

GLASTONBURY

KING OF MUSIC FESTIVALS

Glastonbury takes you to another dimension. You might need a holiday once you return to earth, but the king of festivals is well worth it!

WORDS: DAN HOBSON PHOTOS: BBC



When it comes to music festivals, nothing comes close to Glastonbury. Showcasing every genre of music under the sun, the sheer scale of the event beggars belief. The elaborate stages, array of unique areas, whirlwind of colours, smells, flavours, fancy dress, flags, and sounds takes you to a new dimension entirely.

Whether it's group-chanting around the stone circle campfire at sunrise – rather liberating, I must admit – battling crowds at the Pyramid stage, raving in Shangri La, getting massaged in the healing area, whittling wood at

the Greencrafts Village, watching performers at the circus, soothing ones ears at the Acoustic stage, or simply admiring the view from the Glastonbury sign, it truly is the king of festivals.

So for the king of festivals to choose one man and his Martin custom as the main headliner is a massive thumbs-up to the genre we cover in this magazine. Whatever your thoughts are on **Ed Sheeran** – the singer-songwriter is a polarising figure, after all – he put acoustic music on the biggest stage of the summer. And for that, I think we owe him one.

Many people did not consider Sheeran a worthy headliner for the event. Some felt his

songs were not upbeat enough for the slot, others felt he was not an established enough act for the billing. Of my group – who had been wowed by an unknown Sheeran at small Sheffield pub, the Nottingham House, seven years prior – many felt he had lost touch with his roots and begrudged seeing the alternative artist in his 'pop star' guise.

Following an understated entrance onto the Pyramid stage – just him and his acoustic – he kicked-off with 'Castle on the Hill' before admitting he was "very nervous, but excited". Despite some controversy over the use of a loop pedal – many in attendance seemed



unfamiliar with the concept [see news] – Sheeran delivered a set well worthy of the billing. With notable hits ‘A Team’ and ‘Shape of You’ – he even mixed Stevie Wonder’s ‘Superstitious’ with Bill Withers’s ‘Ain’t No Sunshine’ at one point – Sheeran finished the set with an extended version of ‘You Need Me, I Don’t Need You’. Some further criticised Sheeran for delivering a ‘basic’ show and finishing half-an-hour early. But the lad did good and the majority of the audience came away rather thrilled.

Earlier on the Sunday, **Lucy Rose** [interview p14] performed a mesmerising and beautiful set on the Avalon stage. Perhaps it was the fatigue kicking-in by that stage of the game, perhaps the plentiful rum and ginger ale, perhaps just Rose’s self-effacing gratitude to be there, either way the sunglasses remained on for the entire set to hide my increasingly watery eyes. She was brilliant. And with family, friends, loyal and supportive fans in tow, Lucy herself seemed euphoric and emotional as the set drew to an end. Sublime, seductive, honest and delightful in every way: Rose is one artist that deserves all the recognition she gets.

Our cover star **George Ezra** [p40] was on top form as he smashed a set at the Other stage on Friday. Ezra’s fourth appearance at the festival – having performed on the BBC Introducing stage, John Peel and the Pyramid before – was packed with energy and passion.

The hour set contained many of the hits that have earned him the reputation as one of the biggest singer-songwriters of the times. However, Ezra took the opportunity to air many songs off the new album too, all of which were extremely well-received by the humungous crowd before him. It was, of course, the hit ‘Budapest’ which gave fans the most satisfaction, though – turning the whole field into one enormous sing-along.

Swedish folk-duo **First Aid Kit** wowed crowds on the Pyramid stage on Friday. I had fallen ever-so-slightly in love with the sisters when single ‘My Silver Lining’ was released a few years ago. And they did not fail to impress with a charged and emotional performance.

Justin Townes Earle [interview p18] was also on fantastic form for a performance on the Acoustic stage on Sunday. Choosing a full set of upbeat numbers seemed a good call for the show too, earning a glowing reception from those in attendance.

On the Saturday, **Corinne Bailey Rae** delivered a fine performance on the Acoustic stage. The Leeds singer-songwriter – looking as beautiful as she sounded – had this to say after the festival: “I had an amazing time, I always do. Such an invigorating time being part of that temporary city. I spent most of my time in the green fields next to a campfire. I wish I could be there all summer. Thanks to everyone who came to see us at the Acoustic stage, such a great atmosphere.” Earlier that day, also on the Acoustic stage, **KT Tunstall** delivered a

flawless performance. Of the show, she said: “Glastonbury is my favourite long weekend of the year. Not only because I get lost in the madness myself, but to see British people fully wild and free and full of love for nature and each other is a beautiful thing.”

And the people certainly were wild for her – a remarkable set.

Other stand-out sets included **Martha Wainwright, Lucy Carter, Lucy Spraggan, The Magic Numbers, and Sound of the Sirens** [featured last month].

It really is a shame I couldn’t be 200 people at once for Glastonbury. With so many amazing artists, it really does make life difficult choosing who to see. Similarly with the walking – four days of non-stop hiking and dancing does take its toll on one person alone.

While Glastonbury is definitely the kind of ‘holiday’ you need a holiday after, it is an experience like no other and truly is the king of music festivals.

See you there in 2019 – or maybe next year, if the rumours are true [see news]! ■

