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Are You Having a Laugh? Comedy and Festivals in the 21st Century

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Humour manages to span the actual and the virtual in its eclectic and paradoxical potential, as playing and festivals do. Like that of festivals its power is ambivalent and transgressive.

(Crociani-Windland, 2011: 182)

Humour and comedy are emergent topics for academic researchers whose work is illuminating our understanding of the power and purpose of humour and comedy for people and society (Lockyer and Pickering, 2005; Jeffries, 2014). However, much of this output discusses the impact of humour and comedy itself and little has been written about it in the context of a festival. This chapter takes as its focus two established and successful festivals: the *International Festival of Comics (FIBD)* in Angoulême, France; and *Dave's Leicester Comedy Festival (DLCF)* in England.²

This choice reflects several factors. The first is that the authors have had personal experience of both, Radošević with *FIBD*, and Maughan with *DLCF*. These personal insights have been aligned with selected theoretical perspectives to provide an analysis which seeks to draw out factors of relevance to those studying and/or working in a festival, in particular how a festival and its management culture need to change through time and with time (life cycle theory); the relationship of a festival to its artistic and cultural roots (liminal/liminoid effects); and the impact of commercial culture on both.

Comedy and the desire to laugh are universal. The cartoonist Robert Mankoff discussed the distinction between humour and comedy in the following way: "all comedy has humour, but not all humour is comedy. Humour is the much broader category of anything that may make us laugh, such as a loud fart at a funeral, which is funny but not comedy. Comedy is a form of professional entertainment, consisting of jokes and sketches intended to make people laugh" (Mankoff, 2014). The works of Aristophanes, born in 446 B.C., are noted for their political satire and abundance of sexual innuendo, features that we easily recognise today in humour based comics and stand-up comedy. The history of contemporary comics is traced back to artists such as Hogarth and subsequently to satirical magazines of the nineteenth century. Comedy as a feature of performance has a special place in theatre, dance and music, and of course in the UK within the music hall