

Hastings Storytelling Festival 9th - 20th November 2011

The first ever Storytelling Festival opened at Hastings Arts Forum. Ben Fairlight gave a first rate performance to a grown up audience. This years theme of 'The Sea of Life' gave all performers scope to adapt their own stories and give a Hastings flavour.

There were 2 strands of events spread right across the whole of the town. Strand 1 took place in childrens centres and at the Bridge. The audiences were mainly under 4 years old with their parents. There were also 2 sessions for the After school club at the Bridge which included a puppet making workshop. The best responses came when the storytellers used puppets and shared short rhymes and songs. Many parents said that they had enjoyed themselves as much as their children.

Strand 2 events were open to the public and attendances varied considerably. Morning starts gave very low numbers. Highest numbers were at the Childrens Library [60] and University of Brighton at Hastings with 54.

Performers often used a rolling set of stories. This style particularly suited the Fishermens Museum and Stade Hall.

Margaret Sheehy recruited 4 potential storytellers for a workshop day. During the day they developed their own story ideas with guidance by an author and storyteller. At the end of the day each performed their own story in 1 of 4 bases around Rock a Nore Road. The audience were divided into 4 groups of about 12 people who then moved to each storytelling base to hear the stories told. There was very positive feedback from performers and audience alike.

The 3 course classic Italian meal featured stories between courses. The stories subjects included Italian fishermen, Sorrento and all ports to Venice.

30 customers paid £20 each for the event but all other events were free.

Altogether there were 30 events and lots of lessons have been learnt. We were lucky to secure Arts Council funding with other smaller contributions.

Looking to 2012 there will be some events at the White Rock Theatre in February. Students on the English and Media courses at the University of Brighton will look at writing, performance and event organisation. Established celebrations like Jack in the Green may include a story event. The performers gave a lot of pleasure to a lot of people and deserve warm thanks. One of the best comments feedback was ' The first time I have sat and listened to a story since I left school over 20 years ago. I had forgotten how much I enjoyed the experience,'