

FOCOLARE



Genfest 2018

behind the scenes

In July 2017 I received an unexpected phone call – would I ‘give a hand’ with the programme for Genfest 2018 – to be held in Manila. I had no idea then how this call would change the course of my life for the best part of a year! The penny slowly dropped when I saw my name on a list as ‘Programme Director’. So I set out to be a ‘facilitator’ – to help the programme emerge from the ideas and experiences of young people from all continents.

Sarah Finch shares her experience of working behind the scenes as the Programme Director for the Genfest

There was a consultative group of 42 people, representing all continents, creeds and those without a religious affiliation. Then I worked with a close group of 8 young people (4 based in Rome at the International Gen Centre and 4 in the Philippines) There were also other adults, and a few professionals on board: a lighting designer, choreographer and musical director.

Learning to lose

During my first Skype call, an idea was offered – my instant reaction (which I did not say out loud) was ‘over my dead body!’ Then I thought about it and realised that I too must learn to set aside my culture and embrace that of others: and that, to build an honest unity, means being prepared to set my own ideas, tastes and desires aside. I was very aware that it was the young people who must express their generation. There were a couple of songs where my choices would have been different, but the really extraordinary thing was that as the Genfest unfolded over the three days I understood that the choices made were the best and that there is wisdom in losing!

With extremely long hours of work, extreme tiredness puts a strain on relationships – but from the start I felt that relationships were at the heart of what we were doing, the Genfest would finish – but the love would remain. It was important to bend – but never break; and there were moments when this was a real challenge!



Sarah Finch (centre) with some of the technical team

On the same page

We read more than 150 very moving stories from people’s lives around the world, we listened again and again to a large number of songs – we talked about the style of the days, how would we present, how would our MC’s be? From the start we wanted the Genfest to be an event where the stage and the audience could become one. So we had a ‘satellite’ stage with three entrances from the audience, to help us become one ‘us’, uniting

audience and stage. Our MC's were vloggers (video bloggers) who had been active on social media leading up to the event, so that they were already familiar faces, and representatives of various continents. I moved from England to Manila for two months before the Genfest. A moment that remains with me was at the end of my first week. I was working with two of my Philippine team. We worked from 3.30pm until 9.30pm – I forgot which country or continent I was in, I felt we were completely on the same page. We hardly knew each other (then) we came from different cultures and continents, but were completely one in this extraordinary charism – that brings about the miracle of unity.

A miracle of unity

In the days leading up to the festival, when over 200 performers started arriving, and there was so much to do – the stage was being built, the lighting designer arrived



Graziella, Joops, Sarah, Adela and Cata

– the disparate parts of the festival began to be put together I was so aware of being part of a very united team. I often didn't know exactly where they were, but I knew that each one was doing the right thing! Therefore, there was a peace that prevailed; and as the festival began (after the, naturally, chaotic and fairly disastrous rehearsals) I knew I had given all I had to give, and it was not my festival – but God's, so I had to just give it to him. What followed really did seem like a sizable miracle! 🍷

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