



2023

## Report

### Context for the project:

This project started in 2021 at the point where live performance was starting to take place. I met with Emma Bird from Liverpool Comedy Improv, and we talked through the issues we had faced or were facing in this changed landscape. It was from these discussions that the following five points emerged.

- Address the impact of covid on the improvisation community.

I wanted in a post pandemic environment to profile the regional improvisation community. The pandemic impacted this community – anecdotally numerous companies and artists ceased to continue. I am of course aware that numerous companies emerged through online spaces and that the access to teachers from across the world was made possible. This was a positive in what was a very difficult time for all.

- Raise the profile of improvisation in a crowded marketplace.

The region has a large amount of live performance taking place (Music, Theatre, Dance, Opera, Stand-up comedy, etc.) and to stand out / compete in this crowded offer a festival format was the obvious choice to address this. The rationale being that there is strength in numbers. This mirrors other work e.g., storytelling tends to operate outside of traditional venues for performance.

- Place improv into the heart of a city centre-based venue.

Improvisation happens in a live context across the northwest region. However, work is seldom often seen in theatres, part of this pilot project was to address this. To place improvised performance into a theatre and supply companies and artists with the additional tools that they may not necessarily have access to in their current live contexts.

- Reflect the vast array of spontaneous performance that takes place across the region.

I wanted the festival to represent and reflect all elements of the improvisation community, from the new and emerging to artists / companies who are more experienced. I also wanted to share the vast array of spontaneous practice which takes

place across the northwest, including artists who might not be traditionally defined or viewed as 'improvisation'. In addition, I wanted to create space for folk to share and experience current practice via workshops.

- Document the work of this creative community

Finally, I wanted to document the work and share this (open access) with and for the future benefit of researchers and those from the improvisation community.

### **What happened next:**

I met with Gordon Millar from the Unity Theatre in 2021 and we discussed the rationale of the festival as a suitable approach. Gordon bought into the vision, ambition and subsequently agreed to host and support the festival – the deal agreed equates to a 70/30 box office split in the festival's favour and with additional charges for VAT and all debit and credit card payments. This was initially due to take place in February 2022, but due to a serious family illness this was postponed until April 2023.

Due to expediency of setting up and running a new festival by myself I took the decision to curate the first festival. I am aware of the work taking place across the northwest and on this basis, I made a number of approaches to companies and artists all of whom fall under the categories set out above. They were asked to either bring 40/45 or 60/70 mins of work and would work in either Unity two (88 seats) or Unity one (150 seats).

### **Artist offer:**

I made offers of a small guarantee to cover expenses – this was underwritten by myself and totalled £900. Once sales surpassed this guarantee the company / artist would receive the full split (70%) minus credit / debit card charges.

### **Festival funding and expenditure:**

I met with a local artist Jason Kelly who created both the logo and festival poster. I also created and set up a dedicated website for the festival in addition to the cost of printing – posters. These monetary costs were absorbed by myself.

I successfully applied for research funding, and this covered the costs of documenting the festival through art and film.

### **In-kind funding:**

- The Unity theatre contributed a significant amount of in-kind funding which equates to more than £4000. (staff)
- The photographer Andrew Ness contributed £500 of in-kind funding.
- My own time equates to approximately £4200. 8 months (35 week) x one day per week x £120 day rate.

## The Festival:

This pilot event took place at the Unity Theatre, on Friday the 21st and Saturday the 22nd of April, 2023. Across the two days were programmed 12 shows and 4 workshops. The full 2023 programme is available here [Liverpool Improvisation Festival Schedule - Liverpool Improvisation Festival \(liverpoolimprovfestival.com\)](https://liverpoolimprovfestival.com).

In total 70 improvisers and workshop facilitators took part in the two days.

## Post festival:

All images and films are now archived and have been shared via the festival website and via social media. These have freely been made available to all artists at zero cost.

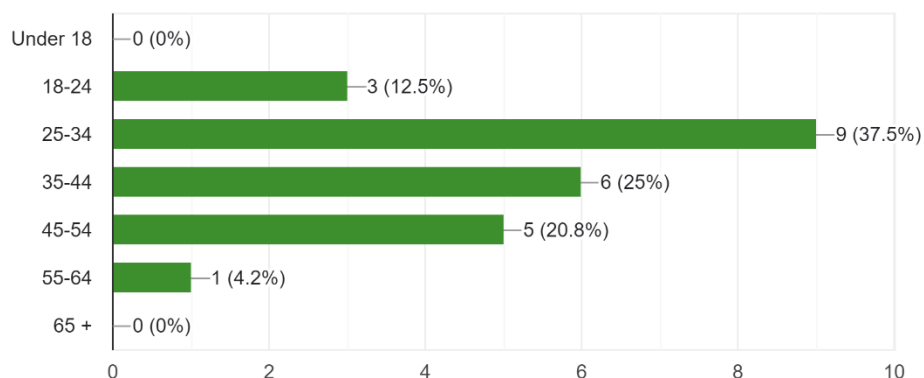
Post the event we asked partners and audiences to reflect and contribute their thoughts on what worked well and areas for future development. The feedback form was disseminated (22/04/23) via the festival website and social media platforms and was open for 15 days. The form outlined the purpose for collection, how it will be used and how long the information will be stored for as per best practice.

The audience return (24) equates to 2.8% of total attendees. There were 875 attendees across the entirety of the festival (shows and workshops). The data and information recorded although extremely helpful does not offer a full picture and thus this must be taken into account.

The full set of data is below – this is followed by attendee commentary (audience feedback) which has been grouped (themed). This broken into two part 1) Positives and 2) Areas for development.

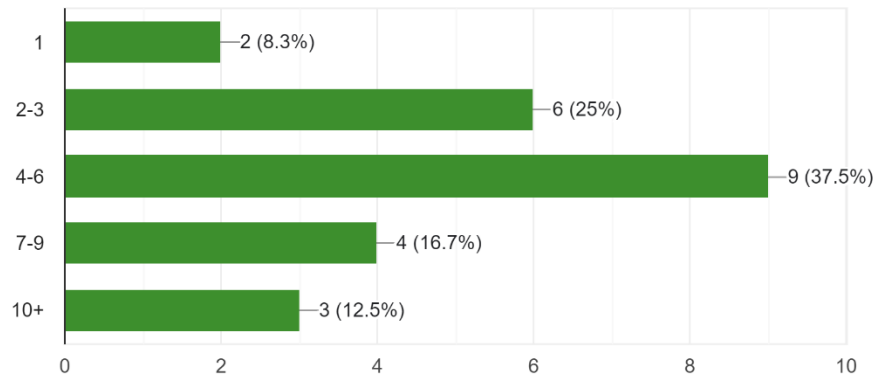
### Age:

24 responses



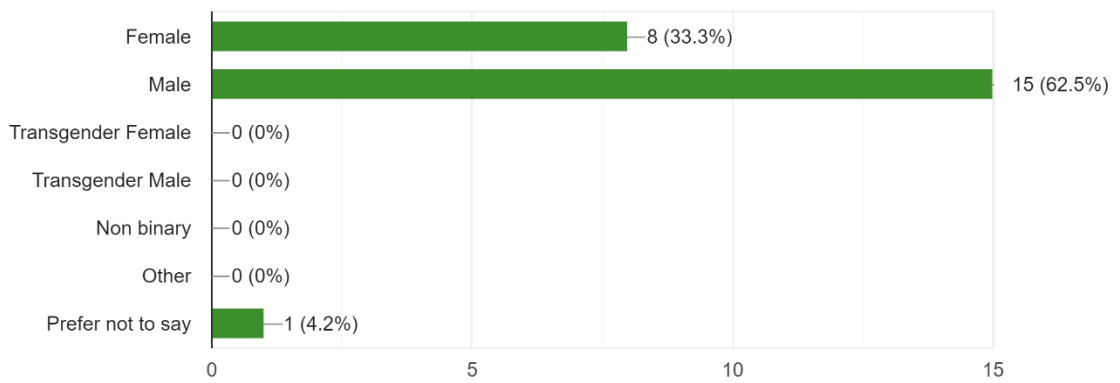
How many events did you take part in? this includes shows and workshop.

24 responses



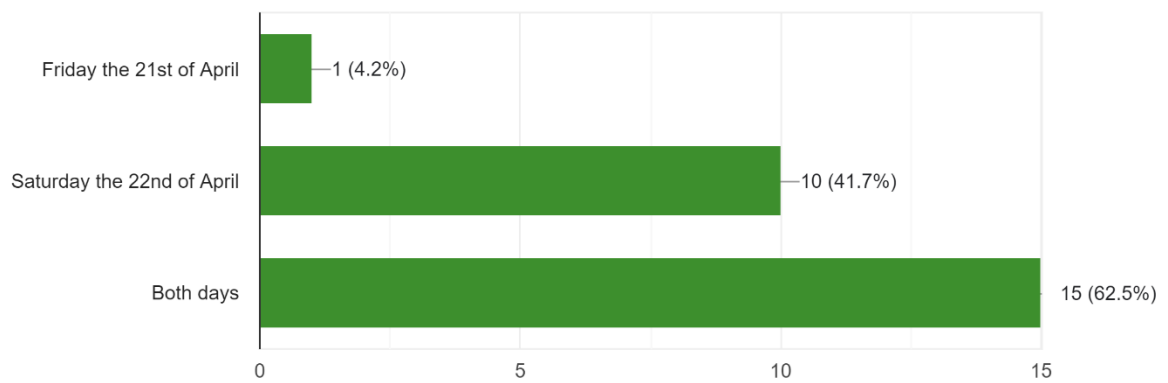
To which gender identity you do most identify?

24 responses



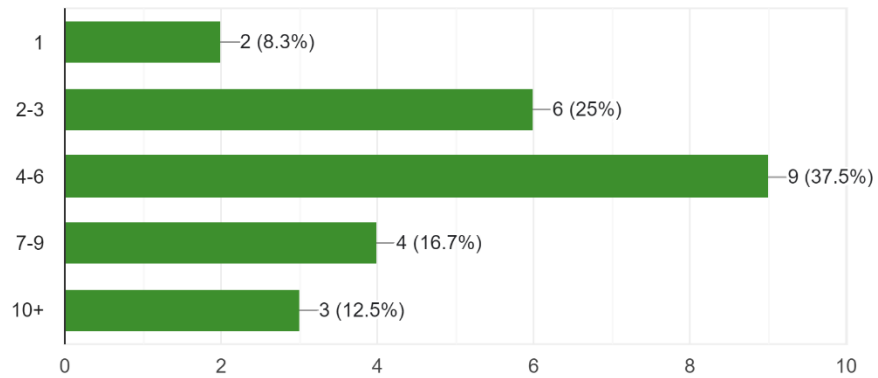
When did you attend LiF 2023?

24 responses



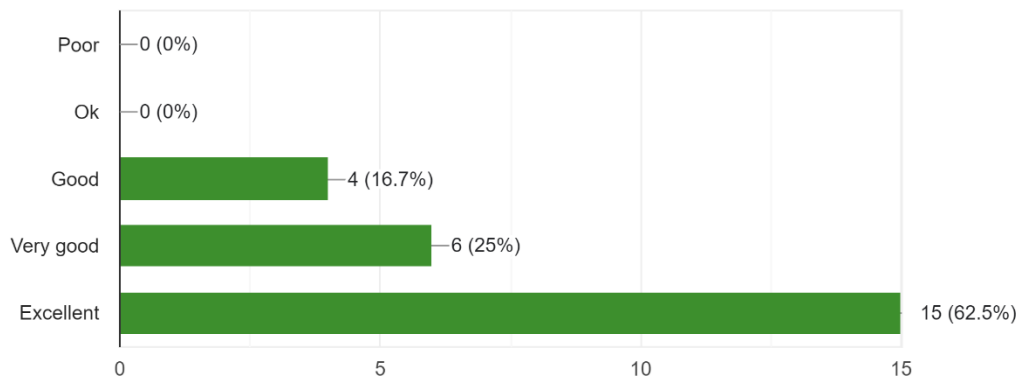
How many events did you take part in? this includes shows and workshop.

24 responses



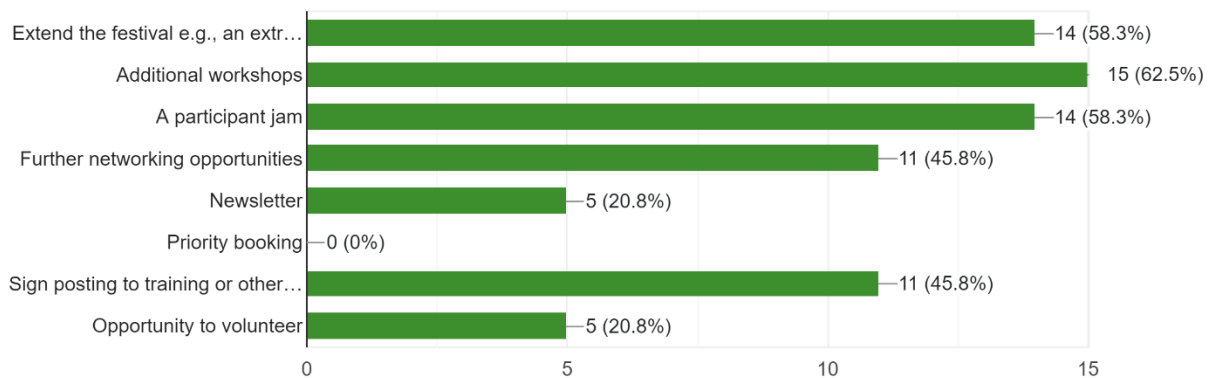
How would you rate your experience overall of LiF 2023?

24 responses



Please select from the potential options - what would you like to be added to the festival?

24 responses



## **Positives:**

This was raised by 8 responders or 33%:

### **1. Programming**

‘High-quality workshops and performances from a wide variety of skilled Improv groups, all for a reasonable price. I found it a great opportunity to find out about Improv acts I knew little about before, making it a great networking opportunity.’ (Anon; April, 2023)

‘I thought the selection of shows was varied and interesting, and definitely showcased the talent of improvisers in the region.’ (Anon; April, 2023)

‘Overall, I really enjoyed the festival, I thought the selection of shows was varied and interesting, and definitely showcased the talent of improvisers in the region.’ (Anon; April, 2023)

‘There was a great mix of performances, from the traditional idea of improv (Comedy Sportz, Liverpool Comedy Improv, Atom Improv) via dramatic (Living, Dying, Dead), puppetry and long form. As a relatively novice fan, it was great to see this variety.’ (Anon; April, 2023)

‘Excellent festival, it was great to see such a variety of acts from all across the country.’ (Anon; April, 2023)

‘Variety was great. I liked the Liv/Glossop sessions not because they were necessarily the best improvisers but because they represent where most people started off so were ideal for this audience. A great cross-section of improv culture.’ (Anon; April, 2023)

‘Vibrant, energetic, a great vibe in the building and wonderful skilled work on display. A well needed day packed full of feel-good-ness.’ (Anon; April, 2023)

‘I think the shows were brilliant and extremely varied, meaning that each show had its own identity and stood out in its own way, making it enjoyable and never boring.’ (Anon; April, 2023)

### **2. Pricing**

This was raised by 1 responder or 4%:

‘The price was great value, especially the Day Tickets.’ (Anon; April, 2023)

## **Areas for development:**

### **1. Timings and audience fatigue:**

This was raised by 6 responders or 25%:

‘Amazing but need more time between shows’ (Anon; April, 2023)

'I think my only criticism is that it was a bit intense, especially the Saturday; back-to-back two-hour workshops followed by six shows' (Anon; April, 2023)

'Make the shows shorter and provide some respite time at some point of the day. It's unreasonable to have people sit from 2pm-10pm with only switch over times.' (Anon; April, 2023)

'One thing and this is nit picking but the shows came thick and fast! An extra day and spread them out more? An observation but maybe not a viable one!' (Anon; April, 2023)

'However, as someone who participated in most shows, I found the days quite tiring, especially the Saturday, and would've appreciated some kind of scheduled break slots. For example, between the afternoon and evening shows, there could be a workshop planned, meaning those that wanted to participate could continue, but those in the audience could have an hour or two to decompress. It would also be a perfect time to have some kind of participant mixer/networking event.' (Anon; April, 2023)

My only negative (and I don't think it can be fixed) was after having got full day tickets having to duck out of some shows just to refuel/rest. (Anon; April, 2023)

## 2. Ticket booking:

This was raised by 1 responder or 4%:

'The ticket booking system was very slow and a bit annoying to have to keep inputting the same info when booking tickets for different shows. If there was a way of streamlining this for next time, that'd be great.' (Anon; April, 2023)

## 3. Workshops – group sizes

This was raised by 1 responder or 4%:

'The "you me and the world" workshop had over 20 people attend, this was a bit too much and some people didn't get the chance to complete some of the work.' (Anon; April, 2023)

## 4. Lighting

This was raised by 1 responder or 4%:

'I also really enjoyed the theatrics with the lighting, and thought the tech team were amazing, however there were a few instances where the lights strobed, which brought me to the edge of a migraine, and some warning of this pre-show would've been appreciated. I also found the lights in Talk To The Hand were constantly shining in my eyes, causing a similar problem.' (Anon; April, 2023)