The Story So Far…

**Congleton Live CIC**, the community interest company that organises Congleton’s “Unplugged” and “Jazz & Blues” music festivals, has begun promoting the upcoming “Congleton Jazz & Blues”, another weekend of free-entry music gigs in town centre establishments on 27th and 28th August 2022.

Congleton Live CIC is currently enjoying support from Congleton Town Council as well as a collection of local businesses that includes AD Profile Design Works, Beartown Brewery, Eze Talk Limited, Franklyn Financial Management, Hammond McNulty, SAS Daniels and Stephenson Browne.

**This Year**

The Unplugged Event in March 2022 was perceived as extremely successful in musical, enjoyment and economic terms. The team delivered 69 gigs across 17 venues throughout an extended festival period. Unplugged marked a positive turnaround in the wake of the pandemic while also initiating Congleton’s 750th birthday celebrations. One highlight was a sell-out ticketed gig at Congleton Town Hall where **John Dhali**, a local recording star, launched his Vinyl Album “On Time” to great acclaim. The great and good of Congleton were in enraptured attendance. Many were observed dancing in the aisles while a raffle raised £00’s for Ukraine charities. One venue manager described the festival as an “*Absolutely, great event and brings people to town who wouldn't normally come. Good advert for the pubs too*” while another suggested footfall showed an “*increase in the region of 100-150% for us*”

The forthcoming CJ&B promises to be better than ever with approximately 70 gigs across 20 venues over the two core festival days. The CJ&B free-entry music events will run for Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th August, keeping Monday free for recovery😊

For enquiries about events or merchandise, contact the organisers at https://www.congletonjazzandblues.co.uk/ or call in to Congleton Town Hall Information Centre, Stonehammer Music or any of the listed venues.

**The History**

In 2009, a local entrepreneur and pub owner, Joe Manning, decided to set up a music festival in Congleton. Consequently, and unashamedly inspired by Nantwich Jazz & Blues festival, the genesis of Congleton Jazz & Blues (CJ&B) was played out in 2010.

“…***50% of the venues saw it as a success and that probably meant they just covered costs…it went well enough to have a second one***” – Joe Manning on video

The beginning being humble, according to Joe’s assessment of the inaugural event, nonetheless we have seen the event grow considerably in terms of coverage and attendance while its positive influence and importance to the economy, mood and perception of Congleton is palpable. In 2011, Joe was joined in his efforts by Vince Cutcliffe, the current leader of a group of volunteers that now works to deliver two annual landmark music festivals, specifically **Congleton Unplugged** (held on the first weekend of March) and **Congleton Jazz and Blues** (held on the late August Bank Holiday weekend).

The Unplugged Festival first launched in 2013 and has proven to be a very successful and much appreciated addition to the calendar. Centred in the first weekend of March it gives great impetus for the town’s awakening from the slumbers of winter and attracts significant attendance at venues, many offering a more diverse range of events when compared to CJ&B. Over the years, music of all genres plus poetry and other performances have been included in the offerings.

“***Catering for people of all ages***…” – Louise Renn on Video

Yet another innovation, perhaps a flattering copy from New Orleans, was the introduction of the Umbrella Parade to launch the Jazz & Blues Festival. As the caption suggests, it caters for people of all ages carrying umbrellas of all shapes, sizes and styles and following a Jazz Band as it traverses the streets of the town-centre. This has become a much-loved event, particularly when good weather and pandemic rules allow for it.

Since 2011, the management team has developed a style and skillset that can be measured favourably against any equivalent body. As well as the complex task of securing and matching performers with suitable venues, Vince has surrounded himself with volunteer talents in business administration, marketing & communications, social media and governance matters. No less important, most of the volunteer group are musical performers who can be found eating and drinking in the town’s hostelries and who know a lot about having and delivering “a great night out”.

“***We provide a visual presence as well as an audio presence*…**” – Darren Graham on Video

An important element of the committee’s work is concerned with Branding. Under the expert guidance of **AD Profile Design** they have established a professional and dynamic image that portrays appeal in terms of style, identity, professionalism, humour and message delivery. With Congleton being known as “Beartown” the Bear image is an integral part of the brand for all events along with many of the iconic structures associated with the town. Each festival is signposted with unique signage, brochures and a directory of events as well as being supported by social media and press reporting. Merchandise in the form of posters, tee-shirts and programmes are collectable items.

In 2020, a Community Interest Company was established to give the volunteer group a legal structure that befits the age, thus **Congleton Live CIC** was incorporated. The organisation survives on a very modest budget, paying no salaries and with funds spent on promotion and development of the festivals plus essential professional services. Thanks to **Congleton Town Council** and a select group of seven commercial sponsors who make this possible. The seven select sponsors are:-

AD Profile Design Works, Beartown Brewery, Eze Talk Limited, Franklyn Financial Management, Hammond McNulty Accountants, SAS Daniels Solicitors and Stephenson Browne Estate Agency

**The objectives of Congleton Live** regarding the events, include…

“***[It] isn’t really about music; music is a facilitator. It is about small-town sustainability and raising community spirit***” – Vince Cutcliffe on video

1. Driving Town Centre sustainability by increasing footfall and interest therein
2. Provide accessible events and venues for all music lovers
3. Entertain and educate
4. Motivate engagement from business community and other interest groups
5. Engage with new residents and out-of-towners

**The Future**

More to be written…………………..into the future, perhaps covering aspirations, relationships (with stakeholders like CTC, Sponsors, Venues, Artists etc)

**Personal Stories** (Thematic ideas – the chosen to be expanded after discussion/agreement)

* Congleton as a point (or a traffic jam) on a route to another destination
* Discovering Congleton and the friendly inhabitants through the festivals, most significantly our first CB&THCB gig that closed the 2017 Festival from the YP
* Robin Bibby experience in August 2021, bringing tears of pure blue-joy-relief during a mid-pandemic gig
* The Big Wolf Band outdoor gig on a freezing Saturday night at Unplugged 2022
* Sunday afternoon Irish Dancing at Unplugged 2022
* Great and different opportunity for family reunions with gigs to suit all tastes and tolerances
* Discovering great venues on a pub-crawl from The Cricket Club through to The Beartown Tap
* Variety of venues – W&W for Lunch, No 15 Bar for Cocktails, Cygnet Club for 3pm gig, on to Cricket Club for the second-half of a gig, then to the Cross Street Pentecostal Church, quickly followed by the Library at 7pm and on to the Beartown Brewery for some tunes among the Vats & Barrels. Catch the second half of a gig at the EPH then drift over to the iconic Beartown Tap. Start the homeward journey via the Antelope, Young Pretender and the Ye Olde White Lion. It is a journey through the town but also through the architectural and style ages

**Call to action**

Residents and town visitors are invited to participate in the support and promotion of Congleton’s town centre as we continue our emergence from pandemic and the pursuit of normal life. Live performance can be a joyous and inspiring mechanism for all of us.

Programmes and additional merchandise will be available in town centre establishments from late-July/early-August right through the festival weekend as well as dynamic information that is delivered on the website at https://www.congletonjazzandblues.co.uk/ and social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram …