



SECRET GARDEN PARTY: 13 YEARS OF WOODLAND ADVENTURE

This summer, after 13 years of fun, founder and 'Head Gardener' Freddie Fellowes called time on one of the UK's best loved festivals: Secret Garden Party (SGP). A trailblazer of the boutique festival scene, SGP grew from a small gathering of 500 into a giant bubble of brand-free, independent inclusivity; a community of all-encompassing, come-as-you-want-to-be fun. TPI speaks to some of the key audio team who deploy the festival's Funktion-One sound systems about the event's success and fond farewell.

Over the years, SGP had become something of an open 'secret', steadily growing in size as word spread - its final instalment drawing a crowd of over 30,000 to say goodbye in style. Despite this, the event managed to retain its spirit of playful adventure. For attendees - appointed 'Gardeners' for the week and sent forth to cultivate fun - this was a gateway to a shindig of Gatsbyan proportions, but on a perennially intimate scale; a party where eccentric pleasures were encouraged and enabled by a selection of weird and wonderful spaces with equally weird and wonderful names; pockets filled with magic, mud wrestling (optional) and, of course, music.

By their final year, the SGP crew had become masters of maximising sensory stimulation - including, in the case of audio, the use of a Funktion-One system on 11 stages and event spaces across the site, courtesy of two suppliers: Audio Feed and Vortex Events.

For Audio Feed, the SGP connection runs deep. MD Oz Jefferies attended the very first Party back in 2004 and in 2009 started supplying sound. "Since then the SGP crew have become like a family to me and the Audio Feed team," he said. "Built on passion and creativity they've strived (and succeeded) to change the festival circuit in the UK with their unique and entertaining approach to customer immersion of fun. We started out

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supplying the Lake Stage bringing the first ever Funktion-One sound system to SGP. Over the years we have grown that up to 9 systems across the site, including live and dance music stages."

The Lake Stage was perhaps the most iconic of the festival's spaces. A floating raft accessible only by rowboat, each year it took on a different design; often reflecting the theme of that year's event. As well as providing a novel destination for Gardeners to (literally) bob to some quality tunes, it also formed the centrepiece of the party's main celebrations with its ritual destruction in a blaze of pyrotechnical glory.

As with the previous three years, the Lake Stage featured two Funktion-One Res 4 mid/tops and two F218 mk2 bass units, complete with MC2 amplifiers and Funktion-One processing.

"The Lake Stage has always been very special for us as it's such a beautiful location for a stage floating peacefully in the heart of the festival, and a very unique place to create a party," said Jefferies. "There is something very exciting about rowing Funktion-One speakers out into the middle of a lake in the beautiful Cambridgeshire countryside, before they dramatically explode the stage for the spectacle on Saturday night. Don't worry; we take the speakers off before the explosion."

Since its SGP mid-lake introduction in 2009, Funktion-One's proven performance has made it an essential part of the festival's audio landscape. "Funktion-One brings that extra clarity that it's famous for," noted Jefferies. "It reproduces dance and live music seamlessly and effortlessly. Secret Garden Party was founded on creativity, but they have recognised over the years the importance of good audio and given us the means to bring only the best standards to their event."

The truth of this could be seen across the festival site. Back on shore, for example, the Cocktail Bar served up the perfect mix of drinks and tunes, aided by a DJ set-up that incorporated 2 Funktion-One Res 1's and two F1128 mk2's. More drinks - this time with a twist of cabaret and kink - were on offer in the Little Gay Brother Bar where the sound system featured 2 Res 4T's and 4 F121 bass enclosures.

Over on the Dance Off stage, Funktion-One had ringside seats to SGP's annual battle of the body-moves. A procession of punters took to the checkerboard-floored boxing ring to strut their stuff. Beats were provided by a quadraphonic speaker stack set up comprising 4 Evo 6EH's, 4 F215 Mk2's and 8 F121 bass enclosures.

Rejuvenation for the mind, body and soul was on offer in the Spirituality Playground. As the daytime dog shows and naked catwalks gave way to wild night-time parties, 2 Res 2 full range cabinets, 4 F121 bass enclosures and 8 F101 infill monitors delivered the audio entertainment.

For 2017, The Drop stage had been reimagined as a steam-powered industrial arena, guarded by a robotic flame-throwing sentinel. A techno-/house-heavy mix of the best dance music washed the crowd, courtesy of 8 Evo 6E mid tops, 12 F121 bass enclosures and 2 F101 infill monitors.

Completing Audio Feed's Funktion-One roll call were the Duff Camp (with its 2 F1201s and a BR118) and the Maya Jane Coles Party Tent (using a F1202 full range speaker).

"Setting up PA equipment designed for nightclubs in the countryside certainly has its challenges," remarked Jefferies. "The key is an experienced, hard working team that works well together, which we are lucky enough to have. The festival has always supported us through the challenges involved



and treated us all as an integral part of the SGP family."

This extended family also includes MC2 and XTA, whose amps were used throughout the festival site. "We've continued to have great support from MC2 and XTA," said Jefferies. "Richard Fleming from XTA always attends to make sure everything runs perfectly, although I think this is an excuse as nothing ever goes wrong but he feels quite at home there."

XTA/MC2's Richard Fleming added: "I've been attending SGP for more than five years. Audio Feed has handled multiple stages each year and this year was no exception. It was great to see a combination of XTA APA amplifiers and the new MC2 Delta amps deployed across the site, plus it was a perfect opportunity to hang out with the Audiofeed crew in the glorious sunshine." Funktion-One around the rest of the site was provided by Vortex Events.

Set on the shore of the site's sizable lake, the Pagoda Stage was one such location. For the first year, 8 Funktion-One V124 were used to handle the majority of the low end. According to Vortex Events' Iain Rendle, they proved a powerful addition. "I am really impressed with these boxes - the new loudspeaker driver Funktion-One has developed delivers some serious power generated from its double stacked voice coil and magnet arrangement," Rendle said. "We run all of our Funktion-one speakers on Full Fat Audio (FFA) amplifiers, and the combination of this bass bin and the FFA-10000 is perfect. This provides a deep affirmative bass tone with plenty of headroom and - if I am honest - we never dared to take them close to their full output level." The mid bass was covered with F215 Mk2's and the tops with Evo 7EHs.

NST processing was used across all Vortex's Funktion-One systems, which gave them all the audio processing tools required to fully co-operate with the sound control team and meet their SPL targets throughout the week.

NST Audio's Dan Cartman said: "I think everyone using either NST or FFA

DSP - which is an NST ID48 OEM - was using the D-Net control software on the iPad - or FATWARE which is the FFA version - for setup and monitoring their systems. Our users love being able to wander out into the audience area with an iPad and tune their system. It's ideal for these kinds of stages where you haven't got a FOH position."

The Lost Woods stage - a discrete outpost, framed in a tangle of knotted branches - saw extensive use of the Funktion-One BR121. "This was an absolute must due to its location on the edge of site, and we needed to take advantage of the comparably shorter throw (compared to that of the horn loaded equivalent F121's)," said Rendle. "Once again, this is a truly great box and can be used to great effect outdoors." A total of 18 BR121's were used across 5 stacks in a near circular 30m dance arena. In this arrangement, the team were able to take full advantage of some of the cancellation characteristics associated with this configuration, whilst also managing to provide excellent coverage. The mid bass was delivered through 9 F215mk2 and a combination of 4 Evo 7EH's for the front stacks, and 6 AX88's ("a personal favourite of mine," noted Rendle) were deployed on the rear stacks on large truss towers.

Despite being hidden down a discrete path towards the edge of the site, The Labyrinth was nonetheless an incredibly popular stage, playing host to an estimated 500 people at peak points. Here Funktion-One Evo 7 and Evo 7EH were deployed, along with F215 mk2 and F121 bass enclosures. "This is a great combination of Funktion-One loud speakers," said Rendle. "We've used this type of configuration a lot over many festivals and events as it's very easy to tune; you can achieve very predictable results with plenty head room and low distortion characteristics. The 10-inch mid driver seen in all the Evo range top boxes provides a very thick warm sound and the large HF horn gives great clarity and cohesion to its 10-inch counterpart."

The smallest stage supplied by Vortex was the Jackdaw bar - a 24-hour bar complete with stage for bands and DJ setup. The 300-capacity, 30m



Some of the Audio Feed crew; XTA's Rich Flemming with TPI's Kel Murray; Full Fat Audio's Dave Millard; Funktion-One's Mike Nicholson with Audio Feed's Oz Jefferies.

x 15m tent needed to have a well-distributed system that could keep a consistent audio level and minimise influence on off-site noise limits. To achieve this, Vortex turned (for the third year) to a tried and tested system: 8 Funktion-One F1201's with 2 BR218's.

As this year's event came to an end and the SGP speaker systems fell silent for the last time, the consensus among crew and crowd alike was that 2017 had been a fond farewell. "It is very sad to see that this really was the last Secret Garden Party ever," said Rendle. "It's been a true pleasure to work with such a brilliant production team who share our passion for really pushing production values as high as possible. Not only have we at Vortex successfully achieved this, but it's become a defining attribute of the festival itself: everything from sound, to light, to video production has consistently exceeded expectations year on year."

It's a sentiment shared by Jefferies. "Audio Feed started with the support of Secret Garden Party," he said. "Jo Vidler one of the original founders and James Brennan the Technical Production Manager took faith in us to provide the dance music systems across site. Our company wouldn't be what it is today without them."

In addition to this, Jefferies continued, the inclusive spirit of SGP extended far beyond the paying public; it permeated every level of the production process. "Many people have said

to me that when they have worked there it's felt like a really tight family of crew, and have always been privileged to be a part of it," he explained. "Of course, we are sad to see it go, but are thankful for the influence it's had on us and the dramatic influence it's had on the UK festival circuit."

It's, one suspects, precisely this legendary purity of spirit that Fellowes aims to preserve by calling time on SGP now. With the party's ever expanding popularity beginning to test its boutique-festival status to the limit, this "senseless act of beauty" (as he describes the move) means everyone involved can leave on a high, while the sweet taste of a happy success still lingers. But, as Fellowes hints in his farewell statement, there may yet be more to come from the SGP team: "Think of it more as 'Dylan goes electric' than our Altamont," he said. "So, watch this space for the phoenix rising from the ashes..."

TPI

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