



Wide Days 2022

It's been over three years since **Wide Days** last took place in-person and last week the event returned with vigour, adding a half day to the conference schedule, introducing a range of new strands and integrating one-to-one meetings into the programme. A partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council also provided a new daytime venue - the stunning Assembly Rooms dating back to the 18th century.

Having been a co-founder of Wide Days from its inception in 2010 until 2013, and a regular attendee in most of the years since, it is impressive how it retains the vision of Olaf Furniss and continues to evolve. Along with Michael Lambert (who came on board as a student in 2010 and has been a partner in parent company Wide Events since 2013) the conference component continues to lead the way when it comes to fresh approaches and pushing new themes.

In 2017, Wide Days was the first UK convention to programme a gender balanced speaker line-up, and this year organisers have partnered with Attitude Is Everything (AIE) to highlight case studies and initiatives to make the industry more accommodating for disabled music professionals and audiences. The charity's representatives, Rich Legate and Paul Hawkins, do a great job of explaining how everyone can make a difference, while a presentation from Louise Hutchison (DF Concerts) and Michael McCulloch (The Garage), highlighted what is being done at a local level.

The AIE strand builds on a session hosted at the second online Wide Days in August 2021, with many elements at this year's convention resulting from the insights, experience and connections developed during the pandemic. These include the partnership with Canada's BreakOut West Festival, the roundtable sessions (exploring collaborations with the tourism and gaming sectors) and the Local Heroes strand, which shines a spotlight on Scottish professionals championing new talent.

Also arising from the team's experience of hosting 14 online events in two years, was the ability to book 15-minute meetings via a user-friendly app, the charity partnership with the British Association of Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM) and the live streaming of a Mexico market presentation. The latter was delivered by Malfi Dorantes, who worked with the organisers on a digital event last month, connecting 60 Mexican, Scottish and Welsh professionals.

Moreover, although the 15 Minutes Of Knowledge sessions date back to 2019, their popularity during lockdown ensured that they ran throughout the conference. Topics included music photography, the remix, radio plugging, international copyright and environmentally friendly NFTs, as well as presentations from sync service DISCO, the MMF and CMU.

Furniss' approach to conference programming is partly inspired by the early days of In The City with Tony Wilson, and it is in evidence again this year. Forgoing a professional interviewer for this Local Heroes slot with the founders of Edinburgh's colossal Terminal V event, he enlists two regular attendees of the electronic music festival. Barely out of their teens, they did a fantastic job and underline his continuing commitment to provide a bridge between industry veterans and the next generation.

Also taking a different tack to other events covering the topic, the Not Another F*cking NFT panel excels in cutting through the hype to deliver practical insights relevant to the audience. Moderator Charlene Hegarty (Zero Myth) and panellists Marlen Hüllbrock (Music Ally), Mike Walsh (Serenade), Jenn Morgan (Cirkay) and Chris Cooke (CMU) complement each other perfectly to deliver one of the conference highlights.

Later that day, the feat is repeated when the BBC Radio 1's Gemma Bradley chairs the session on co-writing with lawyer Jeffrey Izzo and showcasing artist Alex Amor, whose excellent performance the night before, is matched by her confidence as a speaker. The line-up is completed by musician, producer, actor and film-maker, Lee John, whose subsequent in-conversation with Furniss reveals a multi-faceted artist whose hits as the frontman of Imagination, are only part of an incredible story, another conference highlight.

On the live side of the convention, the offering has followed the template established in 2019 with the opening reception hosted with a partner, the seven acts selected for the talent development programme showcased on the Friday and the final night featuring the artists booked for the Festival Takeover.

This year it is the Music Venue Trust, (launched at Wide Days in 2014), which gets the music going with a fund-raiser for the recently-launched Revive Live initiative. In addition to Lizzie Reid and Americana act The Jellyman's Daughter, both performing with a full band, it is an opportunity for audiences to see Kapil Seshasayee with his preferred line-up, comprising two drummers and a flautist. Alex Amor, who draws comparisons with the dreamy pop of St Etienne, definitely impresses too, but we would love to hear with other musicians on stage.

Both her and Seshasayee, are alumni of the Wide Days international talent development, which is supported by PRS Foundation. The days are long-gone when the main criteria was that at least one team member had to love the act, and the seven acts taking part this year have been assessed by a panel of 34 selectors, grading each on their music as well as career readiness.

Presented on the Friday night they include acts Savage Mansion, Katherine Aly and BEMZ, who established a profile pre-pandemic, along with artists who have emerged over the past two years. The biggest draw at the first venue is young troubadour Calum Bowie, while the atmospheric pop of Cyrano also impresses.



A short walk away, the quirky indie pop of Swiss Portrait, led to offers from several showcase festivals attending Wide Days while respective performances by Chef and BBC Introducing winner BEMZ, demonstrates the variety of Scotland's rap scene.

The final night (like the Thursday evening), is programmed in consultation with Wide Days and the Festival Takeover partners and ensures that the acts are of high quality. Focus Wales presents Bethan Lloyd (imagine The Knife singing in Welsh) and the energetic punk rap of Minas, both proving worthy bookings.

The Canadians begin with the folk-tinged Dana Sipos, followed by The Bobby Tenderloin Universe, who have been wowing locals with their country sounds at impromptu sets at the legendary Royal Oak pub. Closing the night is Khanvict, whose crowd-pleasing, Indian infused electronica will hopefully lead to a return to these shores soon.

Arguably no other music industry event adapted to the pandemic as well as Furniss, Lambert and their young team. Three years since their last physical event, they have proven once again, that Wide Days is an unmissable convention, roll on 2023.

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Photo: Jannica Honey