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Taking science to festivals: engaging the public where they least expect it

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Over the past several years, a team based around the ATLAS Experiment at CERN in Geneva has organised public engagement and education activities at a variety of non-scientific venues. These have included the Montreux Jazz Festival (Montreux, Switzerland), the Bluedot Festival (Jodrell Bank, UK), the WOMAD Festival (Charlton Park, UK), Moogfest (Durham, NC, USA), and the Sofia Music Weeks in Bulgaria, with discussions on-going with a major European music festival as well as a festival in the United States. The goal of this effort is to engage new audiences who normally would not be drawn to science festivals and to investigate our ability to communicate scientific messages to broad, diverse audiences.

The results have been impressive, as measured through attendance (example: the first Physics Pavilion at WOMAD received 4500 visitors over 3 days and such was the success that a return invitation was received immediately for 2017 with additional space, resulting in an increased footfall of ~5500), and enthusiasm of the audience and the scientists hosting the activities. We describe the presentation material and format, the hands-on workshops, and other methods employed, as well as lessons learned on how to best optimise audience engagement. The concept can be reproduced for other festival-type environments, and adapted to suit the particular audience demographic and format of the festival.

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