

Despite the cancellation of key festival events, including Phoenix, the summer has been good for the live industry since well thought-out bookings meant that those events that did go ahead pulled in a lot of revenue. By Nick Tesco

That a relative newcomer to the festival scene such as V98 managed to gross more than Glastonbury, traditionally the favourite event of the masses, should be a reliable indicator that the festival sector is still in rude health.

Admittedly, the cancellation of the Phoenix Festival and a handful of other early summer events due to poor ticket sales sent a tremor through the live industry. But the fact that the season ended up supporting five hugely successful – and sold out – main events, which together grossed more than £20m in ticket sales, effectively quelled fears that the market had become saturated.

DF Concerts managing director Geoff Ellis, who co-promotes V98 with SJM and T In The Park with MCD, believes the market remains buoyant and regarded the cancellation of the Phoenix Festival as an aberration.

“Just because one event falls away, or individual acts fail to pull, it doesn’t herald the end of the business,” he says.

The events of the summer also reinforced the message that for promoters and agents alike, the key to a successful festival is getting the right acts.

“Strong, varied bills are the most important element of a festival,” says Steve Strange, booker at Helter Skelter, the agency which booked out acts such as Robbie Williams, Pulp and Faithless, who were among the main stage attractions at Glastonbury, Reading, V98, T In The Park and Womad. “It can be difficult putting the right bills together because of the number of festivals,” he adds.

Five booking agencies dominated the bills at this summer’s five biggest festivals. ITB placed the most, with a total score of 29 acts, including 14 at Reading. Helter Skelter were close behind with 21, while The Agency, Free Trade and Asgrad came third, fourth and fifth with 13, eight and three acts respectively.

Glastonbury is still promoted by Michael

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Eavis, and the Womad Festival by the Womad Organisation. But many agents believe that the increase in festivals which are staged by regular promoters rather than individual entrepreneurs has led to better organised and, consequently, more profitable events. The Mean Fiddler Organisation, which runs leading London venues such as The Forum, The Garage and the Jazz Café, has been promoting the Reading Festival since 1989, while V98, which is now in its second successful year, is jointly organised by Metropolis, SJM, DF Concerts and MCD, all of which are regular promoters of club and concert shows and tours all over the UK and Ireland. Similarly T In The Park, with its 140 acts over two days, is promoted by DF Concerts and MCD for Big Day Out.

“Consequently, the current generation of agents has a much better relationship with festival promoters,” says Steve Parker, managing director of Miracle Artists.

The new sense of understanding benefits both parties, as SJM’s Rob Ballantine, who co-organises and co-promotes V98, explains. “Since we are talking to agents every day of the year about our shows, we can work their acts into festivals more easily,” he says.

For other companies offering specialist

SPECIALIST ORGANISATION MAKES FOR GOOD FESTIVALS



Robbie Williams: a big draw at V98 (pictured), Glastonbury and T In The Park

touring services, the summer festivals are a significant source of revenue. As Dave Ridgeway, managing director of NegEarth, which lit the main stages at V98 and Glastonbury, points out, they have become more important as the number of summer tours have decreased.

“Five years ago there would be a summer lull but thanks to the festivals it can now be a busy time for us,” he says.

With headlining bands earning anything up to £400,000, and the average music budget set in the region of 33% of the takings on the gate, festivals clearly provide important revenues for the music industry as a whole. In order to maintain these revenues, promoters and agents must remain attuned to their audience’s demands.

Promoters such as DF Concerts survey their audiences throughout the year to ensure they

can deliver at festival time. “We are constantly evolving and listening to feedback,” says DF’s Ellis. “We have a website where people can give us their criticisms of T In The Park. The minute you take your audience for granted you can say goodbye to your festival.”

But the general consensus in the live industry is that as long as new talent continues to come through there will be a continuing demand for festivals.

WOMAD

July 24-26. Rivermead, Reading, Berks. Promoter: Womad. Stages: six. Total acts: 70. Main stage sound/lighting: Ampco Pro Rent/Prism Lighting. Attendance: 34,350. Ticket prices: £53 w/e, £17 Fri; £27.50 Sat/Sun.

Main stage act (Agency):

Friday: Te Vaka (Julie Foa’i); Istanbul Oriental Ensemble (Music Contact, Germany); Nenes (Antinos Records, Japan); Eleftheria Arvanitaki (Breathless, Greece); Chumbawamba (Helter Skelter).

Saturday: Oliver Mutukudzi (Arts Worldwide); Carlo Nuñez (Sold Out, Spain); Sekouba Bambino (African Music Agency, Holland); Margareth Menezes (Bacana, Germany); Cornershop (The Agency); Ladysmith Black Mambazo (Brad Simon Organisation, US).

Sunday: Justin Vali & Kepa Junkera (Sir Ali, France); Celtus (Helter Skelter); Musafir Gypsies Of Rajasthan (Sasa Music); Kadda Cherif Hadria (bp33, France); Faithless (Helter Skelter).

READING

August 28-30. Richfield Avenue, Reading. Promoter: Mean Fiddler. Stages: four. Total acts: 134. Main stage sound/lighting: SSE/NegEarth. Attendance: 55,000 per day. Ticket price: £75 w/e; £30 pd.

Main stage act (Agency):

Friday: Page & Plant (ITB); Ash (Helter Skelter); Mansun (ITB); Deftones (ITB); The Afghan Whigs (ITB); Symposium (Helter Skelter); Rocket From The Crypt (CNL); Monster Magnet (ITB); Headswim (ITB).

Saturday: Beastie Boys (Free Trade); Prodigy (Concorde); Supergrass (ITB); Foo Fighters (The Agency); Echo & The Bunnymen (The Agency); Lee Scratch Perry (Free Trade); Rancid (ITB); Asian Dub Foundation (Value Added Talent); Money Mark (ITB); Jurassic 5 (ITB); Bis (The Agency).

Sunday: Garbage (Free Trade); New Order (Martin Elborne); The Bluetones (ITB); Shed Seven (ITB); The Divine Comedy (ITB); Gene (The Agency); Monaco (ITB); Audioweb (Free Trade); Drugstore (The Agency); Girls vs Boys (CNL).

T IN THE PARK

July 11-12. Balado, near Klnross, Scotland. Promoter: DF Concerts & MCD for Big Day Out. Stages: seven. Total acts: 140. Main stage sound/lighting: SSE/VLPS (Vari+Lite Europe). Attendance: 45,000 per day. Ticket price: £54 w/e; £29.50 pd.

Main stage act (Agency):

Saturday: Prodigy (Concorde); The Seahorses (ABS); Robbie Williams (Helter Skelter); Space (The Agency); Catatonia (The Agency); Travis (Helter Skelter); James Taylor Quartet (ITB); Headswim (ITB); Martyn Bennet (Active).

Sunday: Pulp (Helter Skelter); Beastie Boys (Free Trade); Garbage (Free Trade); Finley Quay (Free Trade); The Supernaturals (Helter Skelter); Stereophonics (ITB); Feeder (AAA); The Smiles (Helter Skelter).

GLASTONBURY

June 26-28. Worthy Farm, Pilton, Shepton Mallet, Somerset. Promoter: Michael Eavis. Stages: seven. Total acts: 229. Main stage sound/lighting: Britannia Row/NegEarth. Attendance: 70,000. Ticket price: £80

Main stage act (Agency):

Friday: Primal Scream (EC1); James (ITB); Foo Fighters (The Agency); Lightning Seeds (The Agency); Finlay Quaye (Free Trade); Ben Harper (Rosebud); Gomez (Helter Skelter); My Life Story (Helter Skelter).

Saturday: Blur (Helter Skelter); Tricky (Primary); Robbie Williams (Helter Skelter); Mansun (ITB); Stereophonics (ITB); Tori Amos (ITB); Hothouse Flowers (Asgard); Nick Lowe (Asgard); Melissa Etheridge (Helter Skelter).

Sunday: Pulp (Helter Skelter); Nick Cave (Helter Skelter); Bob Dylan (ITB); Sonic Youth (Mojo); Tony Bennett (William Morris); Space (The Agency); Steve Earl (Asgard); Medieval Baebes (MPI).

V98

August 22-23. Chelmsford, Essex and Temple Newsam, Leeds. Promoters: Metropolis, SJM; DF Concerts, MCD. Stages: three. Total acts: 50. Main stage sound/lighting: SSE/NegEarth. Attendance: 55,000 per day. Ticket price: £55 w/e; £30 pd.

Main stage act (Agency):

Saturday: The Verve (ITB); The Seahorses (ABS); Green Day (ITB); Lightning Seeds (The Agency); Iggy Pop (Solo); Chumbawamba (Helter Skelter); Marion (ITB); Whale (ITB); Young Offenders (Helter Skelter).

Sunday: The Charlatans (ITB); Texas (Helter Skelter); Robbie Williams (Helter Skelter); Space (The Agency); James (ITB); Stereophonics (ITB); Feeder (GAA); Rialto (Primary); Headswim (ITB).

Source: Music Week research