



## The Festival Experience

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I WAS GOING TO literary festivals long before I was published. I think my first event was in the 1990s and certainly by 2004, I was going to three or four a year. At that time, I hadn't started writing but I was an avid reader. I remember my excitement at meeting some of the authors I loved — Ann Cleeves, Henning Mankell, Maj Sjöwall, Sue Grafton and P. D. James spring to mind. Sitting in the audience gave me valuable insights into what works and what doesn't. The interviewer needs to be dynamic and responsive but not dominate the event. The best authors conveyed their love of the craft and their enthusiasm for their books. Some events were sadly underattended, but I was impressed at how the author still made the events work for them. People were simply happy to be there.

Since I've been published, I've spoken about my novels in bookshops, libraries, schools and prisons. Festivals are a slightly different experience I find. First, they usually have a dedicated organiser whose role is to book you, either direct or through your publicist, promote your event and look after you on the day. You appear alongside a raft of other authors, sometimes big names, but you're still made to feel welcome and appreciated. There's a general 'bookish' buzz in the air that I love.

The green room can be daunting when you're starting on your literary career but I've usually found it a source of conversation and news. After a solitary winter of writing, there's nothing better than meeting others to discuss the vicissitudes of being a published author. Suddenly you realise



that your experience isn't unique and there's a support network to tap into. I've also met authors who I wouldn't necessarily encounter in my crime-fiction network. Historians, politicians, romance writers. It's a reminder that the literary oeuvre is diverse and dynamic.

The most successful festivals, for me, are the ones that give the writer the whole experience. Perhaps I'm biased but two local events, Derby Book Festival and Buxton International Festival, look after the author from start to finish. The small touches from making you feel welcome in the green room to giving you a goody bag for your journey home make all the difference.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of a festival — from marshalling the audience to handing out programmes and holding the mike for questions. Many are budding writers themselves and always appreciate a chat with a published author. It's always great to meet readers who are often drawn from the local population and are passionate about the festival based in their hometown. I've also met many booksellers at these events, some of whom have become friends who continue to hand sell my books long after a festival has finished.

Finally, I usually take the opportunity to buy tickets to listen to other authors speaking. I'm still that enthusiastic reader who wants nothing more than to hear an author talk about their writing.