

SH PRESENTATION TO THE NEW ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR EVENTS 26/10/15

Chairman: James Heappey, MP for Wells, Somerset

Steve Heap is the General Secretary of the Association of Festival Organisers representing over 150 festivals throughout the UK.

The Association of Festival Organisers was formed in 1987 when a group of festival organisers came together to share ideas and thoughts about future festival planning.

We continue to be an organisation of support for the festival industry. Specialising particularly in folk, roots and acoustic music, jazz and some of the smaller festivals, perhaps up to around 5000 capacity though we do have some larger members.

We continue to swap ideas, support each other and meet once a year at our Conference. In 2015 this is at Ettington Chase, Stratford upon Avon 13-15 November.

Steve is also the newly elected Chair of the Events Industry Forum, a group of twenty five events industry associations that come together two/three times a year to share news, ideas, campaign and support each other.

Research is missing from the festivals industry. It is estimated that there are over a thousand music festivals alone in England. The estimated number of visits to festivals could exceed 5 million in one festival year which normally runs approximately March to October. Major festivals are run by such organisations as Glastonbury and Live Nation amongst others. Live Nation recently produced a major report on the festivals industry to support a consultation on Business Rates, which in the main focused on the large rock and pop events.

After what could be described as a very tricky two year period (2012 and 2013), (except of course for the very successful London Olympics). 2014 saw an upturn in the number of events and was continued successfully in 2015; recovery is in the air.

Festivals of all kinds are now available to the visiting public. Music, visual arts, theatre, crafts, literature and multi arts are in the main reporting success. They have embraced 21st century technology and now sell most of their tickets through online providers. They market through social media. But most of all their success is still word of mouth.

Their profit is not just financial but also socially measured against original targets and there is no doubt the festival industry is wise enough to set those targets at sensible and achievable levels.

The majority of festivals in England are run by volunteers and aimed at charitable fund raising and social cohesion. There are many larger events run by professional companies and these are on the increase providing jobs in the events industry for the many students currently attending Event Management courses at universities. Festivals in 2015 and onwards are becoming 'trendy'. It's no longer "Did you go to one" but "Which did you go to".

The largest audiences are in the sixteen to thirty years age range, however more and more festivals are appealing to whole family groups taking the focus off headline acts and more onto image and the "wow!" factor. Facilities, comfort and the ease of access for all are now very important.

The recent rise in popularity in numbers at festivals is feeding both UK national and international tourism. There is no doubt we are world leaders in this industry. However our success has not gone

unnoticed, our profitability is in danger of becoming a CASH COW and we are under attack by a variety of both commercial and, sadly, government agencies. These skirmishes (perhaps battles) are being fought by the very same volunteer and semi-professional organisers who have learnt to survive and grow without local and national grant funds in these tough economic times. They rarely achieve serious commercial sponsorship to aid their work.

The proposed imposition of business rates on green field sites used for festivals is causing great concern. See recent correspondence from the Valuation Office Agency.

PRS for Music is also trying to fill the gap left by a drop in CD sales by reviewing their percentage licence revenue on the live tariff which covers festivals, currently 3% or box office plus VAT. It is generally thought in the industry that PRS for Music are trying to raise this to 5% and surprisingly now wish to include none- ticket income. The industry was invited to consult on the matter and has raised a considerable force to try and convince PRS to retain 3% for festivals.

Another example of difficulty is the random misinterpretation of the 2003 Licensing Act by some local authorities. Perhaps these are some areas where APPG for Events can be informed and assist wherever possible.

In conclusion the festival and events industry in the main is in good shape and ever expanding providing full and part time jobs, contributing to local and national economies and certainly quality of life.

The AFO and EIF welcome the reinstatement of an APPG for Events and would like to thank James Heapey MP and colleagues for offering this vital support.

SH – AFO/EIF
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