



MUSIC

Our top 50 musical

From the fringe benefits of Justin Bieber to the huge phone bills of Gaga and Beyoncé, and from Whitney Houston's comeback wobbles to Axl Rose's, eh, comeback wobbles, our critics recall the best and worst bits of 2010

THE TAKEOVER

There was no doubt about who ruled Oxegen this year as Jay-Z showed that his brand of hip-hop could work just as well in muddy, windswept fields as indoor clubs and arenas. You felt a smidgen sorry for Arcade Fire, who had to follow Jigga's grandstanding, barnstorming performance. Come December, though, Arcade Fire had found their mojo too, and delivered one of the gigs of the year at the O2. **JC**

FIRST STEP 2 FOREVER

Fringe of the year, Justin Bieber, launched his unstoppable empire by releasing an autobiography (he's 16!) and planning a 3D movie about his life (he's 16!). And don't forget his range of perfumes and nail polishes (he's 16!). Somebody stop him. **AM**

THE GODS THEY DID HAMMER

It's not every bright autumnal morning that Robert Plant places his hand behind your elbow and says "Let's go for a long walk". As we meander around London's Primrose Hill Park, I soon dispense with the niceties of asking him about his new album and get on to the real sex, drugs and rock'n'roll stuff. He gladly answers even the most piercingly direct of questions - but with a qualifier: "Don't print that or I'll be behind bars." **BB**

ANYTHING GOES

The National Concert Hall's Kevin Barry Room, actually a suite of former lecture rooms that became available after UCD vacated Earlsfort Terrace, has rough edges, including non-existent sound-proofing. But it's become the kind of experimental music venue Dublin has needed for decades. **MD**

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

Whitney Houston's comeback tour always had the potential to be a car crash. From set-up audience interactions, alleged miming and a voice far from its glory days, her O2 shows were a watch-through-your-fingers affair. But fair play to her for schlepping over on the ferry during the Icelandic volcano chaos. **SG**

KENNY'S WEIGHTY 80

There were no signs of creative (or any other) decrepitude when composer,



arranger and flugelhorn player Kenny Wheeler led a big band of Britain's best jazz musicians in Belfast's Elmwood Hall in November to celebrate his 80th birthday. No gimmicks - just glorious music, gloriously played. **RC**

VILLAGERS RULE JOOLS

It felt like sending your youngest off to his first day at school, but on a Tuesday night in mid-April at BBC's **1**



Television Centre, Conor O'Brien did us proud by making his major UK TV debut with an astoundingly powerful solo performance of *Becoming a Jackal*. "Special" doesn't cover it. **LM**

NYAH WITH KNOBS ON

Rachel and Becky Unthank, cupped hands behind their ears, harmonising on the sublime *Here's the Tender Coming*. Who would've thunk that folk could be so utterly, completely mesmerising? **SL**

RAE OF LIGHT

A voice from the past right here, right now. Corinne Bailey Rae had been something of a recluse up to the release of her second album, *The Sea*, at the start of the year. The reason was utterly understandable (her husband was found dead in 2008), but being a true artist as much as a survivor, she channelled her suffering into making a rewarding, poignant and tear-swelling album. **TCL**

BRUCE KEEPS HIS PROMISE

No one protects Springsteen's history more than the man himself. So his decision to release a double album of tracks that didn't make the cut on 1978's key *Darkness on the Edge of Town* album is revealing - but not half as much as the riveting documentary in the box set. **JB**

WE'RE ALL VILLAGERS NOW

In a standout year for Irish acts and releases, it was Conor J O'Brien and his band of Villagers who shone brightest in that galaxy of stars. Their debut album, *Becoming a Jackal*, did all the heavy lifting, and demonstrated width and depth **2**



galore at year's end. One to note for the long-run. **JC**

PHONE A FRIEND

Pop royalty holds court, with help from Tarantino, twinkies and product placement. Lady Gaga and Beyoncé are on the run from the law by the end of their *Telephone* video, but their friendship is stronger than ever. Fact: This song was written for Britney, who turned it down. **FOOL! AM**

STUDIO 2 ABBEY ROAD

A hot summer's night and there's some big do upstairs in the Abbey Road studios. Knowing what lies in the basement, and consulting the mental map that has been in my head since childhood, I peel off from the main group, trip down the stairs and push open the sturdy doors of Abbey Road Studio 2. Sacred time in a sacred space. **BB**

HELLO, GOODBYE

Pianist Ivro Pogorelich, a star of the 1980s, returned to the National Concert Hall in June, and played so slowly and so eccentrically that normally patient and reserved Dublin listeners showed their dismay and dissatisfaction by leaving in ever-greater numbers as the night wore on. So extreme you wouldn't want to miss it. **MD**

AND SO WE LOVE ASIWIYFA

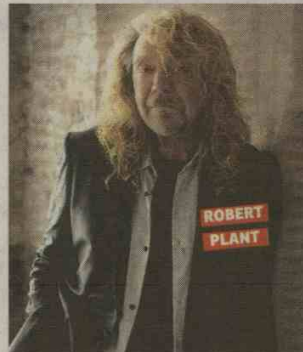
If the 2010 Choice Music Prize was awarded for performance on the night, Belfast boys And So I Watch You From Afar would have hauled the trophy back up the MI. Their live performances are some of the most infectious full-on sets played by any band this year. Go see. **SG**

HAVE GUITAR, WILL TRAVEL

Andreas Varady, like Django Reinhardt and

MUSIC

moments of 2010



Colour me genre The key

- **ROCK** ■ **POP**
 - **JAZZ** ■ **TRAD**
 - **CLASSICAL** ■ **ROOTS**
- JC Jim Carroll AM Ailbhe Malone
 BB Brian Boyd RC Ray Comiskey
 SG Sinéad Gleeson TCL Tony Clayton-Lea
 MD Michael Dervan SL Siobhán Long
 JC Joe Breen

Ferenc Snétberger, is a brilliant jazz guitarist of European gypsy stock and, at 13, may yet be the best of them all. A debut CD, *Questions*, is out, and a stunning appearance in Dublin earlier this year proved the hype to be justified. **RC**

She was once married to minor legend Loudon Wainwright, with whom she begat the twin peaks of *Martha* and *Rufus*. Kate McGarrigle's death at age 63 touched many

because, in their own endearing way, she, her sister Anna and their fondly remembered songs captured the honesty and frailty of undiluted emotion. **JB**

he drew "Mama always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." More than any other event on the Irish classical music calendar, the Bantry festival has that mixture of the familiar and the utterly surprising. **MD**

MONÆ ON THE MONEY

Small in stature, big in voice (and hair), Janelle Monáe's multi-genre album was packed with collaborators. The results was like a bomb going off. At Electric Picnic she busted a gut on both the big arena and Body & Soul stages. A huge talent – and she believes in time travel. **SG**

TIME FOR TOBIN?

Dublin-born, British-based Christine Tobin is one of the best singer-songwriters on the world jazz scene. She is acclaimed abroad but still relatively unknown here. Her concert at the National Library last summer and *Tapestry Unravelled*, her remake of Carole King's 1972 Grammy-winning album, could change that. **RC**

GUNS AND PRISY POSES

You didn't even need to be at The O2 on September 1st to get enjoyment from this one – following the story on Twitter was entertaining enough. Hissy fits, rumoured punch-ups, bottlings... Axl, there's always an opening in the Gaiety's Christmas panto, if you're available. **LM**

"GOODNIGHT MANCHESTER"

Randy Newman casting his inimitable wit to the audience as he bows to the "unmistakable" reception he got from his, eh, Dublin audience. And all that after a knockout solo performance, with nothing more than his piano for company. **SL**

OTHER VOICES LOUD AND CLEAR

No greatest hits, no album tracks, no messing – Richard Hawley and Jarvis Cocker ploughed their way through the likes of Lee Hazlewood's *The Girl on Death Row*, Lambchop's *I'm A Stranger Here* and The Everly Brothers' *I Wonder If I Care as Much*, while Lisa Hannigan sang a flawless *Moon River*, duetted with Hawley on *Hushabye Mountain* (from the movie *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*), and encoored with Cocker and Hawley on *Silent Night*. No need for a Christmas present for me – this will do very nicely. **TCL**



TURN UP THE BASS

2010 was when dubstep and post-dubstep acts came out of their subterranean lairs to blink in the limelight. Aside from Mount Kimbie, Darkstar, Magnetic Man and Skream, all of whom released well-received albums, a slew of next-generation stars – among them SBTRKT, Actress, James Blake, Jamie Woon and Katy B – began to limber up. **JC**

MOVING SWIFTLY ALONG

Pity the boy that kisses Taylor Swift. No matter the length of the relationship, the poor chap's slights will be forever immortalised in song. The JoBros already know from experience (*Forever and Always*). On Swift's new album, *Speak Now*, John Mayer (Dear John) and lupine hunk Taylor Lautner (*Back to December*) meet a similar fate. **AM**

TEA AND SYMPATHY

There's nothing in the rock journalist's etiquette book that tells you what to do when a 5ft 2in, 77-year-old Japanese woman is sitting beside you in floods of tears. Yoko Ono has been talking about John Lennon and getting herself into a right state. I opt for a classic Irish manoeuvre: "I'll make us both a nice cup of tea." **BB**

A SURPRISE INSIDE

Forrest Gump could have been talking about the West Cork Chamber Music Festival when

RUFUS PUTS ON A GRAND SHOW

Even the most ardent Wainwright devotee couldn't deny that his latest show takes the biscuit when it comes to pretension. No applause allowed? Flamboyant costume? Arty visuals? However, combined with the starkness of new album *All Days Are Nights*, it worked beautifully. **LM**

TRAD TANGO

Joe Derrane's sublime *Tango Derrane* on his spine-tingling collection (*Grove Lane*) – the very model of a modern tango general. **SL**

THIS YEAR'S NU-FOLK MODEL

With a will-o'-the-wisp of a voice and a figure like a wraith, UK singer-songwriter Laura Marling played Dublin's Academy last April and ushered in a hushed but not too reverential phase of what it means to be a superlative singer-songwriter at a time when sensitivity is occasionally superceded by thug-pop. Marling, however, is often a snarling folk singer – she dares to dream nightmares and tell us all about them. **TCL**

THE MERCHANT AND THE MUSE

She can sound as flakey as any diva, but when Natalie Merchant soars into song, the world seems a better place. Her long-awaited *Leave Your Sleep*, in which she turned favourite verse into song (a graveyard for the ambitions of many others) was a treat, as was her show in Dublin's Whelans. **JB**

ADIEU, KATE MCGARRIGLE

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Have anything to say about our critics' musical musings? Want to share your own? Or just rant? Leave your comments at irishtimes.com/blogs/ontherecord



Our 50 musical moments of 2010

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THE MAN WHO CAN'T SIT STILL

It's time to come up with something other than the "renaissance man" tag for Damon Albarn. After spending much of 2009 on Blur reunion duties, Albarn relaunched the Gorillaz ship this year and enjoyed a fantastic voyage, thanks to *Plastic Beach*. And, as evidenced by their triumphant Dublin show in November, he's also finally squared the cartoon-band-versus-real-band live show circle. **JC**

RETURNING TO THE FOLD

Reunions are slightly awkward at best, and a meeting with old work colleagues doesn't bode well – especially when a former member of the team has made a career out of slugging you off. But a performance on *Strictly* heals all wounds, and the proto-man band Take That are back at their be-suited best. **AM**

LUV U LOADS, COURTNEY, XXX

Somewhere in the bowels of Glasgow's Academy, Courtney Love is interrupted by a lovey-dovey text from her new boyfriend. Because she has a cigarette in one hand and a drink in the other, she dictates an appropriate response for me to type into the phone. We spend 10 minutes discussing how many Xs she should put at the end of it. She wants two. I think one X is more appropriate at this stage of the relationship. We can't decide, so I put three and press send. (Note: they've since broken up). **BB**

FILLING IN THE BLANKS

How much do you know about Irish music of the late 19th or early 20th centuries? Courtesy of BBC Northern Ireland, in August Catherine Leonard and the Ulster Orchestra under Kenneth Montgomery gave the premiere of Ina Boyle's fascinating Violin Concerto, nearly 70 years after it was written. **MD**

VILLAGERS HAUL

Not only did Conor J O'Brien release one of the finest albums of 2010, he also bagged a prestigious spot on



the Mercury Music Prize shortlist. His performance on the night proved that one man and his guitar can be sublime. **SG**

IF YOU'RE OIL-RICH; STAVANGER'S 12 POINTS

Like good wine, 12 Points, the Improvised Music Company's festival for emerging European jazz talent, travels well. Its first venture abroad took it to Norway's oil capital, Stavanger, this year and produced some vintage talent, including Germany's Pablo Held Trio and Britain's Trio VD, both of whom have since played in Ireland. **AC**

HARD WORKING CLASS HEROES

It's had its fair share of critics, but this year's HWCH festival was a well-oiled machine. Changing its days and its venues, the showcase festival's eighth year was one of the best yet – and there's still no other way to see so much diverse Irish musical talent in one go. **LM**

BAWLIN' RAWLINGS

Dave Rawlings, aka Mr Gillian Welch, taking up the lead on *Bells of Harlem*, the magical closing track of his solo debut, *A Friend of a Friend*. Hell, if we'd known faith had such good tunes, we'd have joined the Baptist Church aeons ago. **ST**

TANGLED UP IN TRUTH

Bob Dylan's *Witmark Demos: 1962-1964*. Forget for a moment about the man whose voice is all but gone – the release in October of Dylan's *Witmark Demos* (as part of the Official Bootleg series) showcased the man's exceptional burgeoning talents in raw form, and even slipped in one of his all-but-forgotten songs, the quite amazing *Tomorrow Is a Long Time*. Please, Mr Dylan, Mr Dylan, please – no more Christmas albums! **TCL**

LED ASTRAY

Robert Plant followed up his acclaimed pairing with Alison Krauss by pulling together a wonder band and a wonder album, *Band of Joy*, fuelled by Buddy Miller's moody, fevered guitar and Patty Griffin's atmospheric backing vocals. A joy in itself,

the album should help spread the word about Miller and Griffin's solo work. **JB**

THIS MUST BE THE PLACE

Hey, let's start a Facebook campaign to stop James Murphy hanging up his microphone. Murphy and LCD Soundsystem provided one of the year's live thrillers at Dublin's Tripod, a show which only needed the frontman to don an extra-large suit to really nail the Talking Heads comparisons. A band firing on all creative cylinders. **JC**

NEED HEAD

Trinidadian rapper Nicki Minaj was the hottest thing since the cheese inside a toasted sandwich even before the release of her debut album, *Pink Friday*. Dropping eight bars like a Hilton drops cash at Kitson, the leading lady of Young Money Records has so far this year guested with Mimi, Will.I.Am and Eminem. **AM**

GARY AND STARMIX

I've bumped into Gary Barlow three times over the past 12 months. One was a formal interview occasion when he tore his way through a large bar of Green & Black's organic chocolate. On the other occasions (once outside a tube station and once in Düsseldorf airport) he astonished me by his ability to demolish a whole bag of Haribo Starmix in five minutes flat. That's a lot of "rings, bears, fried eggs, hearts and cola bottle jelly candies" (it says on the pack in front of me at the moment). **BB**

NEW DIRECTIONS

Exciting times at the National Symphony Orchestra: new conductors (Alan Buribayev, Hannu Lintu), a first-ever associate artist (pianist Finghin Collins), new strands of daytime and latenight events, and a mentoring scheme that brings third-level students from Dublin, Cork, Waterford and Belfast onstage at the NCH. **MD**

SO LONG ARI UP

Punk lost one of its innovators in October, when Slits singer Ari Up died after an illness. Having established the all-girl punk band when she was just 14, Ari Up was an

uncompromising figure, a renegade and, in contrast to the title of The Slits' biggest single, far from a *Typical Girl*. **SG**

AND LET'S HEAR IT FOR ...

The Kevin Barry Room at the NCH, which hosted fine concerts by, among others, Francesco Turrisi's diverse groups. Seating 80-120, with a grand piano and sound system, it's available free – no EU/IMF bailout required – for concerts, masterclasses, rehearsals and other musical activities. A boon to Irish musicians of all persuasions. **AC**

VENUE VEDI VICI

The opening of two brilliant new venues in Dublin (**The Workman's Club** and **The Grand Social**) was both unexpected and welcomed this year. What's more, their layout, design and programme are sympathetic to music-lovers. We may be in dire economic straits, but we still want to watch gigs in comfort. **LM**

BEIRUT BOMBSHELL

Zac Condon whooping it up in Dublin's Tripod like it's the eve of the end of the world. French horns and ukuleles were never this cool, were they? **SL**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YA, TOO!

At the O2 in the third week of June, we were Stevie Wondering; wondering, that is, whether one of the all-time greats of black music would deliver a bland greatest hits-type show or pull a few rabbits out of the hat and produce a master-blast of a gig. Well, wouldn't you know it, but didn't the show turn out to be a cause for celebration as Wonder lived up to his name. **TCL**

MASTER OF INSIGHT

Reading Greil Marcus has often been a challenge, a provocation and frequently an education. But hearing (at a UCD conference) this much-lauded American culture critic's remarkable lecture based on Bob Dylan's *Masters of War* song was an inspiration. Marcus's continued thirst for music and meaning is remarkable. **JB**