



Rockwell rates the year's performers

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As much as I hate the thought of another 12 months passing me by, I've got to admit I look forward to all the year-end issues of my favourite entertainment magazines.

It could be my love of lists, or maybe I just like the idea of seeing whether I agree with their top CD (for me, a toss up between Radiohead's *In Rainbows* and Interpol's *Our Love To Admire*) and movie (my vote goes to *No Country For Old Men*).

Of course, this is also the time of year when all the award-show nominations start dropping. So, not to be outdone, I thought I'd offer you a few Best of 2007 performers of my own.

Best performance by a beer maker: Garrison Brewery

This past year saw a population explosion of Canadian-made brews, with suds from Ontario (Mill Street), Alberta (Big Rock), Quebec (McAuslan) and New Brunswick (Pump House) each looking for their piece of the Nova Scotian palate.

Flying under the radar was Halifax's own Garrison who, after tinkering with a few new styles, quietly snagged the title of Beer of the Year for its heavily hopped Imperial Pale Ale (650 ml, \$4.95) at the Canadian Brewing Awards in Toronto.

To cap off the stellar year, owner Brian Titus and his team unveiled their mega-malty Black Lager (500 ml, \$5.95), just in time for winter sipping. Dark, thick and smoky, it drinks like a meal with a knock-you-on-your-butt 8.9 per cent alcohol level. Both are currently available only from the brewery's onsite store and from Bishop's Cellar, Premier Wine and Spirits and Vin Art Wines.

Best performance by a country (white wine): New Zealand

Who would have predicted a few short years ago that the tiny country of New Zealand (it's about a quarter of the size of Ontario) would be on the lips (literally) of wine fans the world over in 2007? What makes things even more unbelievable is that its wine-makers have become sought after superstars, thanks to creating somewhat expensive wines using a white grape - sauvignon blanc.

Perfect chilled on their lonesome or served with fresh fish, most poultry and light cheeses, tasty versions like those made by Kim Crawford (\$21.99), Sacred Hill (\$23.33) and Matua (\$18.99) were finding a place at the table of even the staunchest of red wine lovers.

Best performance by a country (red wine): Argentina

Argentina was the little country that could. Spending most of the new millennium trying to get its juice in the mouths of anyone buying wine - things finally clicked this year with sales (especially from the red side) taking off like a misguided champagne cork.

The spotlight was on the malbec grape and value was the key word, with wines such as Trapiche's 2005 Broquel Malbec (\$14.97) and Finca Sopenia's Alto Sur 2006 Malbec (\$17.25, exclusive to Bishop's Cellar) matching perfectly with grilled beef and tasting like they should cost about \$10 more.

Best performance by a performer: Dan Aykroyd

With golfer Mike Weir's wines finally coming to Nova Scotia and branded vino from Paul Newman and Wayne Gretzky eyeing a listing in 2008, it was the year of the celebrity wine promoter. Slapping your name on a label is one thing, hitting the road to talk up the liquid is another.

Dan Aykroyd's visit to Halifax a few weeks ago not only drew attention to his two newly released Discovery Series wines (available only at the Mic Mac Mall, Port of Wines and Bayers Lake NSLC stores), but also gave the Canadian wine industry a shot in the arm as he talked up the quality coming from our home and native vineyards.

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