

# **Josienne Clarke and Ben Walker**

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## **BBC Radio 2 Folk Award Winners 2015**

### **Best Duo**

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Praise for new album 'Nothing Can Bring Back The Hour':

***'A bold success' – The Telegraph***

***'Clarke and Walker stand out due to their originality.....impressive stuff' –  
The Guardian***

***'Thoroughly remarkable and unique' – Maverick***

***'a wistful soundscape of longing....arresting stuff' – Independent on Sunday***

### **Biography**

To win the Best Duo category at the 2015 BBC Folk Awards is quite an achievement at any stage of an artists' career. But just two years prior to this accolade Josienne Clarke and Ben Walker were virtually unknown on the folk scene (or any other, for that matter). So their success is quite remarkable.

Josienne and Ben had been performing to one woman and a disinterested dog at London acoustic nights since 2009. Following the release of their first two albums *One Light Is Gone* and *The Seas Are Deep*, interest began to grow in discerning pockets of the blogging community. But it was musician and producer Jim Moray who persuaded them of a far bigger audience who'd appreciate their classically instilled traditional songs and self-penned lovelorn ballads. Although Josienne was initially sceptical that the folk and roots scene would welcome outsiders, the reviews, end-of-year polls and nominations that greeted their 2013 album *Fire & Fortune* would prove her gratifyingly wrong.

But it's their latest album that has drawn the most attention and plaudits – earning five star reviews across the board. Entirely self-financed, self-produced, self-arranged and released on the Folk Room label they co-run, 2015's *Nothing Can Bring Back The Hour* was a hugely ambitious, uncompromised realisation of everything Josienne and Ben had planned when they met six years ago.

While much of their music is characterised by lush chamber ensemble orchestrations, what truly sets them apart is the combination of Josienne's exquisitely nuanced,

emotionally affecting voice and Ben's intricately expressive, adroit guitar technique. They cite Sandy Denny, June Tabor, Nic Jones and Pierre Bensusan as respective influences but theirs is a captivating sound that's all their own.

Although Ben Walker (who grew up in Worcestershire) studied classical guitar from childhood and Josienne Clarke (from West Sussex) is a classical music degree dropout, both are keen to stress that they're "bog standard comprehensive school kids" who didn't benefit from a conservatoire education. The elegance and sophistication of their music comes entirely from their own discipline, rigour and craft. To emphasise the point, Josienne has been known to quip: "We're not posh, just pretentious!"

This self-deprecating humour is key to their much-loved live shows. Given Josienne's often devastatingly sad and poetic lyrics, and the frequently death and doom-laden nature of the old songs they interpret, she feels it's only fair to lighten the mood. Otherwise they'd need to tour with a member of The Samaritans on hand for post-gig counselling. The misery, mirth and sheer beauty of their performances has taken them to such auspicious stages as Cambridge Folk Festival, Bristol's Colston Hall and London's Purcell Rooms, a far cry from the pub backrooms where they began.

After their ovation-stirring rendition of *The Banks of The Sweet Primroses* at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards this year, 6 Music DJ Cerys Matthews fell in love with the music of Josienne and Ben and invited them to appear in the National Theatre's production of *Our Country's Good*. The play, which runs from August to October 2015 at the Olivier Theatre, will also feature two of Josienne and Ben's original compositions.

The way this duo inhabit songs that are centuries old, making them personal and present again, and their gift for pricking the heart with tales of everyday love and loss makes the music of Josienne Clarke and Ben Walker a rare and precious thing.

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