

## ARTS

# Gen Verde and Genfest 2018



### How would you describe the Genfest to someone who wasn't there?

At a time when the whole world seems intent on tearing itself apart and retreating in a global ghetto, the Genfest in Manila was an extraordinary event. To see the six thousand young people from all over the world present

New City caught up with **Sally McAllister**, who manages the international performing arts group, Gen Verde. The band performed at Genfest 2018 and helped out behind the scenes

in the World Trade Centre witnessing their desire to see a world without barriers of race, creed or colour, was already a taste of a united world here and now. The three day programme was exciting, vibrant, joyful and full of hope. But there was

nothing airy-fairy or delusional about it. The experiences the young people shared were very grounded and often illustrated the harsher side of life today in so many parts of the world.

### Apart from the festival elements of the Genfest, which moments stand out for you in the programme?

I thought Emmaus' (Maria Voce) talk was very powerful. It was simple, direct and had great vision. She invited the young people to go beyond borders. She encouraged them not to give up or lose hope in times of difficulty but to believe that a united world is possible. Finally, she invited them to share wealth and resources but also to be ready to take on each other's burdens. So she not only indicated a goal to be reached but also steps to be taken to get there.

Another thing that moved me deeply was the dramatization of Siobhan Coyle's story. Siobhan's belief in 'people before profits' took her to the Philippines twenty years ago. However, there in the World Trade Centre, listening to her words spoken by young actors, I saw Siobhan again

– that lovely, warm, shy but determined and courageous girl who made a difference not just in the Philippines but to all those who were privileged to know her.

### How was Gen Verde involved in the Genfest?

Our contribution was varied and very full on. We went to the Philippines a couple of weeks before the Genfest and were involved in the behind the scenes preparation with the Genfest singers and band. During the three days in the World Trade Centre, we also helped with stage management.

During the programme each day we were able to contribute songs which illustrated experiences. For example, after the experience from Noé (Mexico) and Josef from the US, (see page 8) about life on different sides of 'the Wall', Gen Verde sang a song called 'Tierra di Paz-Our Common Ground' from our new album. The song is inspired by the experience of two members of Gen Verde, Adriana from Mexico and Nancy from California.

We also had a very special experience running a 'pre-genfest' workshop programme for 200 young people from Davao and Tagaytay. It was fantastic to work with such amazingly talented, joyful young people and extraordinary how much was achieved in just three days. We prepared pieces which we performed together in the International Concert on the second day.

Apart from all that was planned in advance, there were some special gifts. One day, while we were still in Tagaytay with the pre-genfest preparation, we heard that the group from Pakistan needed a bass player and a drummer and we were able to offer to play for them. Then, quite late the night before the Genfest began, I heard that due to a mix-up, Gen Fuoco, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, had no-one to play for them and so it looked like they wouldn't be able to perform in the International Concert. Having come such a long way they were devastated. Only four members of the group had been able to make the trip because of costs (3 singers and the keyboard player). For a moment I hesitated, thinking that Gen Verde had enough to do, but then I thought – 'who am I to limit someone else's generosity?' Their



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response was unanimous: ‘We want to do this!’ So when Gen Fuoco finished singing the girls approached them and offered to play. They were so delighted and immediately set to, to make the song work now that they had a guitarist, drummer, percussionist and bass player!

Afterwards, Gen Fuoco wrote to us: *‘We were really struck by the fact that despite all you had to do, you put yourselves in our place and seeing someone who needed help, you came to us and offered in all simplicity. What greater witness to love can there be than to see someone in need and help them? When it was time to say goodbye, none of us could hold back our tears, because our meeting with Gen Verde left a debt of love in our hearts and the memory of this will always make us want to go and do likewise. We will never stand by and wait for someone to cry out for help without making the first move. This was our greatest and most beautiful experience at the Genfest in Manila. Words will never be enough to express what fills our hearts.’*

### **Gen Verde is preparing to come back to England after a three-year gap, what can audiences at your concerts expect this time?**

When we toured Scotland, England and Wales in 2015 our concert featured songs from our last album ‘On the Other Side’. Our new release (in October 2018), ‘From the Inside Outside’ continues in a similar vein, drawing

on our own true stories, or those of other bridge-builders, who have inspired us to be better people. Some of the themes reflect experiences we have had over the last three years working closely with thousands of young people in various countries all over Europe and Asia in performing arts workshops during our Start Now Project. The issues addressed, express some of their gifts and their challenges. We wanted to dig deep in our own experiences, looking head on at these issues but also drawing out the potential each of us has, to turn on the light of hope we carry within us.

And the music? Together with our characteristic ethnically influenced pop-rock style, there are songs which will make you want to get up and dance, but which at the same time, deliver a strong, thought-provoking message. The concert kicks off with an electro rock dance, followed by some high-energy techno, trap-influenced and K-pop songs that deal with challenges such as addictions, the culture of ‘lookism’, racism and bullying. That is just the beginning – there are colourful spaces where different worlds meet, going beyond their borders. There are more intimate, acoustic moments which ultimately lead into a festive, multicultural celebration of the values of peace and dialogue that can link all peoples together across the globe. 🍷

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See back cover for concert details