

COMMERCIAL SUCCESS AND FINDS THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR HAS AWARDS PLAN OF ITS OWN

TV slots Independent sector aims for its own awards recognition

are proving to be the hottest post-Brit ticket – outstripping all other acts that performed live at the Brits,” said Viagogo UK director Ed Parkinson.

That is a trend well recognised by booking agents: Boswell admitted performing at an awards ceremony was arguably better than winning. “If it’s a show that a lot of people watch, then performing is the key,” he said.

Boswell did not dismiss the importance that collecting an award could have for an artist, but he maintained that a good performance, seen by millions of viewers, could have a much more beneficial impact.

“Winning an award can elongate an album campaign and that obviously can have a positive impact on the live side of things, too,” observed Boswell.

“But it’s different for every act: the Mercurys helped Elbow, for instance, but at the same time Speech Debelle was out a couple of weeks later playing to 10 people a night.”

✉ gordon@musicweek.com

Commercial success

And in 2009, the unfancied Speech Debelle’s Speech Therapy won against competition including Florence + The Machine’s Lungs, Kasabian’s West Ryder Pauper Lunatic Asylum and La Roux’s La Roux.

At other times, though, the Mercury goes to a more obvious winner, such as The xx’s eponymous debut in 2010 or Arctic Monkeys’ Whatever People Say I Am, That’s What I’m Not.

Of course, there are both advantages and disadvantages to the close correlation between commercial success and Brits wins. Winning an award can help to boost sales – although typically it is performing on the night that reaps the greater reward – as well as provide useful PR. Theoretically, the fewer records an act has sold, the more it needs this boost.

But things do not always work in this way. The Mercury win for the Arctic Monkeys did not create a massive sales lift because the band were already very well known by this point. Speech Debelle’s Speech Therapy also failed to benefit from the win.

As for The Brits, an unexpected winner is good PR for the event itself – Belle & Sebastian winning best newcomer in 1999, for example, was massive news.

But it can – and in the case of Belle And Sebastian did – lead to the event being considered out of touch with the UK record industry.

INDIES

BY ROBERT ASHTON

THE INDIE SECTOR HAS responded to another disappointing night for its acts at the Brits by launching its own awards.

None of the three nominated indie acts – The xx, The National and Vampire Weekend – made it on to the winner’s podium at last Tuesday night’s event, with only Adele benefitting significantly from any post-awards sales bounce following her live performance at The O2.

AIM and Impala want that to change this year. Both indie organisations have launched new events to champion the best music in their sector. The move is long overdue – many indie executives have long complained that their sector has been overlooked at the many national and international awards events.

“There’s a strong sense of us and them,” said one, after witnessing a zero haul for the indie sector last Tuesday night.

The European indie outfit has launched a new “Mercury-style” award, the European Independent Album of the Year, which will take place on February 28.

AIM’s own awards follow in October at Floridita in Soho, with a promise by the organisation’s chairman and chief executive Alison Wenham to stop sitting on the sidelines around the awards season.

“AIM can contribute to the awards map,” she said. “We don’t want to overlap, but I am comfortable with the indie sector getting recognition. We only had a few nominations for the Brits and the indie sector needs more showcasing than that.”

Wenham was loathe to reveal too many details about



Sea change Stornoway Xfm’s New Music Award win has boosted album Beachcomber’s Windowsill

her outfit’s inaugural awards but there will be 13 honours on the night at the 370-capacity venue and they will not be sales-based. “We will be delighted to put the spotlight on artists who don’t normally have the oxygen of publicity,” she said. “We don’t want them to be sales-based because that is only one way of measuring success and it is limited way.”

Wenham expects the indie show to grow in the next few years to become a leading showcase of talent, although she is not being over-ambitious. “We don’t want them to be a stretch, we want to test the concept and our belief, but I am certain in five years’ time they will be a mainstream show,” she said.

Similarly, the new Impala award, which will sit alongside its existing sales award, is taking a “slow burn” approach. The new European Independent Album of the Year awards have been introduced to help mark the 10th anniversary of Impala and a shortlist



Nominees Skunk Anansie’s Wonderlustre is up for European Independent Album of the Year

of 21 nominated albums was announced last week.

They include three UK albums: Barking by Underworld (Cooking Vinyl), Wonderlustre by Skunk Anansie (V2 Benelux/earMUSIC) and Field Music (Measure) by Field Music (Memphis Industries).

Three releases from overseas artists signed to UK-based labels were also nominated. They were: High Violet by The National (4AD), Pop Negro by El Guincho (Young Turks) and Philharmonics by Agnes Obel (PIAS Benelux/UK).

A jury of Impala board members will select the winner on February 28 regardless of sales figures or publicity.

Impala executive chair Helen Smith said the awards “recognise talent and great music irrespective of sales. The albums demonstrate the diversity of the European independent sector”.

However, she too expected the criteria for nominations and the selection process to evolve with the progression of the award and there is already talk of further honours alongside best album in future years.

Despite their complaints that the indies have not been given a fair crack of the whip at awards ceremonies, Wenham, Smith and others from the indie sector will have been cheered that one indie act

did benefit at the Brits.

Despite not winning any awards last Tuesday night, the performance by XL’s Adele helped generate an instant surge in sales of her albums on Amazon.co.uk. In the hour following her performance, current album 21 had a sales uplift of nearly 900%, while 19 moved to number three on the Amazon charts, with a sales surge of more than 800%.

Adele’s version of Someone Like You live from the O2 ceremony also climbed to number one on the iTunes charts last Thursday.

Other award organisers have also pointed to their success in promoting indie music. Barclaycard Mercury Prize organiser David Wilkinson said The xx benefitted after being shortlisted for its prize last year. Immediately after picking up that prize last September the band’s eponymous debut was also propelled to a chart peak. “That is a good indication of the spotlight,” he said.

Xfm’s head of music Mike Walsh also said the Xfm New Music Award, won by 4AD band Stornoway earlier this month, had done much to push the indie agenda.

The xx were nominated for the Xfm 2010 shortlist well before there was “any traction” with the album. “The xx were nominated quite early on [in the album’s sales cycle] and I think we helped raise the flag for that and had a big impact on word of mouth,” he said.

Similarly, he explained that 4AD were “very happy” with the way the New Music Award had helped boost the profile of Stornoway’s debut album Beachcomber’s Windowsill.

“I’m sure it will benefit the band and Xfm listeners will pick up on it,” he said, adding that he would do anything to support the new AIM awards.

✉ robert@musicweek.com

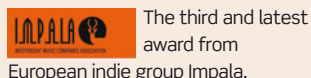
INDEPENDENT RECOGNITION: THE ‘OTHER’ AWARD SHOWS

AIM AWARDS



Launched in response to the poor showing of indie acts on the Brits nominations – and winners – list. The inaugural awards show, which has not yet got an official name, will take place in October at Soho’s Floridita. There are expected to be 13 award categories and nominations will be based on a variety of factors.

EUROPEAN INDEPENDENT ALBUM OF THE YEAR



The third and latest award from European indie group Impala. Twenty-one albums have already been nominated for the European Independent Album of the Year, which will be held in tandem with the established European Sales Awards and the Annual Outstanding Contribution to European Independent Music. The winner of these new awards is announced on February 28.

XFM NEW MUSIC AWARD



This will take place for only the fifth time early next year, although it is likely to expand and move from this year’s home at the Borderline. Won by Stornoway on February 9, the award has previously gone to The xx, Glasvegas and The Enemy.

BARCLAYCARD MERCURY PRIZE

Since 1992, the Mercury Prize has championed music through the album of the year competition, won by The xx last year. This year’s launch takes place on July 19 with the awards show on September 6. The Prize also celebrates live music through the Barclaycard Mercury Prize Sessions, which showcases bands with exclusive performances.

