

McCartney, 'God particle' scientist get honors

December 29 2012, by Raphael Satter

Stella McCartney, who designed the uniforms worn by Britain's record-smashing Olympic team, and Scottish physicist Peter Higgs, who gave his name to the so-called "God particle," are among the hundreds being honored by Queen Elizabeth II this New Year.

The list is particularly heavy with Britain's Olympic heroes, but it also includes "Star Wars" actor Ewan McGregor, eccentric English singer Kate Bush, Roald Dahl illustrator Quentin Blake, and Jamie Lowther-Pinkerton, the royal aide who helped organize the watched-around-the-world wedding of Prince William to Kate Middleton.

McCartney was honored with the title of Officer of the Order of the British Empire, or OBE, in part for her work creating the skintight, red-white-and-blue uniforms worn by British athletes as they grabbed 65 medals during the 2012 games hosted by London. McCartney is the designer daughter of ex-Beatle Paul McCartney and his first wife Linda, and she has moved to make the family name almost as synonymous with fashion as it is with music, setting up a successful business and a critically-acclaimed label.

Higgs' achievements, which made him a Companion of Honor, touch on the nature and the origins of the universe. The 83-year-old researcher's work in theoretical physics sought to explain what gives things weight. He said it was while walking through the Scottish mountains that he hit upon the concept of what would later become known as the Higgs boson, an elusive subatomic particle that gives objects mass and combines with

gravity to give them weight.

For decades, the existence of such a particle remained just a theory, but earlier this year scientists working at the European Organization for Nuclear Research, or CERN, said they'd found compelling evidence that the Higgs boson was out there. Or in there. Or whatever.

All of Britain's gold medalists from this year's games were on the list, with cyclist Bradley Wiggins and sailor Ben Ainslie honored with knighthoods.

Sebastian Coe, who masterminded the games as chairman of the London organizing committee, was made a Companion of Honor—a prestigious title also awarded to Higgs. But Ken Livingstone, London's former mayor, said Saturday he turned down a Commander of the Order of the British Empire, or CBE, recognizing his services to the Olympics because he doesn't believe politicians should get the queen's honors.

Honors lists typically include a sprinkling of star power, and this year was no different. Ewan McGregor, who came to public attention through his role as the heroin-addled anti-hero of British drug drama "Trainspotting," was awarded an OBE. The 41-year-old actor is also known for his turn as a young Obi-Wan Kenobi in the "Star Wars" prequels.

"Babooshka" singer Kate Bush said she was delighted to be made a CBE for a musical career which has resulted in a string of quirky hits including "Wuthering Heights," "Cloudbusting," and "Man With The Child In His Eyes."

Other art world honorees included artist Tracey Emin and Quentin Blake, whose spiky, exuberant illustrations are best known through the work of his collaborator Roald Dahl.

Politicians, policemen, and spies got honors too. Scotland Yard chief Bernard Hogan-Howe was awarded a knighthood; former British foreign minister Margaret Beckett was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair's wife Cherie was made a CBE for her charity work. MI5 chief Jonathan Evans was made a Knight Commander of the Order of Bath.

Also honored was the man credited with helping pull off the wedding of the decade: Jamie Lowther-Pinkerton, principal private secretary to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (as Prince William and his wife are formally known) was made a Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order.

Britain's honors are bestowed twice a year by the monarch, at New Year's and on her official birthday in June. Although the queen does pick out some lesser honors herself, the vast majority of recipients are selected by government committees from nominations made by officials and members of the public.

In descending order, the honors are knighthoods, CBE, OBE, and MBE—Member of the Order of the British Empire. Knights are addressed as "sir" or "dame." Recipients of the other honors, such as the Order of the Companions of Honor given to Higgs and Coe or the Royal Victorian Order personally picked out by the queen, receive no title but can put the letters after their names.

The New Year's honors carried the usual batch of courtiers—even the royal household's switchboard operator got a medal—as well as senior civil servants, soldiers, charity executives, successful entrepreneurs, established academics, volunteers, and community workers. Some of the more eclectic honors included the OBE handed to card game columnist Andrew Michael Robson "for services to the game of bridge," and the OBE given to river conservationist Andrew Douglas-Home "for services to fishing."

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