

2026 Country Music Honours Finalists Announced

2026 APRA Best Country Music Song & 2026 MLT Songwriting Award

Friday 22 May 2026

2026 APRA Best Country Music Song Award:

Marlon Williams and Kommi Tamati-Elliffe for 'Whakameatia Mai'

2026 MLT Songwriting Award Winner

Ron Mitchell for 'Wedding Ring'

Congratulations to the winners, at **the 2026 Country Music Honours**. The awards were held this evening, Friday 22 May in Gore, where top country music artists from across Aotearoa gathered for the red-carpet event.

Country Music Honour for APRA Best Country Music Song winner:

'Whakameatia Mai', written by Marlon Williams and Kommi Tamati-Elliffe, performed by Marlon Williams

Country Music Honour for the MLT Songwriting Award winner and runner-up:

Winner: Wedding Ring written by Ron Mitchell

Runner-up: Not Enough written by Mel Parsons

Country Music Honour for Contribution to Country Music:

Topp Twins

Whakameatia Mai, written by Marlon Williams (Kāi Tahu, Ngāi Tai) and Kommi Tamati-Elliffe (Kāi Tahu, Te-Āti-Awa) has won the APRA Best Country Music Song Award. This is Marlon's second time winning, the first being in 2013 with co-writer Delaney Davidson for Bloodletter. Coming from **Marlon Williams'** most recent album 'Te Whare Tiwekaweka', in his acceptance speech, Marlon described the song as "an all-in song about togetherness and being fully engaged with the world, that this world is not the rehearsal".

A leading finalist at the upcoming Aotearoa Music Awards next week, the album recently won the Taite Music Prize and in 2025, Marlon and **Kommi** were presented with the coveted APRA Silver Scroll | Kaitito Kaiaka for their song Aua Atu Rā . Currently on a national tour with his band The Yarra Benders, Marlon was unable to attend the awards however provided a video acceptance speech in which he thanked co-writer Kommi, producer Mark Perkins, and his band, for really making the backbone of this song. He went on to congratulate other finalists Tami Neilson, TheWesternGuide and Tom Lark. KOMMI was in Gore on the night to accept the award in person and to celebrate alongside the other finalists.

The prestigious **Country Music Honour** for the **MLT Songwriting Award**, celebrating unreleased original songs from Aotearoa, was awarded to **Ron Mitchell**, for '**Wedding Ring**'. Performed on the night by his daughter Maegan Mitchell, Wedding Ring is a song with a classic country rock feel, written for anyone waiting for a cowboy to pop the question. Ron Mitchell writes songs about horses, weddings and divorces, tractors and trucks and pubs going dry. Gore's three-time MLT Songwriting Award finalist, Ron Mitchell released his sophomore album 'Dead On Country' in 2025. Marking his first release since his Tūi nominated album in 2006, the album is full of Ron's storytelling, wit and Dusty Spittle poetry.

Mel Parsons was named runner-up for her song '**Not Enough**', once again earning recognition for her songwriting talent. Mel shares "it's a song about those times when you're really very low and feeling like whatever you try, you're just not quite cutting it. But even though the lyrics are a little bleak, the music feels optimistic, in the way that when you're down you know you just have to sit with it, and things will eventually come back to being ok."

Audiences witnessed the emotive presentation of the **Country Music Honour for Contribution to Country Music in Aotearoa**, to the **Topp Twins**. Introduced in 2025, the Honour celebrates members of the country music community who have not only achieved great heights of their own but **uplifted others and contributed to the past, present and future of country music in Aotearoa New Zealand**. Dame Lynda and Dame Jools have dedicated their lives to standing up and singing for what's right and bringing joy to audiences in every nook and cranny of Aotearoa.

[In a video tribute](#) featuring words from some of Aotearoa's greatest musicians & performers, 2025 inaugural recipient, Tami Neilson, said, "Without the Toppies taking me under their wings, uplifting me and bringing me around NZ on tour with them countless times, I would not be the artist or the person that I am today. They are the touchstone that grounds me and the standard to which I always strive."

The **Country Music Honours** event marked the official opening of the **Tussock Country Music Festival** - a 10-day celebration of all things Tussock Country. MC was the very first MLT

Songwriting Award winner from 1980, Chairperson of the Tussock Festival Trust, Jeff Rea. The audience was treated to performances by special guests The Warratahs, alongside a mix of finalists from both awards.

Media assets:

- [Folder of media assets including](#) photos and video tributes
- [Official Awards photos](#), uploaded post event (password to download: 6969)
- [Topp Twins tribute video on Youtube](#)

For all media enquiries including interview & image requests, please contact:

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