

SYRACUSE AREA MUSIC AWARDS



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March 6-7, 2025

Nominees and Inductees

Press Kit

syracuseareamusic.com



The mission of the Syracuse Area Music Awards has remained true since the first awards ceremony was held in 1993 to honor the musicians who work so hard to imbue the local music scene with their artistry. The SAMMY's has lived on since its founding in 1992, which speaks to the dedication of the volunteers on the Sammy's Executive Committee, aiming to bring Syracuse's most prominent musicians to the forefront of public attention.

SAMMYS HALL OF FAME INDUCTION DINNER

The Hall of Fame Induction dinner will be Thursday, March 6, at Middle Ages Brewing Company from 7-10pm. The list of inductees and bios are available on pages 3-10 of this packet. Tickets are \$30 and can be purchased at syracuseareamusic.com/tickets. Free online streaming of the event will be available on our Facebook page, courtesy of Meier's Creek Brewing Company.

SAMMYS AWARDS SHOW

The Sammy's Awards Show will be Friday, March 7, at the Palace Theatre at 7:00pm. The list of nominees is available on pages 11-14 of this packet. Tickets can be purchased at syracuseareamusic.com/tickets for \$25. Free online streaming of the event will be available on our Facebook page, courtesy of Meier's Creek Brewing Company.

The awards show will feature performances by **A Kid Called Danger**, **The Action!**, **Alecstar**, **Tyjhier**, and **Vaporeyes**. In addition to these performances, awards will be presented in 13 recording categories, as well as the People's Choice awards for Best Artist or Band, Best Event or Music Series, Best Academic or Musical Organization, and Best Venue. The Brian Bourke award for Best New Artist will also be announced.

PEOPLE'S CHOICE

Get in on the Sammys' action by participating in our annual People's Choice vote. Each year we host a web-based competition to see whose fans are the most psyched about their favorites in each of four categories: Artist or Band, Event or Music Series, Academic or Musical Organization, and Venue. Since 2007, the Sammys has attracted millions of votes through its online voting system. Voting is free, open to the public and continues through March 2 at syracuseareamusic.com/peopleschoice.

THE SAMMYS – 2025 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

It is always our honor to honor esteemed individuals, with roots to the Syracuse Community. Individuals that have, though out their careers, advanced to the top of their fields. We are proud to recognize the 2025 Hall of Fame class of outstanding individuals.



ALECSTAR



RON KECK



SHIFTY'S

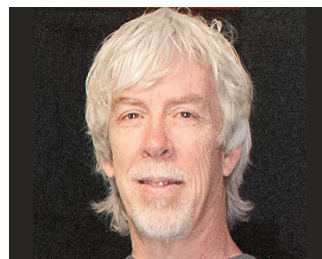


WILKESBURY BRIGADE



HOLLY McCOY

Music Educator of the Year



MATT FORGER

Lifetime Achievement

THE SAMMYS – 2025 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

ALECSTAR

Alecstar was initially formed in the latter part of 1975. However, the main lineup of George Mahoney (drums/lead vocals), Jack Murray (bass/vocals), Dick Murphy (guitar) and Harold Mantor (guitar/vocals) came together in 1978. After a few years on drums, lead singer Mahoney was moved out front. The band went through two more drummers before landing on Binghamton native Tim Sharp.



Alecstar recorded their first single “Taking It Over” on their own Smart Alec label in 1979. In the spring of 1982 they released their self titled LP. Two years later the band released a highly unique picture disc, which featured a photo of the band underneath a see thru 45rpm vinyl disc.

During the bands tenure, Alecstar has opened for many of the major acts of the day including Boston, Foghat, Eddie Money, Ronnie Montrose, Pat Benetar, The Guess Who, Johnny Winter and others.

Alecstar played its last show as a gigging band in January of 1985.

They reunited in 1998 at the request of WOUR’s Jerry Kraus for the stations 25th anniversary show at the Vernon Downs Racetrack..

In 2003, Alecstar was again asked to reunite for WOUR’s 30th anniversary at the Turning Stone Casino showroom with progressive rockers 805. The following year Alecstar reached out to the New York Flyers, who had not performed together since 1987. The result was another sold out twin bill.

Alecstar has not played together since 2009. The invitation to re-unite one last time for their induction into the Sammy’s Hall of Fame comes with both joy and sadness. Guitarist Harold Mantor was tragically struck while crossing the street and killed early last year. I know that our brother Harold would have loved to be part of this. He had such a huge impact on the band’s sound.

THE SAMMYS – 2025 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

RON KECK

Education and innovation have been the driving forces behind Ron's extensive career in music. Ron studied music at Onondaga Community College and Syracuse University. For 25 years Ron taught the best and brightest percussion musicians in the Central New York area, gaining notoriety as one of the region's premiere instructors. In fact, Ron has become known as a world class snare drummer, holding several world champion snare drumming titles.

Ron was one of the first to embrace computer technology in music production in the 1980. He edited and mastered audio for 13 years, until founding SubCat Studios in the fall of 2001. His broad equipment and wiring knowledge led him to design and develop SubCat's newest studios located in Armory Square, Syracuse, NY.

Today, Ron's love for education is clearly demonstrated through the recording classes and various music lessons he teaches on a regular basis, connecting students to the latest technology and techniques.



THE SAMMYS – 2025 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

SHIFTY'S

Shifty's opened in 1969, as a small corner bar and hasn't changed much since. It replaced Wysocki's which had been open since 1917, including during prohibition. Adding great live music and awesome food along the way, Shifty's has become a destination for those looking to relax and enjoy some of the best live bands Central New York has to offer. The current owners are Ron Schultz & Vicky Richardson, and are the 5th set of owners that have kept the name Shifty's.



Shifty's started having live music on weekends in the mid 1970's and Dave Gardner started open mic on November 25th, 1981. Excluding the first six months of 2021 due to Covid, Open Mic has been going every Wednesday for the past 43 years. In 2007, live music was expanded to 5 nights a week. You can also catch local bands at one of their many "day time festivals" celebrating Mardi Gras, Cinco De Mayo, the anniversary of the end of Prohibition, and the most popular for 17yrs, Sloppy Joe Fest.

With their award winning wings, seasoned staff and live music five nights a week, you'll see why everyone has a shifty's story.

THE SAMMYS – 2025 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

WILKESBURY BRIGADE

Wilkesbury Brigade was born in 1969 in an old unheated garage on a remote country road in the town of Cicero, NY. Members of the group changed frequently during the first two years. In 1971-72, Wilkesbury was graced by having two of the finest vocalists in the land, in the Band, at the same time! Of course, we are speaking of internationally known vocalists Dan Elliott and Ronnie Leigh.



Late 1972 saw the biggest changes in the Group as Warren Paschetto took over lead guitar duties and Tommy “Woody” Forest (formerly with The Monterays, Saints and Sinners, and The Seven) replaced the departing Elliott and Leigh. These changes created what became Wilkesbury’s ‘classic’ line-up: Tommy Forest (Lead Vocals), Warren Paschetto (Guitar), Joe Rao (Keyboards), Tim Cleary (Bass), and Mike Campbell (Drums). Only one other change occurred, and that was in 1975 when drummer Brian Meegan replaced Mike Campbell who joined The Alligators. During this prime four-year period Wilkesbury performed almost every Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday nights, with rehearsals on every Monday and Tuesday evenings.

Beginning in early 1972, Wilkesbury and the famous live band club on Old Liverpool Road in Liverpool, NY, The Poor House North, were synonymous cornerstones of the Central New York rock and roll scene. Performing every Saturday night for over 200 consecutive weeks, Wilkesbury rocked the night away. They drew huge crowds week after week with the all-time record of 756 people on one warm early summer night. Dancing began at 9:30 or 10:00 p.m. and continued until 1:30 or 2:00 a.m. Sunday morning! Every single person went home thoroughly exhausted from the fun and dancing. This stretch at the Poor House North by Wilkesbury remains the longest consecutive weekly performance of any group at one venue in Central New York.

Wilkesbury drew prominence for their incredibly diverse song list. The list contained tunes by The Beach Boys, Loggins and Massena, Rascals, Chicago, B.J. Thomas, Four Tops, Uriah Heep, Three Dog Night, Mamas and the Poppas, The Eagles, Rod Stewart, Bill Haley and the Comets, Doobie Brothers, and a near 30-minute Beatle medley which was everyone’s favorite! In addition, Wilkesbury released two of their own singles both recorded live: Movin’ On (LeMoyne Manor) and All Night Woman (Poor House North).

THE SAMMYS – 2025 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

HOLLY McCOY – MUSIC EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

Holly McCoy started her music education at Onondaga Community College. Then, she earned her Bachelor of Music in Music Education from Nazareth University. She has 28 years of public teaching experience. This includes teaching in instrumental, vocal, and general music. Being the director of the Syracuse City School District's Henninger High School Concert Band, Marching Band, Jazz Band, and the new Pride of Syracuse City School District Field Band/Marching Band, has been a dream come true. She enjoys coming to school every day and working with the young musicians. Each day, week, month, and year is as rewarding as the next.



Holly serves as Brass Adjudicator for NYSSMA, New York State Band Directors Association's Treasurer, Large School 3 Representative for the New York State Field Band Conference, and New York State Representative of the Women Band Directors' Association.

Holly has presented at NYSSMA, NYSBDA, and NAFME conferences, the Midwest Clinic, and local workshops. Her topics include urban education, classroom management, personalized learning, mentorship, brass, and percussion. She spends her time on the other side of the podium. She performs on the horn with the Central Winds, a Music Educators' Wind Ensemble, and other community groups. She also plays in local school musicals.

Holly believes music is important in a child's education. It helps kids build relationships and create positive teamwork. It also gives the child space and time to build confidence and creativity.

Holly feels honored to share her love of music. She is blessed to give her students many opportunities.

Holly lives in Sherrill, NY, with her husband, Bill. She is proud of her two children, Morgan and Matthew, and their spouses, Tyler and Jordan. She is also patiently waiting for her first grandchild in June 2025.

THE SAMMYS – 2025 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

MATT FORGER – LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Matt Forger lives in Los Angeles. He collaborated with Michael Jackson on the “Thriller” album. He also worked on the “E.T. Storybook Album” with producers Quincy Jones and Steven Spielberg. He then worked with director John Landis on Jackson’s “Thriller” video. This led to more work on Jackson’s albums “Bad,” “Dangerous,” “History,” and “Blood on the Dancefloor”. Additionally, Matt recorded and mixed the “Captain EO” 3-D film for Disney. George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola directed it. He also oversaw its installation at Disney theme parks worldwide.



Forger began in the music business by mixing live sound for rock bands in Syracuse. He also designed and built sound systems and studios. After moving to LA and getting a job at Westlake Studios, he met and worked with producers Giorgio Moroder, Keith Forsey, Harold Faltermeyer, and George Duke. This was followed by the opportunity to work with Quincy Jones, Rod Temperton, and Bruce Swedien, and become part of “The A-Team.” He worked on the Michael Jackson film “Ghosts” with director Stan Winston. He also re-mastered and added bonus tracks to the “Special Edition” albums of Michael Jackson’s “Off the Wall,” “Thriller,” “Bad,” and “Dangerous.”

Forger provided a solid technical base and a relaxed studio to work with Jackson. It lets the artist’s creativity thrive. This enabled Jackson to write and develop songs and arrangements. “This process of experimentation, exploring new sounds, and applying new technologies is always challenging, but can also be very rewarding,” says Forger. Forger oversaw familiar tasks. These included producing singles, videos, and dance remixes. He also made international versions and promotional materials. He also handled mastering and test-pressing approvals. He created versions for film and TV appearances. He maintained an archive of all materials.

Matt has collaborated with the Japanese superstar Yuming. They first collaborated in 1984. Yuming’s producer, Masataka Matsutoya, was looking for a new sound. After a series of releases, the team decided it was time for a new approach, so they hired Forger. For his work, Forger has won two Gold Disc Awards (Grammy equivalent).

THE SAMMYS – 2025 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

Matt works in the LA singer/songwriter community with new artists. He also consults on the creative recording arts. The basis for his work is the emotional content of the recording. “Remembering that music is a form of emotional communication is important,” he says, “Too many people view recording as a technical experience. It is important to understand technology and be able to control it, but it’s the music at center stage. It’s the song people remember, not the recording system.” He is also recording in a classic format called “reality recording.” This is a live-to-2-track style. It uses a carefully placed stereo mic and a high-quality signal path. It is to capture a performance and put the listener there to share the experience. “It is especially well suited to acoustic performances and elegant in its simplicity,” explains Forger.

THE SAMMYS – 2025 SAMMY NOMINEES

SAMMY awards are given based on the judgment of submissions sent to the SAMMYS Board by musicians in Syracuse and the surrounding area. Congratulations to the 182 artists that submitted 270 recordings! An independent panel of music industry professionals and educators from around the country, led by Jim Elenteny, reviewed the submissions and made their selections based on their merit within their genre.

AND THE NOMINEES ARE...

BEST JAZZ

- Bob Holz – Night Watch
- CNY Jazz Orchestra – If a White Horse from Jerusalem...
- Jeff Martin – First Take

BEST AMERICANA

- The Dart Brothers – Lovers Motel
- Harmonic Dirt – Tumbleweeds
- Point Project – Theft, Karma & Coincidence: Part 1
- The Ripcords – White Cadillac
- Whitney Road – Home

BEST OTHER STYLE

- Max Scialdone – Somewhere In Paradise
- Mt. Erebus – Mt. Erebus
- The Stranger – Beware of God
- Test Kitchen – A Little of This And That
- Tom Rasely – Clockwork

BEST JAM BAND

- Ginbucket – On Fire
- James and the Kyusonics – Chasing Gremlins
- The Magnetic Pull – Lies in Every Sound
- Root Shock – Rise
- Transient Kicks – Take off Your Shoes

BEST POP

- Amanda Marie – What Is Love?
- Ariel Arbisser – Ingenue Corrupt
- Cam Caruso – Try It Out
- Cloey Tierno – inward
- Jess Novak – Womann

BEST ROCK

- The Half/Cubes – Pop Treasures
- Backyard Wrestling – Jorts
- Jeff Gordon – Button Fly Jeans
- Maybe Sunday – Tabula Rasa
- McGrath – You and Me / Gotta Get Outta Here

THE SAMMYS – 2025 SAMMY NOMINEES

BEST HARD ROCK

- Into Shadow – Into Shadow
- King Squiddy and the Sethlapods – Tentacles Out
- Nightshade – Gates of Valhalla
- Sent From Beyond – All Souls Burn
- Somewhat Human – Initiation

BEST R&B

- Ezee – The Autumn Collection
- FB – Love letter
- FB – Pray for Me

BEST HIP-HOP OR RAP

- C-Nube – I Hope You Do Good but Not Better Than Me
- FB – Big Mindfree
- Karim Lesgoooya – The Lesgoooya Mixtape 2
- Premium Mike – Private Run
- Trex – My.Space.

BEST BLUES

- Nate Gross Band – A Ride With The Devil
- Raedwald Howland-Bolton – Live at Rose Hall

BEST ALTERNATIVE

- The Amazing Shakes – Vampire Girlfriend EP
- Jeremy Romance – The Broken Heart Chronicles: Pt. 1
- Mira Grimm – Restless Soul
- Modafferi – The Production
- Paper Rabbit – Havre de Grace

BEST COUNTRY

- Amanda Marie – Rise & Fall
- Jon Rogalia – Spinning Wheels
- Tink Bennett – It Is What It Is

BEST SINGLE

- AK Kastro – Too Tired
- Jeremy Romance – Switchblade Heartache
- Jess Novak – Woman
- Mbusi – Let's Fly
- Zak G – STARSTUCK

ADDITIONAL AWARDS...

JACK O BOCCHINO SPIRIT OF THE SAMMYS AWARD

- Mike Kohli

COMMUNITY SPIRIT AWARD

- 315 Thursdays

THE SAMMYS – 2025 ADDITIONAL AWARDS

MIKE KOHLI – JACK O BOCCHINO SPIRIT OF THE SAMMYS AWARD

Mike Kohli is a driving force in the CNY music scene, wearing many hats as a journalist, photographer, and advocate. His deep-rooted connection to music began in childhood, growing up in a musical family where melodies and rhythms filled his home. This early immersion nurtured a lifelong passion, shaping his diverse career and commitment to fostering the region's vibrant musical landscape.

Kohli is the founder of 315 Music, a platform dedicated to showcasing the talent and stories of musicians in the 315 area code. Through insightful interviews, reviews, and event coverage, 315 Music has become a vital resource for both artists and fans, strengthening the bonds within the CNY community. His work as editor-in-chief of NYS Music further amplifies this commitment, providing a statewide platform for New York artists to reach a broader audience.

His dedication to supporting the local scene is further exemplified by his serving on the board of directors for the SAMMYS, where he contributes to recognizing and celebrating the achievements of CNY musicians.

Beyond music journalism, Kohli is a co-founder of Woods Fest, a testament to his dedication to creating opportunities for musicians to connect with audiences. This festival embodies his vision of bringing people together through the power of music. His role as talent buyer at Copper City Brewing Company allows him to further curate the local music experience, bringing diverse acts and enriching the brewery's atmosphere.

Kohli's passion extends beyond promoting and booking; he's also a skilled local music photographer, capturing the energy and emotion of live performances. His photographs offer a unique perspective, documenting the vibrant moments that make the CNY music scene so special. His images tell the story of the music.

Through all his endeavors, Mike Kohli remains dedicated to supporting and celebrating the artists who make the 315 area a hub of musical creativity.



THE SAMMYS – 2025 ADDITIONAL AWARDS

315 THURSDAYS – COMMUNITY SPIRIT AWARD

315 Thursdays, formerly known as Hanover Thursdays, is a celebrated free concert series that brings the community of Syracuse together through music, food, and local culture. Since its debut in 2022, the event has become a summer staple, offering live music performances every Thursday evening in August at Hanover Square, with recent expansions into the Westcott neighborhood in September.



Founded by local visionary Joe Driscoll and Michael John Heagerty, 315 Thursdays was born out of a shared love for the vibrant energy of Thursday nights. Driscoll and Heagerty sought to rekindle that magic by creating an inclusive event where families, friends, and music enthusiasts could gather to enjoy high-quality live performances in the heart of downtown Syracuse.

In just three years, the series has grown exponentially, attracting an average of 1,000 attendees each week in Hanover Square. Featuring a diverse lineup of local and regional talent, along with food, drinks, and artisan vendors, 315 Thursdays offers something for everyone. The event's expansion to Westcott in 2024 further solidified its impact, bringing the same dynamic atmosphere to a new neighborhood while fostering community engagement.

The mission of 315 Thursdays is rooted in promoting local businesses, supporting artists, and enhancing the cultural fabric of Syracuse. Through grants, sponsorships, and collaborations with organizations like Visit Syracuse and the Downtown Committee, the event has flourished. The team, now comprised of passionate members including Bea Talplacido, Maggie Hartnett, Hope Earley, and others, continues to push boundaries, with future plans to bring the series to Armory Square.

315 Thursdays is more than just a concert series—it's a movement that unites the Greater Syracuse Area through music, connection, and joy.

THE SAMMYS – OUR SPONSORS

The Board of Directors would like to thank all of our sponsors for supporting this community focused event, which is produced by a dedicated group of volunteers and supported by grants as well as private and corporate donations.



IN MEMORY OF
Jack O Bocchino

