

Audience Development Case Study



Leasachadh nan Ealan Gàidhlig

Developing the Gaelic Arts

St Kilda: A European Opera - June 2007

Background

St Kilda: A European Opera was inspired by the lives of the people of St Kilda. It was a:

- ◆ cross-media, music-theatre and film production involving live performance, pre-recorded film projection and live satellite linkage with St Kilda
- ◆ exploration of St Kilda's place in our collective European memory
- ◆ major international co-production performed on 22 and 23 June 2007 in five European venues simultaneously (Scottish performance held in Studio Alba, Stornoway)
- ◆ unique event with all six locations linked by live satellite connection to St Kilda.

The Project was staged by a trans-national consortium of five European partners

- ◆ Proiseact Nan Ealan was lead-body with overall responsibility for the Project and Executive Producer for the Scottish and St Kilda aspects of the production
- ◆ Lew Bogdan, Director of Le Phenix in Valenciennes, France was the European Executive Producer
- ◆ Simultaneous versions of the production were staged five locations in France (Valenciennes), Belgium (Mons), Germany (Düsseldorf), Austria (Hallstatt) and Scotland (Stornoway).

Objectives

- ◆ Ensure local population feel involved in the project / event (Scottish production)
- ◆ Ensure family experience available at reasonable cost (Scottish production)
- ◆ Ensure maximum exposure to live event
- ◆ Develop new audiences for Gaelic Arts

Strategy and Tactics

- ◆ Co-ordinate St Kilda week events across Scotland to raise awareness and allow maximum amount of people the chance to experience the project.
- ◆ Staggered pricing scale to allow the project to remain a premium event at an appropriate price but to ensure that anyone who wanted to experience the project was not put off by price alone.
- ◆ Webcast live performance of the show to enable users worldwide to watch the performance live online or to watch again throughout the week.
- ◆ Web based web campaign encouraging first time attenders

Outcomes

St Kilda Week events

Street Theatre – Seagulls – Two human sized seagulls were used as a publicity stunt to kick start St Kilda week. They were accompanied by 2 members of the St Kilda team who used this as an opportunity to talk to people on the streets about the project and hand out leaflets for the live show and other complementary events. It enabled the project to reach a wide demographic of people in Stornoway – not just regular arts attenders – and to create a little bit of excitement about the project, in particular amongst the young people. **Around 1000 people saw the seagulls on the 16th June.**

Workshops and Youth Theatre – Artair Donald held workshops for schools and young people at An Lanntair. Schools groups came along and created work based on St Kilda using music, song, movement and drama. This allowed the project to reach a younger audience – over 70 children came to workshops. A director's workshop was also held at the studio – giving those interested a chance to speak to the director, watch some of the rehearsal and see the set.

Some members of Drama na h-Oigridh were also working with Artair throughout the week on creating a piece of street theatre based on St Kilda which was then shown twice a day in the town centre. Around 130 people saw the street theatre in Stornoway, again attracting audience who aren't typical theatre attenders and raising awareness of the live show.

Webcast – The Friday night performance was filmed and webcast live with over 1000 viewers watching online via the BBC – again extending the reach of the project. A further 2400 people watched the performance online over the following week. The filmed version was also sent to venues around Scotland for showing on the Saturday night, including An Lanntair – again reaching wider audiences in Scotland with webcast reaching around the world.

Other events included talks, book events, film showings and an exhibition – all bringing in additional audiences. In total, complementary events enabled an extra 2525 people in Stornoway to experience the production – increasing the audience in Scotland by 5 times.

Tickets

In order to ensure that the audience was made up of as many locals as those travelling in for the event, an early bird ticket deal was offered to residents of the Western Isles, again giving them a sense of ownership of the event. This was successful and a large number of residents took up on this. Of attendees 61% were from Lewis.

Prices were also staggered and offered concessions. Because a premium price was charged an extremely cheap preview was offered on Thursday night to offer anyone who couldn't afford the full price, an opportunity to watch the show before anyone else. They could also watch the webcast for £5 in An Lanntair.

Web campaign

Over 4000 people watched video footage via Youtube, a Myspace and Flickr pages were also set up to reach new audiences via these popular social networking sites.

From April to August 2007 the website received 10336 hits from unique visitors, who looked at 58, 719 pages in total. Of these an average 69% were new visitors to the site, mainly coming from search engines such as google, the BBC website, and referrals as well as direct visitors. The majority of visitors during this period were from across Europe, however there were also 629 from the Americas, 182 from Oceania, 49 from Asia and 30 from Africa – showing the global spread of interest in the project and the international use of the website.

New audiences

St Kilda was a wholly Gaelic production, but interestingly 40% of respondents had no Gaelic at all, with another 19% stating that they spoke a little or knew a few words. The project had aimed to target non Gaelic speaking audiences and to introduce them to the Gaelic arts and the language in general – and this 59% (including those with only a little Gaelic) indicates that this objective was achieved.

27% of respondents they had never attended a Gaelic arts event before, showing that almost a third were new attenders – again signifying audience development by attracting non arts attenders. Of these new attenders, a further 86% stated that this experience would encourage them to attend another Gaelic arts event – which is hugely positive in terms of building new audiences. More bilingual information and assistance for non Gaelic speakers and learners would have been beneficial before the performance, and there was some feedback from those who found it difficult to follow however overall even those with no Gaelic at all felt they could take something from the performance and many positive reactions from this audience were heard.