

# ONE man & his Guitar

Alan Owens asks "Is the singer-songwriter dead?",  
in advance of an upcoming performance by a rather talented one.

Music by its very nature is cyclical. We can see a prevalence in the current Irish scene of bands that hark back to the 1980's and beyond in terms of influences. However, the singer songwriter has always been with us in some form or another and will always be with us. A current phenomenon seems to be for artists who might fall under this tag to go under a moniker that suggests a band - Jape and Juno Falls are two contemporary examples in the current Irish scene.

However, despite the negativity that may be associated with the singer songwriter genre, it is undoubtedly alive and well both in Ireland and internationally, and in fact, there are more top quality female singer songwriters around than ever before. LEG spoke to local 'singer-songwriter' Nick Carswell to get his thoughts on this issue.

LEG wonders if Nick can define what a singer-songwriter is. 'Well, that is the problem,' he says. 'People say if you sing and write songs then you are a 'singer songwriter' but clearly everyone who is in a band sings and writes songs too.' He adds that 'you need to look specifically at what a 'singer-songwriter' is and how people define that. People really just throw the term around and that is why there is a stigma attached to it.'

Nick points to the 'folk roots of singer songwriters' and particularly people like Bob Dylan and Cat Stevens or likewise Joni Mitchell or Joan Baez. LEG enquires about the negative connotations in terms of the Irish scene. 'Well it is only because it has become the term used for the negative thing - it is not that 'singer-songwriters' are necessarily negative themselves,' he explains. 'That is what the definition refers to now - one guy with his guitar singing about his girlfriend that dumped him - that is what people think of when they hear the tag. But it is just a word, people use it negatively but only really because they don't know

what they are talking about or haven't figured out what a singer-songwriter really is.'

Again Nick refers to a historical example. 'The other thing to consider is that the biggest and most influential 'singer-songwriter' - if, for the sake of the argument you took them as a single entity - was Lennon/McCartney,' he explains. 'They wrote simple songs with folksy roots but because they were two guys who were with another two guys and called themselves The Beatles, they avoided that tag.'

Nick says he would possibly consider going under a 'band name' to avoid this negative connotation. 'Again it has more to do with peoples perceptions than anything I am interested in myself,' he explains. 'The fact is that I am not interested in just sitting with me and a guitar, I want the music to bring more to an audience. I don't think the show I would present would fall under that tag and I don't want to be defined like that. I am much more interested in playing with other people and having a bigger sound than just guitar and vocals.'

This is definitely one issue that is hard to answer one way or the other. What is clear is that there are a lot of talented musicians out there that deserve to be heard rather than just dismissed out of hand. All that is left to say is.....

The singer-songwriter is dead ... long live the singer songwriter!

**Nick Carswell plays Baker Place on the 28th December. For more info log onto [myspace.com/gigtown](http://myspace.com/gigtown) or [myspace.com/nickcarswell](http://myspace.com/nickcarswell)**



For many music fans the merest mention of the term 'singer-songwriter' is enough to send them into catatonic convulsions or, at least it is enough to bring about that 'glassy eyed stare combined with slack-jaw syndrome' that signals systems shutting down in their brain.

The phrase has in recent years become associated with ubiquitous, overly sentimental, patch-elbowed troubadours. Unfortunately due to the success of such artists on the home grown scene - Mundy/Damien Rice/Mark Geary/Paddy Casey/Glen Hansard - and those on the more risible international scene - James Blunt/James Morrison/David Gray/Ray LaMontagne - a certain negative connotation has become attached to anyone who might fall under the 'singer-songwriter' tag. Thus, people are now as likely to be turned off by such an artist, often with no consideration for the music in question.