

Solfest at Tarnside Farm

It's August and Solfest is back at Tarnside Farm, bigger and better than ever before!

Solfest is sold out. But what is Solfest and what has made it grown into such a success in only three short years? On behalf of the Solway Buzz we set off to find out.

Solfest originally sprang out of an idea from Abbeytown man Simon Kay and a group of friends, which they had while attending the Cambridge Folk Festival in summer 2003. "We felt that between us we had the skills and the enthusiasm to put on something really special in Cumbria. We go to many festivals every year ourselves right across the British Isles and knew that the people of Cumbria would love the opportunity to experience the festival atmosphere without having to travel hundreds of miles."

One of the key successes of Solfest has been the professionalism with which it has been run. Right from the start, a committee was formed and a constitution drawn up which ensured that members of the committee could never make any financial profit from Solfest. "This has been a blessing" said Simon. "Because none

of us are in it for the money, it means we can invest heavily in all the quirky little extras which make festivals so special, without ever feeling that we are losing out ourselves. At our first ever meeting in 2003 we decided that we would always run everything in as professional a manner as possible, without ever cutting corners. By doing this, we were able to lay sound foundations for what the festival may go on to become. After the first year we decided to become a 'not for profit' limited company in order to provide ourselves with a bit of security, but we have always stuck rigidly to our original principles"



Funded by a combination of ethical sponsorship, grant funding and ticket sales, Solfest has consistently managed to defy the odds by prospering in a climate, which sees most new businesses fail within the first two years. This is particularly true in the field of the Arts, where it is virtually unheard of for Arts events to be self-funding (something which Solfest expects to achieve within the next two years).

This year, the Solfest box office has had to post tickets to people in the USA, China,

Canada, and all over Europe and the UK. So, with so many festivals of different types to choose from, what is it that makes Solfest so special? According to Simon, it is a combination of taking good ideas from other events and also finding completely new solutions where needed. "A lot of events base their attendance numbers on the number of people who pass through in a weekend. In many cases the same person could be counted several times. At Solfest, we only sell full weekend tickets. This means that for one weekend in August, we will be building a canvas town with a population the size of Aspatria and Silloth combined! Because people stay on site, they invest heavily in the festival and become part of it. I've even known local people who only live a few hundred yards away from the site actually going home and getting their camping gear just so that they could be part of the experience!"

Another example of the levels of community involvement is this year's fancy dress party, which will see over 5,000 people dressed as Pirates and Faeries on Saturday night. "Having fancy dress at festivals is a great idea. It requires very little organisation and really lifts the

energy of the event. I'm surprised more events don't try it!"

Solfest really is an event that bases itself on two simple beliefs; firstly that it is people who make festivals, all the other stuff just helps them along. Secondly, attention to detail is everything. This is something which is apparent all over the Solfest site with quirky walkabout entertainers, musicians, artists, shops & stalls, cafes where you can sit down and have a cup of tea (or perhaps something a little stronger). Hundreds of children's activities and workshops, sculptures, flags, kites, a labyrinth and much, much more. And if you ever manage to find the time, there's always three Main stages and a Dance tent as well as countless smaller stages and venues dotted around the site where you can see a host of acts ranging from the well known crowd pleaser's right through to up and coming bands discovered from the thousands of CD's sent to the organisers and the hundreds of gigs which they attend each year on the look-out for new acts.

With over 200 separate live performances in a weekend, it's impossible to see everything, so we thought we'd take this opportunity to ask

Simon what his hot tips for Solfest 2006 were. So, exclusively for the Solway Buzz, his acts not to miss this year include:

- Croft No5, Mainstage, "A big hit at Solfest 2004, these lads from Skye have chosen Solfest to play their last ever English gig. If you miss them this time, it'll be too late!"
- Nula and The Retrobates, "The Bar Stage, this lot blew us away when we first saw them. Nula has one of the most powerful voices I have ever heard and the band create the ideal backdrop for her awesome talent."
- Mark Saul, Drystone Stage, "An Aussie piper who uses electronic wizardry to create amazingly dance-able tunes. He's never been seen before in the UK, but we are sure that he'll be all over the festival circuit in a couple of years time. See him at Solfest first!"
- Dreadzone, Dance Tent, Considered by many to be the ultimate festival band, Dreadzone have been entertaining festival audiences for many years but still provide a show which is guaranteed to delight. Not dancing is not an option!"

We will be visiting Solfest and you will be able to read a full review of the 2006 festival in the Solway Buzz.

Corrections

As most people know and understand, the Buzz is a community paper with most work done by volunteers and all work by amateurs, so we don't always get things right, but despite appearances we do try to be professional.

In the last issue two items deserve clarification.

Firstly: The small article about the Abbey fire implied that six people were involved in entering the Abbey and starting the fire. This appears to have been incorrect and some of those involved feel they have been unfairly represented by the article. The Police have explained that their understanding is that only two entered the Abbey, intending to steal, and that one of them then started the fire on his own. All six were initially arrested because they had all been drinking together prior to the fire.

Secondly: The article on the Battle of the Bands stated that the winners were THE FREEDOM, they were actually the runners-up. the winners were AWOL who will support THE DRIFTERS (we got that part right).

We apologise to all our readers and everyone else offended by our mistakes on this and other occasions.

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