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**Tom Hanks and Sting to receive Kennedy Center honours**

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Singer Al Green, actress Lily Tomlin and ballet dancer Patricia McBride will also receive the decorations at a White House reception on 7 December.

The movie star said the honour added to being "a fortunate man, in that I love the work I do".

Figures who have influenced US culture through the arts are awarded annually.

It is relatively rare for a British artist, such as Sting, to be recognised. He likened it to receiving an artistic knighthood in the UK.

He told the BBC: "It was very unexpected. I'm thrilled. I'm only the 18th British person to receive it, along with Cary Grant and Julie Andrews.

"I'm definitely the first Geordie ever to get it," said the singer, who was born in Wallsend.

Green, one of the defining voices of Memphis soul, said that his career had been "a funny voyage", while Tomlin, whose screen credits include 9 to 5 and The West Wing, said she was "astounded" to find out that she will be honoured.



Sting says he is the first Georgie to be recognised by the Kennedy Center

McBride, now 72, became the New York City Ballet's youngest principal dancer at the age of 18, a position she held for 28 years.

Kennedy Center chairman David M Rubenstein said the honours "celebrate five extraordinary individuals who have spent their lives elevating the cultural vibrancy of our nation and the world.

"Al Green's iconic voice stirs our souls in a style that is all his own; Tom Hanks has a versatility that ranks him among the greatest actors of any generation.

"One of the world's greatest ballerinas, Patricia McBride, continues to carry forward her legacy for future generations; Sting's unique voice and memorable songwriting have entertained audiences for decades.

"And from the days of her early television and theatrical appearances, Lily Tomlin has made us laugh and continues to amaze us with her acting talent and quick wit," he added.

The five award-winners will be received by President and Mrs Obama before a star-studded gala, which will be subsequently broadcast on US television.