

NEWS FOCUS: Southport Weekender



# SOUTHPORT WEEKENDER

## A LEADING UK HOLIDAY RESORT WITNESSES SEAMLESS INTEGRATION OF LIGHTING, VIDEO AND CREATIVE DRAPING AT ITS ANNUAL GROOVE FEST...

In November, TPI found itself amongst 4,000 revellers at a Pontin's family resort for the small and hugely friendly three-day festival, the *Southport Weekender*. Its location throws up connotations of a rowdy, 18 year old crowd, but this could not be further from the truth. Perhaps it is these false preconceptions that have kept the trade press relatively at bay for the last 22 years, but reality proved the *Weekender* to be a worthy stop on the festival circuit.

Alex Lowes and Dave Gardner, the partnership behind Up North Promotions, began the event in 1987 at a caravan park in Berwick-Upon-Tweed as a soul music weekender attended by 500 people. It moved to Blackpool for three events before heading to its current home in Southport where it has operated twice yearly since 1989.

The four main music arenas — the Powerhouse, The Beat Bar, The Connoisseurs Corner and The Funkbase — played host to a variety of genre-led sessions, such as Friday night's disco session, the Jazz Dance session, the Saturday afternoon Soul Session and the Latin-tinged finale.

In terms of live music, India performed Sunday afternoon's finale with Brazilian Jazz Funk outfit Azymuth live on stage at the

same time. There were also live concerts from Jazzanova with Paul Randolph, Mica Paris and the Sunburst Band and live appearances from Omar, Tawiah and Jenna G. DJ sets came from Frankie Knuckles, Mr Scruff, Kenny Dope, Dennis Ferrer and Tony Humphries.

The *Southport Weekender* prides itself on a close-knit and long-standing production team that is dedicated to continually changing the production of the event to keep it fresh and different. Said Alex Lowes: "The good thing about our production team is that they always like to do something different, so every time people walk in they find something new."

"I'm really proud of the production team, it's a team effort and everyone feeds off each other." The core production team consists of Future Projects, Creative Draping, Digital Insanity, Audile and PRG Europe, most of whom have been doing the festival since the start.

Future Projects' production manager Gerry Calderhead got together with Creative Draping's Susie Carlino and Digital Insanity's Richard Bagshaw at the start of the planning process to create a visual concept for the *Weekender*.

Calderhead, who has been production managing the event since it moved

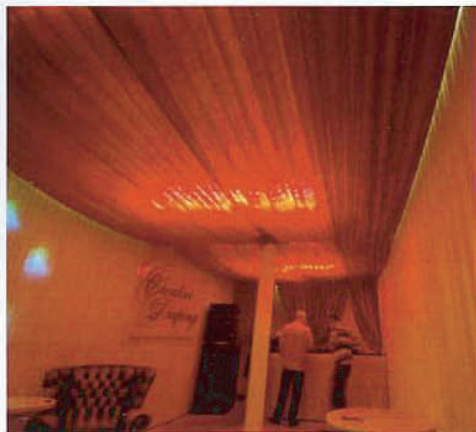
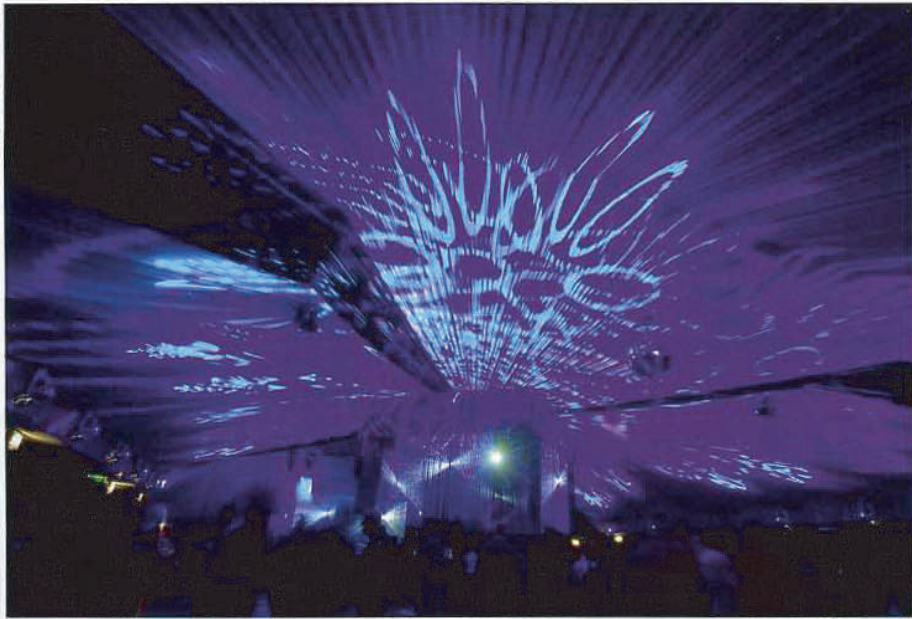
to Southport, said: "[Alex and Dave] have managed to keep their production values up, which makes a change for today when other people are cutting back and cutting back."

Calderhead managed a team of 47, a four and a half day build, and was assisted by Simon Harborow, Phil Eltringham and Nigel Hogan.

Draping and truss design have always had a generous amount of the production budget and Creative Draping has played an integral role for 18 years in transforming the open indoor space at Pontin's into a series of interconnecting rooms that each has its own identity.

Carlino said: "Gerry does a brilliant truss design (truss by LSD), which gets more complex each year and we basically fill in the gaps."





The Beat Bar featured Carlino's cerise pink and aubergine striped drape design that had been distorted and knotted to create a billowy Bedouin style.

She continued: "In the chillout room I created a sculpture (pictured right) using 10" long pieces of plastic, which are like cable ties stuck together. It's a black room so I wanted to create a central feature with a whirlwind shape. It's very organic but contemporary at the same time, has a frosty coating and was then uplit."

#### MID-AIR ILLUSION

But by far the main masterpiece of the design was in the Powerhouse arena, where a circular, beaded curtain was suspended over the dancefloor and used as a surface for projection. The effect it created was that of a circular LED screen and was so successful that one of the DJs couldn't believe that it was not LED.

Explained Carlino: "Last year we used beaded sparkly curtains and discovered that the projection images from the lighting got picked up beautifully. Even Richard Bagshaw from Digital Insanity said, 'Oh my god it looks like data', and I was very pleased for a video person to be excited about my designs. Gerry then came up with the idea of cross projecting images on to a central box and going overboard

with beads to capture moving imagery in mid-air in the middle of the room."

Digital Insanity has been working on the *Southport Weekender* for a decade and claimed to have developed a specific style for the event. Kate Perring said: "It's a paired-down style, it's not very image heavy, but is more about the colours matching the lighting and the shapes of the drapes. A lot of lighting people don't get what Susie does but she's very aware of lighting and the way lighting moves in the space.

"We have a real bugbear about TVs and screens; I hate it when you get a set with a 4 x 3 rectangle. People don't want to come out and watch TV. I like video when you can't see the edges."

Digital Insanity made around 80% of the visual content used in the Powerhouse and Funkbase arenas using a total of three Hippotizers, a Hippo Critter and an Edirol V-440HD mixer. Said Perring: "We were able to isolate the chandelier from the stage, which was important for clarity in projection. I like running it through a mixer and picking up the pace."

Rather than a traditional VJ show, the content was mostly for background atmosphere to complement the lighting and mainly showed abstract patterns, neon-lined faces and designs using the *Weekender* logo.

The Class A Consultancy supplied the video hardware for the system, which included Panasonic 65" and 42" plasmas, all switching and signal processing for the Funkbase arena, as well as two Panasonic 15kW projectors for the main stage, two 12 x 9 screens and four 6.5kW Sanyo XS60s for the main arena, installed by the company's Jules Blagg and Will Jackson.

Perring employed Hippotizer experts Julien Hogg, Nigel Sadler and Simon Harris as video operators for the event. Commented Perring: "They get the chance to see Hippos being tested at the rough end of the scale, because quite often Hippos are put into sterile environments where it's a controlled show; they do the same thing every night in an air conditioned theatre. But we put them through the paces, running them for two days solid so they really get road tested. It was immediately a very symbiotic relationship with them. They are always on-site when we have an issue."

PRG Europe, led by Kal Butt, supplied lighting for the Powerhouse which required 23 rigging points across the LSD trusses and included eight VL3000 Spots, eight VL 1000 TIDs, 24 VL6Cs, 10 VL2000 Washes, 20 ColorKinetics Colour Blaze 48s in 12 channel mode and two Stadium Hazers, controlled by a grandMA full size (with a Light for back-up).

Below, clockwise from top left: Susie Carlino (R); Funktion-One by the main stage; Simon Harris; Kate Perring & Nigel Sadler.



Colour Sound Experiment handled lighting for all the other rooms and the foyer. Tony Wilson and Stuart Barr operated the lighting in the Funkbase room on an Avolites Pearl console, which controlled five Robe ColorWash 700E AT, five Robe ColorSpot 575 AT, six Martin MAC 500s, club strobe flowers, 14 blue Arcline strips and six Source Four PARs.

The Connoisseurs Corner used some classic disco lighting to create a retro effect, with four Ego 1s, four Ego 3s, four T-Rex, four Rainbow multicolours, two PAR 64s and four UV guns. Over in The Beat Bar, a funky vibe was achieved with five Martin MAC 250 Washes, four Mighty MX-4 Scans and five Robe 575 Scans, controlled by another Pearl desk.

#### SOUND

Calderhead had struggled to find a talented sound engineer who was passionate about dance music, but eventually switched suppliers to Manchester-based Audile and discovered Kim Lewis. He commented: "It's a stipulation with Audile that they have to supply Kim as it's taken us a lot of time to find a good engineer!"

Audile initially just did sound for the B-Bar but its presence at the *Weekender* has increased over the last 12 events. Explained Audile's Rob Ashworth: "The Southport crowd are very passionate about sound and outspoken in their opinions, so the main room supplier was asked to put in a more modern system. The line array system they installed actually proved to be a step backward in quality, though, and we were asked to provide Funktion-One for all four rooms on the next event, and have ever since.

"The systems have remained more or less the same spec since day one. We nailed it first time

and there's been no reason to change!"

The main room sees four Resolution-5 speakers per side and three per side of F-221A. "When Funktion-One brought the new double-21" subs out, Southport was the first gig we tried them on, and everyone was blown away again, ourselves included!" said Ashworth.

With no changeovers, and no need for the recall facilities of a digital board, Audile chose a Midas Heritage 3000 analogue console for FOH. The system is completed with XTA processing and MC2 amplification.

The DJ booths feature a Formula Sound FF-6000 in the fader booth — a collaboration between Funktion-One and Formula Sound, with a Pioneer DJM-800 and Allen & Heath Xone-92 on standby. "In the rotary booth we were pleased to have the prototype of Paul Morrissey's re-issue of the legendary Bozak mixer, which the DJs were very excited to be using," added Ashworth.

Transport was by Fly By Nite, power was supplied by Golden Triangle Generators, Alistage erected all the stages, whilst DPI Ltd built sound-proofed walls, and Liverpool-based Roe Street Runners put forward extra crew. Gable Scaffolding supplied scaff structures and GTG provided gensets and power distribution.

STS Touring has also been involved since the very first *Southport Weekender*; this year supplying a technician and backline for the four stages, which included multicores, amp racks, wedges, keyboards, and an M7 console.

TPI

*Photography by Rachel Esson & Susie Carlino*  
To read more on the history of Audile and FI's involvement in the event visit:  
[www.tpimagazine.com](http://www.tpimagazine.com)