

The Ivors in 2011: Still The Write Stuff?

The Ivor Novello Awards are capable of arousing strong emotions among Britain's songwriter/publisher community, well into their sixth decade. In an exclusive report for *SongLink*, former Billboard global news editor **Tom Ferguson** asks some key industry players and current nominees their opinion of the prestigious awards ceremony, and what winning an Ivor actually means.



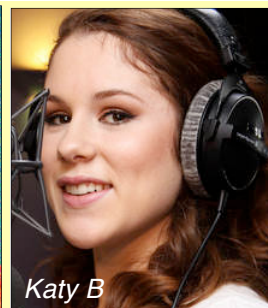
OK, SO HOW MANY 56 YEAR-OLDS DO YOU KNOW that are avowed **Tinie Tempah** fans? The nominations for the 56th edition of the PRS For Music-sponsored Ivors, taking place at London's Grosvenor House hotel this Thursday (May 19th) certainly don't reek of an aging event, thanks to names like pop/grime superstar Tempah, 21 year-old Brit School graduate **Katy B** and up-and-coming indie-rock quartet **Everything Everything**.

"Bands like us don't normally get nominated," says the latter act's drummer/co-songwriter **Mike Spearman**, who admits to being "very pleasantly surprised" to be shortlisted with the album "Man Alive" and the song "MY KZ, UR BF" (Universal Music Publishing). "Most people's perception of the Ivors is that it's an award for major artists that sell huge numbers of records."

While that may have been so in previous years, this year's nominations raised many eyebrows among the publishing community, notably as only one of the three Album award nominees (Plan B's "The Defamation of Strickland Banks") had featured in the Official Charts Company's top 40 best-selling albums of 2010. In particular, there was no sign of Take That, who delivered the biggest-selling album of 2010 when they sold 1.8 million copies of "Progress" (Polydor). As a matter of policy, BASCA refuses to comment on the nominations or on which works were submitted for consideration.



Tinie Tempah



Katy B



Everything Everything



Nigel Elderton

This year's nominations are "perhaps a little leftfield," concedes Peermusic (UK) Ltd managing director **Nigel Elderton**, who chairs the Music Publishers' Association and also the MCPS arm of Ivors' sponsor PRS For Music. "There are some notable omissions that I personally would have thought would be there." However, he adds: "I thought several of the nominations this year were very good. You're never going to satisfy everybody - and if a specific act didn't get chosen by the judges, well unfortunately, that's just the process that we go through."

Some publishers admit to concerns that Ivors judges are increasingly nominating leftfield acts to attract media attention - one suggests this year's nominations "are starting to look way too precious and to go in the same direction as the Mercury Music Prize", although ironically one press observer congratulated BASCA on doing exactly that. While the Ivors aim to honour the excellence of UK songwriting, one senior exec at a major publisher, who asked not to be identified, insists this year's list "absolutely does not" represent the cream of British talent. Claiming to reflect the disgruntled private views of many in the music industry, the source points out that an Ivor win "draws attention to songs and songwriters internationally. The Ivors still matter very, very much - they're seen as being right up there with the Grammys. So in that case, why didn't Take That get one single nomination? Internationally, people are going to be scratching their heads as to why a lot of these songs got nominated."

However, **Guy Moot**, president EMI Music Publishing UK & Europe Creative, insists the inclusion of acts like EMI writers Katy B and Tinie Tempah "reflects what's going on in the marketplace." Noting that the Ivors "have always stood for recognizing the best songwriting," Moot emphasizes that "it's important that always remains at the heart of what they do."



Barry Blue

Independent players have their own views. "You can't just keep giving out awards to these large acts that sell huge amounts of records," declares veteran songwriter/producer **Barry Blue**. "We need to promote the new, young breed of artists that are coming through," he adds. "I think that's why you find, with these particular nominations, there are some names that are 'not the top of the recognition table,' like Everything Everything." Fellow indie boss **Steve McMellon**, CEO of UK/US publisher (and production company) Southern Crossroads Music, admits to surprise at the absence of Take That and Laura Marling from this year's lists. However, he notes that for successful nominees, "the fact that the majority of the 'decision-makers' are writers themselves adds to the status afforded by such a selection. This is the way it should be."

Everything Everything's **Mike Spearman** admits that, "growing up, we were dimly aware of the Ivors - I guess we always thought it was something for mainstream big-hitting artists rather than bands like us. I think they've always been up-to-date but maybe they haven't been as open to more left-field artists in past years." Ironically, the preponderance of young, fresh talent on this year's Ivors lists could be a result of publishers' own initiatives.

After last year's event, recalls Elderton, "with my MPA chairman's hat on, I organised a post-Ivors meeting with BASCA which was also attended by two major publisher MDs. We had a very full and frank discussion about our aspirations for the Ivors going forward. The MPA's over-riding concern," continues Elderton, "is that it remains very much a writer/publisher event and our aspiration is that it stays relevant and fresh. BASCA were very receptive - and they took those concerns aboard. We really didn't want it to be just 'safe.' It's important that the jury aren't all middle-aged gray-haired old gits like me!" McMellon agrees that "the important thing is to get the judges right - a good mix of writers across all genres."



Gary Osborne

Some industry insiders suggest this year's lists reflect a diminished role for publishers on the judging panels - and BASCA's Ivors Committee chairman **Gary Osborne** confirms that the eight-strong panels contain "hardly any publishers these days. Over the five years that I've been chairing," explains Osborne, "we've increasingly taken the view that to be 'judged by one's peers' should mean exactly that. So the vast majority of our judges these days are songwriters and composers."

While Elderton admits that, in most cases "it would be nice to have a publisher representative on there," he adds: "the over-riding thing is to ensure that you have a very good spread of people on there who are aware of the new talent coming through." Osborne also notes that the Ivors Committee is "not averse to using the occasional 'expert,'" citing the presence of broadcaster **Paul Gambaccini** on the main Ivors Committee, alongside **Graham Gouldman, Sharleen Spiteri, Gary Kemp, Nitin Sawhney, Mick Leeson, Alison Clarkson (Betty Boo), David Bedford, Mark Fishlock, Tom Robinson** and adjudicator **Peter Compton**. BASCA won't publish its full list of Ivors' judges until the day of the ceremony, May 19th. The major publisher source complains that this "keeps the voting too private; they should be more transparent and allow more writers in. Which songwriters' views are reflected in these lists? Songwriters who have a chip on their shoulder because they haven't had a hit for years? Most successful songwriters don't even know how they go about becoming nominating members of BASCA."

Transparency, the Judges and Credentials

Gary Osborne bristles at any suggestion of a lack of transparency, declaring "we are ultra-transparent!" The Ivors judges, he continues, "are sworn to secrecy over the results, but not about the fact that they are judges. They're proud to be judges and we put their names in the Ivors programme." He exclusively reveals that this year's 'Best Song Musically and Lyrically' panel consisted of songwriters **Roland Orzabal** (Tears For Fears), **Brett Anderson** (Suede), **Shelly Poole** (Alisha's Attic), **Andy Hill, Sasha Scarbeck** and **Nina Woodford**, plus BBC radio presenter **Richard Allinson** - who, Osborne affirms, "really knows his music." Several of that panel, he points out, have enjoyed hits in recent years. "The credentials of these people can't be faulted," Osborne insists. "We've got great writers, successful writers, from the past 30 years. The oldest writer there was me and I had a Top 3 single four years ago ("*Checking It Out*" by Li'l Chris - Ed) - so even I'm still relevant! These people know their craft and know that a good song is a good song."

So how are the judges appointed? Well, new panels are convened each year after BASCA canvasses its members and other members of the songwriting/publishing community for suggestions each year. BASCA then selects and appoints the judges. Each panel meets twice; once to draw up a shortlist and once to decide the winner and two runners-up. Notes Osborne: "The judges - bless 'em - give us two days out of their life with no reward other than a lovely warm glow and a pair of tickets to the show. Publishers are free to nominate any song of British origin - provided it has made the OCC Top 75 singles or albums charts - and pay £50 (plus VAT) to do so, which covers panel expenses. We introduced the fee about 10 years ago - when it was free, we had people - often complete unknowns - submitting every track on an album, which meant we had to sit through a couple of hundred songs. The entry fee makes publishers focus on songs that actually stand a chance; these days each category gets about 90 entries." Osborne also notes that the chart qualification rule was introduced in deference to publishers' complaints that "there was too much in the way of unsigned acts last year."



A glance at the Ivors' history provides a roll-call of much-covered classic songs and great songwriters. While he may approve of the fresh talent on recent shortlists, **Barry Blue** admits he's less sure of the staying power of their material compared to their predecessors. A PRS for Music Writer director, Blue has been a successful songwriter/publisher since the 1970s, most recently working with acts such as The Saturdays and The Wanted. "I'm of the old school," he notes, "and to me a classic hit song is one which transcends all genres and styles. As for whether we've had enough of those over the past few years? Perhaps not." He concedes, however, "that can apply to any year. I can go back through the Ivors I've been to - probably 30 or so - and how many of those have had classic songs like 'Born Free,' for example, that move every generation?"

Steve McMellon adds that, for this year's nominees, an Ivor win might not carry the financial benefits such recognition might have brought in earlier times. "From a publisher's viewpoint," he notes, "I would have thought that some of [this year's] selections would be quite difficult to cover, so therefore the main revenue is likely to be from the original recordings - in whatever way possible, maybe even sampling in some cases."



Guy Moot

EMI Music's **Guy Moot**, however, insists it's "very likely" that some of this year's nominated songs - particularly from urban acts - will enjoy long-lasting success. "Urban music," says Moot "is the music of so many young people today, it's the sound of their generation and is music that will last. It may be interpreted, such as through covers or sampling, in different ways to music from the past, but writers like Katy and Tinie are building catalogues that are definitely going to last."

More immediately, BASCA is (as ever) tight-lipped about any surprises it has up its sleeve for this year's event, but there are rumours of a very major name collecting the PRS For Music Special International Award, while **Plan B** (aka Ben Drew) is tipped to be named Songwriter of the Year. It will, of course be a high-profile industry bash - and hefty national news coverage in recent years means public awareness of the Ivors has risen considerably outside the immediate songwriting and publishing world, so the tabloids and paparazzi will be there in force.



Plan B

"In terms of PR, an Ivors win - or even nomination - is priceless," says **Steve Phillips**, co-founder of London-based Bigmouth Publicity. "It's an almost unrivaled artistic endorsement." Phillips, whose clients include Bruce Springsteen, Jarvis Cocker and Tom Waits, adds: "It gets to the heart of what's important in this industry by rewarding songwriting talent. Having worked on a number of acts over the years who have been recognized - Edwyn Collins, Franz Ferdinand and most recently The Leisure Society - I've seen how it has the power to add immeasurable gravitas."

However, don't expect to be seeing "Live At The Ivors" on your TV screen anytime soon. "BASCA would be very happy with the income a broadcast would generate," acknowledges Gary Osborne. "But to us and PRS, the integrity of the event is paramount." He continues: "One of the reasons the industry loves this event so much is that it is not broadcast. No long pauses, no re-takes and no inhibitions with regards to what's said in speeches in which the presenters and the recipients address the audience - not the cameras." Over the years, notes Nigel Elderton, "we've had some fantastic writers and artists attending as guests or recipients because they feel it's behind closed doors and that gives it an air of privacy."

Overall, the furore over this year's nominations is "a healthy thing," reckons Barry Blue, saying that people in the industry still care about the Ivors, "which all writers and publishers aspire to winning." The Ivors "aren't about seeing an instant sales spike," adds Moot, "and I think that's part of the beauty of them, they're solely about the quality of songwriting." "They haven't sold out," concludes Blue. "The Ivors still retain their integrity, rather than having become a brand like The Soap Awards. They're 'by the peers, for the peers' - it IS insular in that way and it's all the better for that. It's not meant for the public, it's there for the industry to congratulate itself, maybe pat itself on the back - and why not?" **SL**

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THE IVORS NOMINATIONS 2011 IN FULL:

BEST SONG MUSICALLY AND LYRICALLY

"Becoming a Jackal". Writer: Conor O'Brien. Performed By: Villagers (Domino Publishing Company)

"MY KZ, UR BF". Writers: Jonathan Higgs/Jeremy Pritchard/Alexander Robertshaw/Michael Spearman. Performed By: Everything Everything (Universal Music Publishing)

"Spanish Sahara". Writers: Jack Bevan/Edwin Congreave/Walter Gervers/Yannis Philippakis/James Smith. Performed By: Foals (Universal Music Publishing)

BEST CONTEMPORARY SONG

"Islands". Writers: Romy Madley Croft/Baria Qureshi/Oliver Sim/James Smith Performed By: The XX (Universal Music Publishing)

"Katy on a Mission". Writers: Benga/Katy B/Geeneus. Performed By: Katy B (EMI Music Publishing)

"Pass Out" Writers: Timothy McKenzie/Patrick Okogwu/Marc Williams Performed By: Tinie Tempah (EMI Music Publishing/Stellar Songs Ltd)

ALBUM AWARD

"Flaws". Writer: Jack Steadman. Performed By: Bombay Bicycle Club (Imagem Music)

"Man Alive". Writers: Jonathan Higgs/Jeremy Pritchard/Alexander Robertshaw/Michael Spearman. Performed By: Everything Everything (Universal Music Publishing)

"The Defamation of Strickland Banks". Writer: Benjamin Drew. Performed By: Plan B (Universal Music Publishing)

PRS FOR MUSIC MOST PERFORMED WORK

"All The Lovers". Writers: Jim Eliot/Mima Stilwell. Performed By: Kylie Minogue (Sony/ATV Music Publishing)

"She Said". Writers: Eric Appapoulay/Richard Cassell/Benjamin Drew/Tom Wright-Goss. Performed By: Plan B (Sony/ATV Music /Universal Music)

"This Ain't A Love Song" Writer: Roy Stride. Performed By: Scouting for Girls (EMI Music Publishing)

BEST TELEVISION SOUNDTRACK

"Agatha Christie's Marple," Series V. Composer: Dominik Scherrer. (EMI Music)

"Any Human Heart". Composer: Dan Jones (Faber Music Ltd/Universal Music Publishing)

"Going Postal". Composer: John Lunn (SATV Publishing/Bucks Music Group)

BEST ORIGINAL FILM SCORE

"How To Train Your Dragon". Composer: John Powell (BMG Chrysalis)

"Monsters". Composer: Jon Hopkins (Domino Publishing Company/Vertigo Music Publishing Ltd /Notting Hill Music)

"Unstoppable". Composer: Harry Gregson-Williams (EMI Music Publishing)

BEST ORIGINAL VIDEO GAME SCORE

"Enslaved: Odyssey to the West". Composer: Nitin Sawhney Developer: Ninja Theory (Namco Bandai Games SAS)

"James Bond 007: Blood Stone" Composer: Richard Jacques Developer: Bizarre Creations. (Activision)

"Napoleon: Total War". Composers: Richard Beddow/Richard Birdsall/Ian Livingstone. Developer: The Creative Assembly (SEGA)

BASCA "Gift of the Academy" Awards:

INTERNATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

OUTSTANDING SONG COLLECTION

PRS FOR MUSIC OUTSTANDING

CONTRIBUTION TO BRITISH MUSIC

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