

PRESIDENT'S LETTER



BRING THE HAPPY

I just returned from an IFEA Europe Board meeting in Brighton, England. Brighton is a beautiful seaside resort town located on the south coast of England, just a short 18 miles across the English Channel from France (a few meters closer if you journey out onto the Palace Pier, filled with carnival rides, restaurants and arcades). It is a picturesque area that takes your imagination back through multiple periods of history without ever having been there.

While we were there, we met with Andrew Comben, Chief Executive for the Brighton Festival and Brighton Dome, who was in the middle of his event. Each May the city hosts the Brighton Festival, which stakes claim to being England's largest annual festival and the second largest arts festival in the UK (after Edinburgh). The Festival draws some 500,000 people to a plethora of events that include processions such as the Children's Parade, outdoor spectaculars (often involving pyrotechnics), and theatre, music and visual arts in venues throughout the city, some brought into this use exclusively for the Festival. Simultaneously, the Brighton Fringe festival runs alongside the Brighton Festival, and has grown to be the second largest fringe festival in the world. Needless to say, the city of Brighton was a busy place during our visit.

But with all the things going on, I was most drawn to a project from the 2014 Brighton Festival called 'Bring the Happy,'

by a group called 'Invisible Flock'. Even without experiencing it first-hand, it is an idea that has lingered with me since I learned about it.

For ten days, a city-center gallery was transformed into a giant 3D map of Brighton on which people were invited to stop by and plot their own happy memories. A first kiss, a longed-for baby, a chance encounter: where it happened and how happy it made them feel (on a scale of 1 to 10)? As the people of Brighton marked their own moments of happiness throughout their city, everyone was invited to explore what has made other people happy – and where.

Similar to the 'Story Corps' Project by National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States, as people marked/plotted their memories, they were also asked to record and share their memories and the feelings that they had held onto from those special moments throughout their lives. From those memories, with the help of an outstanding six-piece band called Hope & Social, the happy memories collected from Brighton and other cities throughout the country were used to create a live show called 'Bring the Happy Live' (performed at the 2014 Brighton Festival), where they were shared (as they describe) "in all their beautiful, tragic, ridiculous and occasionally mundane glory, pitched somewhere between a wedding and a wake, and designed especially to celebrate

happiness and where we find it." It was a life-affirming project that attempted to create a portrait of people's lives, taking happy memories from local residents and then weaving them into a spectacular live, musical event that celebrated the happiness of Brighton. Based upon comments from those who were fortunate enough to experience it first-hand, the results were both powerful and moving.

As I continued to think about this concept (one that could be replicated in any city) of helping people to map their happiness, I wondered to myself, if we could accomplish a similar project from a worldwide perspective, how many life-long memories would be plotted on the global map as the result of a festival or event? Memories of family and friends; of communities at their best; of irreplaceable moments that – were it not for a festival or event – may never have existed at all. And that made me reflect on the continuing and critical role that our industry plays in the world around us; creating results that we cannot possibly plan, except to provide the venues, the canvases, the gathering spots, the opportunities that make anything possible and everything memorable. With that in mind, I hope that we will all strive to provide the highest quality, most creative and inspirational settings that we can through our events; for you never know when and where those happy memories will be etched in someone's mind for a lifetime.

I hope that all of you are planning to join us in Tucson, Arizona for the IFEA's 60th Anniversary Convention & Expo (September 21st-23rd), the largest gathering of industry professionals who have perfected the art of 'Bringing the Happy' to cities and communities around the world! Until then, have a wonderful and happy summer!