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Indigo Girls, OKAN, Crys Matthews, Susan Werner Win International Folk Music Awards in Montreal

The awards helped launch the 37th edition of the annual Folk Alliance International Conference, which continues until Feb. 23. Find the full list of winners here.

By [Kerry Doole](#) | Feb 20, 2025



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Crys Matthews at the International Folk Music Awards Indie Montreal

The 2025 International Folk Music Awards were held last night (Feb. 19) at Montreal's Queen Elizabeth Hotel as part of the 37th annual [Folk Alliance International](#) (FAI) Conference, the largest international gathering of the folk and roots music community.

Honoured with a lifetime achievement award were ground-breaking and Grammy-winning U.S. folk duo Indigo Girls, comprising Amy Ray and Emily Saliers. Accepting the award, Ray pleaded "Please stand up with us and make your voice be heard in these times. Gather together with other people. Raise your voice. Stand up strong. Day by day, song by song, we can make this world a better place."

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Her sentiments were echoed on the night by other award winners. Peoples Voice Award victor Gina Chavez declared "We're all light. The world needs our voices, more than ever."

Other major winners included Crys Matthews as Artist of the Year, Susan Werner for Album of the Year (*Halfway to Houston*) and Tom Prasada-Rao for Song of the Year ("\$20 Bill (for George Floyd)," as recorded by Javiva Magness and Dan Navarro).

Werner could not attend the ceremony, but her noted folk peer, Dar Williams, read out Werner's witty acceptance speech. Presenting in that category was celebrated Canadian singer-songwriter Ron Sexsmith, who stated "I am an album artist in a random shuffle world. We keep doing it because we love it."

Providing Canadian content in the winners circle were Toronto-based Afro-Cuban duo OKAN, cited in the Rising Tide award category. In their acceptance video, they stated that "We want to create a community of people who look like us, so they can feel represented."

Another Canadian winner was Spirit of Folk Award recipient Tom Power, a roots musician and CBC radio host for the show *Q*. In his acceptance speech, he stated "as someone cares a lot about the traditions of Newfoundland and Labrador, I stand on the shoulders of the giants of the folks who preserved the music long before me." Power also passionately defended the CBC, which he termed "an organization that aims to tell the stories of Canadians to other Canadians."

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Other Spirit of Folk honourees were folk and country songwriter and author Alice Randall, Midwest Folk Alliance stalwart Annie Capps and Quebec's Innu Nikamu festival, recognized for "its commitment to the promotion and preservation of Indigenous culture through music and community building for over thirty years."

Joining Indigo Girls as Lifetime Achievement Awards recipients were African-American folk musician Lesley Riddle and roots music publication *Songlines*.

Amongst those performing on the Awards show were top Canadian folk/roots artists Rose Cousins and Le Vent du Nord (both double Juno winners) and Toronto roots troubadour Julian Taylor.

FAI's 37th annual conference features over 175 artists, representing 38 countries of origin, 9 U.S. states, and all 13 Canadian provinces and territories, one of the larger slates of showcases in the conference's history. The conference is being held at Montreal's Sheraton Hotel. Here is the complete [list of Official Showcase artists](#).

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Here are the nominations in the three “Best of 2024” categories, with winners marked, followed by a list of this year’s special award honourees.

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Flamy Grant

Sarah Jarosz

Kaïa Kater

Nick Lowe

WINNER: Crys Matthews

Allison Russell

Album of the Year

Sierra Ferrell, *Trail of Flowers* (Rounder Records)

The Heart Collectors, *The Space Between* (Spins the Gold Records)

Kaïa Kater, *Strange Medicine* (Free Dirt Records)

Aoife O'Donovan, *All My Friends* (Yep Roc Records)

Ordinary Elephant – *Ordinary Elephant* (Berkalin Records)

WINNER: Susan Werner, *Halfway to Houston* (self-released)

Song of the Year

“Tenzin Sings with Nightingales,” written by Tenzin Choegyal, performed by Tenzin Choegyal and Michael Askill

“How I Long for Peace,” written by Peggy Seeger, performed by Rhiannon Giddens, Crys Matthews, and the Resistance Revival Chorus

“Woman Who Pays,” written and performed Connie Kaldor

WINNER: “\$20 Bill (for George Floyd),” written by Tom Prasada-Rao, performed by Dan Navarro & Janiva Magness

“Ukrainian Now,” written and performed by Tom Paxton & John McCutcheon

“Love Letters,” written by Julian Taylor, Tyler James Ellis, performed by Julian Taylor

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Honourees

Lifetime Achievement Award – Living: Indigo Girls

Lifetime Achievement Award – Legacy: Lesley Riddle

Lifetime Achievement Award – Business: *Songlines* Magazine

People's Voice: Gina Chavez

Rising Tide: OKAN

Clearwater Award: River Roads Festival (Easthampton, Mass.)

Spirit of Folk: Tom Power, Alice Randall, Annie Capps, Innu Nikamu festival

Folk Radio DJ Hall of Fame Inductees: Archie Fisher (BBC Scotland), Mary Sue Twohy (SIRIUS XM), Taylor Caffery (WRKF-FM, Baton Rouge, La.), Matthew Finch (posthumous, KUNM-FM, Albuquerque, N.M.), Chuck Wentworth (posthumous, WRIU-FM, Rhode Island)

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INDIGO GIRLS

OKAN

CRYS MATTHEWS

SUSAN WERNER



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Obituaries: Canadian Luthier Oskar Graf, Austin Music Scene Veteran Chris Gage

This week we also acknowledge the passing of Laughing Hyenas/Jesus Lizard drummer Jim Kimball and Sigue Sigue Sputnik drummer Ray Mayhew.

By [Kerry Doole](#) | 4h

Oskar Graf, a renowned Canadian luthier and co-founder of the Blue Skies Music Festival, died on August 26 at the age of 81.

A 2014 [profile in Frontenac News](#) noted that "a celebrated 40-year career as one of Canada's top-notch luthiers [guitarmakers] was not the career that Oskar Graf originally planned for but he affirms that it is one that he is very grateful for. Trained in his native Germany as a cabinet maker and industrial/furniture designer, Graf, who was born in Berlin, came to Canada in 1968. He worked briefly in his trained field upon his arrival in Toronto before purchasing land not far east of Clarendon Station, where he designed and built the home and workshop that he has lived and worked in ever since.

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