

Glastonbury - A Day in the Mud

Anna from “Deafinite” recounts her experiences of working at this year’s Festival.

Some of you may know that I had the pleasure of joining the amazing DeafZone team interpreting at Glastonbury festival this year! It was an incredible experience and completely unique.

I have always enjoyed interpreting music for a Deaf audience but it sure wasn’t easy! Especially when you haven’t had much sleep (although self-inflicted) and you’re covered in mud.

A week before the festival started, we were given the names of the bands and the times... that was all! I was booked to interpret for nine bands and I was only given the set-list for one group! That meant that I spent a great deal of time searching the internet for the bands best known songs and recent play lists to try and guess which songs they might play. These were then printed off and taken with us in a laminated folder for the day. We looked through all the lyrics and practiced signing them until they made sense and looked pleasing in BSL. We then listened to all of the songs on repeat for as long as we could until we could remember the tune and pace of the songs so we can keep up. It’s important for the Deaf audience not only to get a sense of the lyrics and meanings of the words but also what the music sounds like as that is all part of the enjoyment.

At Glasto, we work in teams of two people and we share out the songs between us. Each person does about three songs in a row, however, we don’t know whose song will come up first so learning the introduction is important!

Both major stages have interpreters at all their performances, as these are the most popular. Deaf people can also register an interest in other performances around Glasto to ensure interpreters are available. The two main stages have disability viewing platforms for disabled and Deaf people to stand on and watch the performances without the hindrance of other festival-goers These are raised

platforms about 50 yards from the main stages and offer a great view of the action as well as space to sit down and watch the interpreters at work.

This is great fun. We can directly relate to our audience as we can see them and tell whether they are engaged and understanding what is being interpreted. Their passion and enthusiasm fuels us into being lively and motivated even if we've had just two hours sleep! Adrenaline is a big player in this game to keep you going as this is tiring work! Interpreting music needs a lot of energy! Luckily, we were well looked after with food parcels and snacks to keep us going.

It is also incredibly petrifying!! There are about 180,000 people at Glasto every year. That means you will be on a platform/stage with thousands of people watching your every move and sign. Not only Deaf people but also hearing people who are fascinated by what you do (and lots of them take photos and videos of you doing it). For the first five minutes or so, it was safe to say that I was a bunch of nerves but after a while, enjoying the music you get into it and don't really notice the crowds any more. One of my favourite moments was a hearing lady who came and gave me a big hug after one particular song with tears in her eyes and thanked me for making such a beautiful sounding song, so visually beautiful too.

The biggest issue was that there were times when we couldn't actually hear the words/lyrics of the bands! Although they had microphones and the noise was loud, it was incredibly difficult to pick out the words. If we knew the songs well, we were alright and could keep going. If we didn't know the songs well but had the lyrics printed out, then we could follow the music by speed reading from the book....very useful! This saved me many times. However, the biggest problem was when they played a song we hadn't heard before or hadn't prepped for and still couldn't hear the words. In situations like this there are two options: a) We could tell the Deaf people in the audience that we couldn't hear and just give them a flavour of what the music sounded like, or b) we could make it up...and that's what we did!!! Deaf people didn't pay for their tickets to get 'Sorry, I can't hear it' signed at them so we used our creative minds to fill in the gaps of the meaning to words we couldn't hear.

However, interpreting isn't all that DeafZone do at Glastonbury! Oh no! In one of the market places there is a large yellow tent that is manned predominantly by Deaf

volunteers who take regular classes in basic BSL for people who want to learn and also just want to come for some information about BSL and the Deaf world. These guys do a fantastic job in raising the profile of our language and culture, especially at festivals! Its things like this that will encourage more people to learn BSL and make our lives more inclusive. Well done!

The whole experience for me is one that I will never forget. I got the opportunity to work with some amazingly talented performance interpreters and met some lovely new friends in the Deaf community too. I arrived home tired, but brimming with excitement.

The organisation from DeafZone for the interpretation, tent and all the other little details that goes into planning such a feat was incredible and takes about a year to do! So thank you and well done especially to Paddy Ladd and Pascale Marone who made this happen! If you ask me if I'd ever do something like this again, I'd say 'Sign me up'!