

Book Case

This feature is normally about favourite books but instead the editor has allowed me to pick my favourite music festivals, acts and tracks. This has proved to be quite difficult as its like asking one to pick one's favourite child! So I have gone for the most memorable festivals, acts and tracks that I have come across this year. Dr Tony Tham

GLASTONBURY FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY PERFORMING ARTS, Worthy Farm, Pilton, Somerset. Held every June except for a fallow year every 6 years. <http://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/>

The full name of this festival is a mouthful but everyone knows it as Glastonbury which is the most famous and iconic music festival in the world. People will have their own impression of what Glastonbury is like based on what they have read and seen on TV. It is all that and much more. I have been to four Glastonbury's so far and love it so much that I will keep going as long as possible. The music is what everyone associates Glastonbury with and quite right too. The top acts will aspire to play at this festival because of its heritage and iconic nature. I have had the privilege of seeing acts like the Rolling Stones, U2, Coldplay and the Killers (more about this later), amongst others perform their headline sets on the main Pyramid Stage. There is

also the pleasure of discovering new acts like Dua Lipa who played to relatively small crowds years ago and now has a huge following.

The festival is more than just about the music. Its spirit encompasses themes such as being at one with nature, sustainability, the environment and feeling like belonging to one big community. Water Aid and Greenpeace are regulars and have a large presence. This is a very friendly festival and everyone is chilled and out for a good time. Once, my wellies got stuck in the mud and before I could blink, several obliging festival goers came to pull me out.

Like the music, there is an eclectic range of food from all round the world. I have managed to spend the whole weekend eating nothing but eastern cuisine.

You can also indulge your inner clubbing instinct by dancing all night to the many DJs around the site. One area is called Block 9 and is built like a movie set of a post-apocalyptic world, albeit with party goers having a good time.

If you feel like reliving your youth or if you are youthful and just want to live and have fun, then this is the festival for you. Camping is a great way of being one with nature. The toilet facilities are infamous but have improved considerably and are now acceptable. If it rains and becomes muddy, then you have to be pretty resilient but just imagine all the stories about the mud you can regale

your friends with. If it is sunny and dry, then you have struck the jackpot and Glastonbury is what I imagine utopia would be like.

BELFAST VITAL FESTIVAL. In the past few years, have been held in August at the Boucher Playing Fields in Belfast. <https://www.facebook.com/BelfastVital/>

This is normally a two day city music festival. The focus is entirely on music with a reasonably good selection of local food vendors and hostelry. This being a city festival, there is no camping. The acts that have played over the past several years are arena filling artists such as Foo Fighters, Kings of Leon, Calvin Harris, Muse, The Killers (more about them later) and Snow Patrol. They are ably supported by other A list acts such as Clean Bandit and Duke Dumont (more later). The crowds and the atmosphere at this festival depend on the headline act. A DJ set such as Tiesto last year will attract a younger crowd while a (slightly) older crowd will go to see the Undertones or Snow Patrol. The crowd is friendly and chilled and there is good security without being too oppressive. You are likely to bump into someone you know, typical Northern Ireland, which adds to the fun. There is a chance of being able to blag your way into the mosh pit (an area in the front of the stage where the dancing is energetic) which surprisingly has a lot of space and you can get close and intimate with your favourite act. The advantage of a city festival is that the transport infrastructure is good and the likelihood is that after a day and night of fun, you will be able to go back to the comfort of your own bed and a hot shower.

THE KILLERS, <http://www.thekillersmusic.com/>

The Killers are one of the biggest rock bands in the world and have headlined many major festivals including Glastonbury and Electric Picnic in Ireland and have played sold out arena shows like Wembley. They stormed into our consciousness with their mega selling debut album, Hot Fuss. The stand out single from the album, Mr Brightside, is so infectious, I defy anyone not to break into dance and punch the



Fig 1. Glamping in Glastonbury; a pop up hotel room in a field in Glastonbury 2017

air whenever it comes on. Their genre is indie rock, alternative rock and synth pop. The band come from Las Vegas, Nevada and are the most successful rock band to come from Nevada, having sold 22 million records worldwide.

Their live shows are outstanding and the lead singer, Brandon Flowers, is a very charismatic frontman. Other members of the band are David Keunig, Mark Stoermer and Ronnie Vannucci. Their songs tell tales of androgynous girlfriends, illicit affairs and Las Vegas. One of their songs *Human* is famous for the obtuse lyric “are you human, or are you dancer”. Another favourite goes like this “I’ve got soul but I’m not a soldier”. Their influences range from Bruce Springsteen to Dire Straits. They played a version of the latter’s *Romeo and Juliet* and have included it in some of their live shows. Their latest concert in the SSE Arena in Belfast in November 2017 was one of the best I have ever been to, especially when they played the populist local anthem, *Teenage Kicks*. I have been to six of their concerts since they formed in 2001 and want to go to more.

WOLF ALICE, <http://wolfalice.co.uk/>

Spotify sum up this band very well as an “evocative North London alt-rock outfit led by vocalist Ellie Rowsell. Wolf Alice deftly mixes folk, rock, grunge, and electronic elements with vintage 90’s indie rock”. The other members of the band are Joff Oddie, Theo Ellis and Joel Amey. The band is in their 20s. They formed in 2010 and their first single “*Fluffy*” was released in 2013. Their song “*Silk*” was in the soundtrack of the film *T2: Trainspotting*.

Their live shows are characterized by great energy and rawness. Their frontwoman Ellie is the very definition of a rock chick with a mix of aggression and vulnerability. They have played Glastonbury on several occasions and Electric Picnic. Their audience range from late teens to more mature adults. I think they will become even more famous and it will be wonderful seeing them play in small venues and hopefully



Fig 2. Bumping into celebrities in Glastonbury 2017; with the band Haim

progressing to arenas in the future. If you like grunge, indie rock, electronic and want to see a band at the start of their career, this is one you may want to follow.

I GOT U BY DUKE DUMONT, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHCYHldJi_g

This track reached number one in the UK in 2014. The most memorable association of this track is its music video and with summer. The video was filmed in Thailand which is one of my favourite holiday destinations. *GQ* magazine praised the video saying that it had “all the tropical trimmings: turquoise waters, infinity pools, freshly sliced watermelon, a beachside rave, bungee jumps, inquisitive monkeys” and noted that its only drawback is that it caused cravings for coconut drinks, an extended holiday and a game of beach volleyball. Jamieson Cox of *Pitchfork* magazine called the song, “a blast of sunlight and warm, humid air, flecks of steel drum, vocal samples, and a joyous, radiant vocal take.” This track was nominated for Best Dance Recording at the 2015 Grammys.

Duke Dumont is an English DJ and record producer. He is known for his other number one record “*Won’t Look Back*”. He has performed at the Electric Picnic festival in Ireland where the tent he was performing in was so packed that many revelers (including me) couldn’t

get in. I managed to see him however at Belfast Vital in 2016, so that ambition was achieved!

If you want to imagine yourself being in a tropical paradise, then listen to this track and watch the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHCYHldJi_g. Enjoy!

SYMPHONY, BY CLEAN BANDIT (featuring Zara Larsson), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aatr_2MstrI

Symphony is a classical pop song featuring strings and electronica. The song is also accompanied by a memorable video. It features the band, Clean Bandit, and Zara Larsson performing this song with an orchestra, while an emotional story plays out. It shows a loving couple doing every day activities. One of them is killed in an accident. The surviving man is seen grieving and visiting places they went as a couple together. He then writes music again and we discover that he is the composer in the orchestra that Clean Bandit are playing with, and has composed a symphony in memory of his partner. The video ends with him looking into the crowd and sees his deceased partner looking proudly from the audience.

Clean Bandit is an electronic and classical music group from Cambridge. Their music combines dance music with strings. They have collaborated with other famous artists such as Jess Glynne on the track “*Rather Be*” which has been a hit in the charts and has had a lot of air play including as a sound track for commercials. Their songs have characteristically infectious hooks and they are an awesome live act. I have seen them at various festivals including Electric Picnic and Belfast Vital.

And so I end this piece with an emotional track that shows that out of devastating loss something good can arise.

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