



BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards 2011

Another evening of awards for the same old faces? Noel Harvey reports on the 2011 BBC Folk Awards.

It's easy enough to be cynical about the Radio 2 Folk Awards. The idea that a self-appointed body of 'folk professionals' should determine not only what constitutes the genre, but who is most accomplished at writing and performing it, is profoundly, copiously and irredeemably daft. Folk has always been the people's music, and that's what makes it folk, folks. When they start setting up elitist bodies to become the gatekeepers, you have to ask yourself, aren't these guys missing the point?

Yet having said that, the majority of people who'd consider themselves folk enthusiasts would most likely agree (up until this year's event at least) that the Folk Awards give recognition to many performers that is, more often than not, well deserved. And in any case, the awards are no more silly than, say, clog dancing, morris men, or believing that a hurdy-gurdy can be made to stay in tune. This year, though,

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the awarding body seems to have shot itself in the foot. They've singled out Donovan for a career honour. There is talk of a boycott, threats of a stage invasion, mutterings among the audience that whoever came up with this little stunt wouldn't know a lifetime achievement from a hole in the ground.

But such is the capriciousness of the music business. As events transpire, the threatened stage invasion fails to materialise, Roger Daltrey gives Donovan a standing ovation, and the only howls of anger heard throughout the entire evening come, not from irate dissenters, but from Nancy Kerr's nine-month-old baby, Hamish, seething at having been kept up so long past his bedtime.

And that aside, it was business as usual. Apart from, that is,

the glittery, logoed backdrop and the interjected sound effects, approximating to a cross between a Sid James letch and a turbolift door sliding open on the *Starship Enterprise*. 'And

the nominations for Folk Singer of the Year are: *phwaaawhgh* ... Chris Wood! [cue Wood track] ... Jon Boden! [cue Boden track]... Heidi Talbot! (cue Talbot track)... Kris Drever! (cue Drever track)... *phwaaawhgh*.

Yet in a perverse way, it's these slow, creeping, relentless leanings to affectation and glitz that make the whole package so gloriously entertaining. And then, of course, there's the live music, the free wine and the ridiculous speeches. Not so much the winners' speeches, I hasten to add, which tend, for the most part, to be modest, unaffected little affairs. Whereas the presenters' speeches, on the other hand, will occasionally deliver a more spectacular line in dive-bombing than a squadron of Stukas.





BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards Winners

- BEST DUO**
Nancy Kerr & James Fagan
- BEST TRADITIONAL TRACK**
'Poor Wayfaring Stranger' – Eliza Carthy & Norma Waterson
- BEST GROUP**
Bellowhead
- YOUNG FOLK AWARD**
Moore, Moss and Rutter
- MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR**
Andy Cutting
- BEST ORIGINAL SONG**
'Hollow Point' – Chris Wood
- HORIZON AWARD**
Ewan McLennan
- BEST ALBUM**
Gift – Eliza Carthy & Norma Waterson
- LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**
Donovan
- BEST LIVE ACT**
Bellowhead
- GOOD TRADITION AWARD**
Fisherman's Friends
- ROOTS AWARD**
Levellers
- FOLK SINGER OF THE YEAR**
Chris Wood



Charles Hazlewood, presenting Best Duo award to Nancy Kerr and James Fagan, quotes the Glaswegian poet, Ivor Cutler: 'Don't walk through a tree. Walk round it ...' Sound counsel indeed. Is this something one needs to be told, or is there some profound hidden meaning here, apparent only to Glaswegians?

A gushing and giggling Tamsin Greig is more transparent. 'I do love a horn section ...' she announces proudly '... my husband can vouch for that' before awarding Bellowhead with the gong for Best Group. Roger Daltrey proclaims that it gives

him great pleasure to present the award for Musician of the Year to 'someone who I've had the pleasure of playing with ...' Not a wholly unreasonable statement for a musician. That's what they do, isn't it? They play with each other. What's so odd about that? Yet the words are barely out of his mouth and he's faltering like he's just had a moment more naughty than Naughtie's. 'Er ... yes ... of being accompanied by ...' Joanna Trollope is altogether more eloquent. 'Folk music', she pronounces, sounding not unlike HRH, 'is the narrative of human feeling and suffering ... harnessing

the human voice and adversity to the music, which echoes and enhances the voice and the words, and then you add this rather ethereal quality ... which you can only describe as spiritual! Ah! So that's what the 'The Cuckoo's Nest' is all about! Well now, didn't you always wonder?

Mark Radcliffe invites us to consider how 'John and Paul's music would have gone if Donovan hadn't taught them how to fingerpick'. That's Lennon and McCartney, we're talking here, in case you were wondering. The best-known, most successful, most influential, most brilliantly creative musical collaboration in the history of popular music. Mark, you wouldn't, by any chance, be interested in buying Tower Bridge after the ceremony?

And now Frank Skinner's up on the podium, excavating jokes from the Palaeolithic era. It's his turn this year. Last year it was Steve Harley's. 'Do you fancy a smoothie? Charles Dance is over there. I love coming to the Folk Awards. It's not often that I feel fashionable. In this context I'm a sort of Gok Wan figure ... Google it ... it's an Internet thing. You don't go to many places where people point admiringly at crocs ... I do love live folk music ... Other gigs are so often about dry ice and 25 costume changes. It's not like that at a folk gig. There's only so much you can do with corduroy. I've to do some of this stuff. I've to,' he pleads, sensing a growing restlessness in the audience. Can't a close friend tell him? Can't somebody? Actually, you don't, Frank. Really, you don't. It's just so passé.

Award ceremonies ... Don't you just adore them?

Noel Harvey