



The National

Maybe it was the time of year, the inspiring music or the hours spent in a tiny church in the tranquil setting of Dingle, but the Other Voices festival seemed to bring out the philosopher in all its performers. **Roe McDermott** caught up with **Marina and the Diamonds, Ellie Goulding and ASIWFYA** as they talked about the highs and lows of 2010. **PHOTOS James Goulden**

Ireland's most unique music festival is held in a most distinctive venue: a tiny, unassuming church nestled amongst the pubs and shops of Dingle town. But despite barely seating 80 people, St. James' Church has been graced by some of the world's best musicians, thanks to RTÉ's Other Voices festival, running for the past nine years. Last December, Dingle was again alive with the sound of music as dozens of Irish and international acts, The National, Richard Hawley, Jarvis Cocker and Anna Calvi among them, took to the altar for a week of incredible music.

Great tunes aside, what's magical about the festival is the post-show atmosphere as artists and audience alike cram into the tiny bar of Benner's hotel, amicably jostling each other in their rush to get a pint. Watching The National chat to local fiddle players as the lads from Everything Everything and Ryan Sheridan wait to get served is a wonderfully bizarre experience, and as everyone bonds over a couple of drinks there's a not a diva in sight.

Though I have to admit, Marina Diamandis definitely looks the part. All flowing raven locks, make-up and a fur coat that would make Cruella De Ville squeal with joy, the singer's quirky style

doesn't blend easily into the sea of Aran jumpers and sensible shoes favoured by the locals. But maybe she has to for the job - after a year in which Florence reigned supreme in ethereal gothic gowns while Lady Gaga redefined 'baring all' by donning leotards designed to show off her bikini waxer's mastery, female performers' wardrobes are often scrutinised with more fervour than their music is. So what does Marina think of the current fashion icons of the music industry?

"I used to be quite critical of other women," she admits, "because I think I was trying to figure out how I felt about things and perceived certain things like sexuality and being sexy. And I think the way women dress, nothing's right or wrong; it's just a response to centuries of oppression and not being recognised as someone who's just as sexual as a man. But we have to fight for it all the time and say 'Hey, look at how empowered and sexual I am' and it's really annoying that we still have to do that. Personally I think what women love about Lady Gaga is she's one of the first major pop artists not trying to be sexy with her clothes. It's just in her blood and it's her way of creating art. I feel quite the opposite - I want my mind and my thoughts to provoke people and not my body or my causing a shocking image because, really, what's shocking anymore?"

However, Diamandis is painfully aware that as a woman in the public eye it's nigh impossible to avoid criticism and outrage, even from those posing as fans.

"We have this voyeuristic obsession with building up young female stars while actually willing them to crash and burn, especially Disney girls like Miley Cyrus. It's weird and infuriating. Honestly, the relationship between females and media and sex is so twisted and complex that I can't possibly cover it - though I am trying to on my next album."

Another woman who spent 2010 battling her demons is the adorably pint-sized Ellie Goulding. Though admitting to being naturally worrisome, the elfin blonde cheerfully declares over a hot toddy that 2010 was the year she finally became fearless.

"I'm naturally anxious and have suffered from panic attacks for years. Sometimes I put my chest down on the bed and my heart pounds and I can't stop it or get to sleep. But I think this year was so wonderful that I have no fear anymore at all, and that's the god's honest truth. I mean, I still get nervous when I'm collaborating like when I did stuff with Lissie or Tinie Tempah - that made me fucking nervous! It's their show. You don't want to mess up. But for me I think at this point you have to be fearless, you can't be sorry for where you are. I used to do that on stage, I'd apologise and be all 'Sorry, I'm going to play some songs now, sorry for inflicting myself on your ears!' I've had such an amazing year and have such a big following behind me now, so I kind of feel like I've emerged victorious from this year. It's been tough, and I could have crumbled and could have easily given up but I feel victorious," she beams.

As Goulding calmly enjoys her anxiety-free



Jarvis Cocker

evening from the comfort of a fireside armchair, one person who seems to be particularly enjoying (if not single-handedly creating) the mayhem of the *Other Voices* festival is Tony Wright from *And So I Watch You From Afar*, who is rather unconvincingly denying reports that he stole a cat from one of Dingle's infamously raucous sessions the night before.

"I didn't steal the cat, it came to me! I merely christened it Adebisi and now it won't leave me alone!" he protests. I don't believe him for a second. But Wright remains adamant that (alleged) kitty-kidnapping aside, *ASIWFYA* aren't half as mental as their stage performances would have you believe.

"All that 'we throw TVs out windows and snort coke off girls' things' just doesn't happen. Well, I used to snort TVs and throw cocaine and girls out windows but I got into a bit of trouble for that... Them Crooked Vultures are pretty mental on tour though, Josh Homme goes through two litres of vodka a night and that's just on stage! That's because he's a fellow ginger - we've been abused our entire life so we need a crutch to tolerate the pain."

The jokey manner and hyper energy of the *ASIWFYA* lads is infectious and unwaning, even after their wildly dynamic and energetic performance. It was a set that not only marked the first time anyone performed topless in St. James' Church, but was also the first time that earplugs had been distributed among the pews of this tiny place of worship, items that are strangely enough not necessary while listening to the psalms on Sunday morning. But it's clear that despite enjoying their whirlwind European tour and rounds on the festival circuit, some of 2010's darker moments still weigh heavily on their minds, particularly the death of Charles Haddon and Michael Been at Pukkelpop last August, where *ASIWFYA* were playing.

"It was just horrible, it felt like death was following us around," says Wright. "And that was the weekend that guy committed suicide at the Swell Season gig as well, it was just awful. I didn't know Haddon, I hadn't heard *Ou Est Le Swimming Pool's* music but he was only 22-years-old so it's essentially a peer, someone who's doing what you do, so it's terrifying. And Pukkelpop is such a wonderful festival, the atmosphere is incredible and all of a sudden it just went from this big, bright, beautiful festival to this little dark hole. I still think about it quite a lot."

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Other Voices will be broadcast on Wednesdays on RTÉ2, beginning on February 16.
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Anna Calvi



Marina And The Diamonds



Richard Hawley