

Encounter 09 – Back By Popular Demand.

1. By Sharron Hardwick

Encounter 09 was back by popular demand on Saturday May 9th at Folly Farm. Over 600 people gathered for exclusive use of Europe's largest indoor vintage fun fair, followed by a celebration with Northern Ireland's international singer and song writer, Andi Oakes (42).

Encounter Wales had a booming start with Encounter 08. Their vision is to reach the young people of Pembrokeshire, and their families, through events that are relevant to their culture and that they can enjoy with their friends.

Steph Tindall, Encounter Wales team and youth worker said: “Because everyone enjoyed Encounter 08 they felt confident inviting their friends and families to Encounter 09, knowing it would be a great night for all the family.”

There was a real party atmosphere with Mexican waves, bubbles and UV glow bands in the theatre. The man with the vision for Encounter 08, Steve Lee, welcomed the buzzing crowd, handing out prizes in an 'Ant and Dec' style game.

Andi Oakes was joined by Coventry's Ant and Tom from “**NEXUS**”; Dan and Robbie from Bristol's **New Generation Music**, also members of “**ONOFF SWITCH**”: playing Withybush show ground on 21st November; while Neyland's Sue Lee sang backing vocals.

Tess Francis' (7) favourite part of the night was the singing: “It was fun, it was kind of like rock music but with nice singing.” Youngsters Becky, Sophie and Dionne Bower said: “the band were amazing!”

Events in his own life influenced songs from Andi's latest Album: “**Close to me**”. Performing his number 1 single: “**Not Perfect**”, Andi said : “I thought God wanted me to be perfect. I realised that's not what God wants, he just wants us to trust him.”

Andi's emotions were evident as he sang: “**Lord It's You**”, which he wrote a week before his dad's death. A follower of Jesus since 16, it was only after his dad's death that Andi understood what it was to lean on God: “All in my life was stripped away. I lived for two years with clinical depression. It seemed like God was asking me who I was relying on. I thought I was relying on God, but I was wrong.”

Andi concluded with a message of encouragement: “If you let God love you, it drives out fear; then you'll do more naturally the things that God wants you to do. Remember God loves you, leave tonight with that resounding in your ears.”

Andi's honest message impressed young Tess Francis: “It was good how Andi could talk about his past and not be afraid that people might not understand.” Jane Roach said “I loved every minute of tonight. When Andi shared his struggles with depression, I know from personal experience how difficult it is when you feel like that, to find where God is. It takes time for it to pass, you need to hang on to the hope that God's still there. You'll come out of it, then you'll realise 'His' everlasting arms are holding you up.”

Shedel Goddard said: “Andy showed us how we don't need to strive to have a relationship with God. It's not by good works, it's by understanding God's love, straight off.”

If encouraging young people was the aim of the night, then 17 year old Steven Bird's comments demonstrate

the success of the vision: “I enjoyed myself and really got into the songs. My eyes looked up more than what they used to and I got in touch with God and all that. I did enjoy myself and my eyes opened.”

To find out more about Encounter Wales, Andi Oakes and “NGM” and “ON Off SWITCH” visit www.encounterwales.org join Encounter Wales on Facebook or call **01646 602319**.



