

Information Seminar: Theatre - Live and Digital

Jessica Fuller, Director, **Platform Ireland**
Ron Inglis, Director, **Regional Screen Scotland**
Linda Crooks, Administrative Director, **Traverse Theatre**, Edinburgh

Siobhán Bourke (Co-director, Irish Theatre Institute): Good morning everybody. What I thought I would do in the context of introducing this session this morning was to essentially lay out to you why it is we're having this first session on Theatre – Live and Digital. Why we decided that the first session should be about this. The main reason really is that when Jane Daly and I led The Touring Experiment for the Arts Council, with Temple Bar Cultural Trust, which spent 18 months looking at touring in Ireland, one of the key recommendations of that report – which is available on the Arts Council's website if people wish to look at it again – was that there should be an audience-centred approach to touring in Ireland. One of the components of the audience centred approach that we felt really needed to be looked at was to continue to research and reflect on how audiences consume the arts, to use that terrible verb. How audiences engage with the arts, and how audiences access the arts.

What we recommended in The Touring Experiment was that there would be this kind of ongoing evaluation, and we mentioned that this might work – in the context of venues in Ireland – it might work in the context of having large scale touring shows that maybe wouldn't tour literally to your venue, but might come in to you virtually. It might be work that would be of a sufficient kind of brand status that would be accessible to you. In the report we mentioned the Metropolitan Opera. We said these things are happening and there are other things happening online and maybe we should keep an eye on it.

And that was 2008. In the last year we became acutely aware that so much has become available in the theatre world now, digitally. And it's not just in terms of things being beamed out to cinemas and to some theatres, stuff is coming on the internet and stuff is also being repackaged. Just some examples of that which I thought would be of interest to reflect upon. And they're not just theatre; they cross dance and music. They are, in an Irish context: many people know that Philip King did live from the church in Dingle the Snow Patrol concert that went out, that in a sense was broadcast. He's working very closely with an infrastructural company called InTunes about the possibility of having more work be broadcast in this way. Opera Ireland has worked with Jessica Fuller and Platform Ireland in the past, also about broadcasting via satellite some of their work. And I read recently in the papers that Smock Alley, The Gaiety School of Acting, have also formed an alliance with one of the infrastructure broadband providers to also look at having some of their work go.

But I suppose when we actually look around the world and the work that all of us are probably very familiar with is the work of the National Theatre. If you go on the website, which I have up here, and you go into it, what you will see is a variety of work. You will see that it's heavily branded. The one that many of us know is *Phèdre*. *Phèdre* was beamed into the Irish Film Institute. When you look at the site you'll see that 200,000 people watched that live broadcast, about 200 of whom were in the IFI. But 200,000 people. When you go into the National Theatre's website you'll see a map of the world that shows you where it went out. It played in a cinema network in the UK called the Picture House Chain. It played across Scandinavia, many, many, venues in Estonia, Finland, Sweden and Norway. It played in Iceland. It played in a few places in Central Europe and a few in America.

I suppose in some ways what we had thought when we were doing The Touring Experiment – it's kind of this idea – that large-scale work would be beamed out live into various places. We were thinking that maybe when an Irish show would be played on Broadway, that may be coming back into some of the regional centres in Ireland. Or maybe something from London would come back, or maybe we would send something direct from Ireland abroad. More recently, in terms of a completely different scale, there's been a very interesting piece that happened during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, which many of you will probably know about as well, called Traverse Live, and Linda will speak about this. But what is really interesting about that project was that there were five writers, two of whom were Irish, the work was specifically commissioned for it, and the scale is completely different to the *Phèdre* scale.

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The final part of the whole thing is what I thought was kind of interesting as well, in that in The Touring Experiment we had said to keep an eye on how audiences are engaging with it, is that when the National Theatre's *Phèdre* was broadcast, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, they were brought in to do a piece of research, and the research was around how do audiences react to the live performance vis a vis the broadcast performance. They ask qualitative questions on the experience. Did people still empathise with the characters, did they engage with the story, did they engage with the drama, what brought them there. Lots of questions on what brought them there. That piece of research is only about ten pages and is also available. Ron may speak about that later.

So, that's why we thought for today it would be really interesting to have some speakers address some of these issues in the context of, is this an audience development initiative. If you look on the websites of some of these places it seems to be housed under audience development. But if you actually look at some of the writing about it, like say the Guardian and the piece that they did on the Traverse, or some of the writing that's been done in the newspapers on the National Theatre, there's discussion about, is this a whole new hybrid art form? Will it have a whole other engagement with audiences? There was a sense for us in ITI that we've always maintained that touring is absolutely key for what companies here do in terms of having a return for the work. To get the work out to the biggest audience. Maybe we needed to have some sense of engaging with that and looking at the possibilities of new technologies. There's another initiative that some of the London theatres are involved in, the Donmar being one of them, where they're actually recording the shows at a very high standard and they're not necessarily being broadcast but they're going on DVD packs. So you buy box sets of shows. And they're in active pursuit of that as a kind of commercial opportunity.

One of the things that came up in discussions with the three speakers today is that there are huge issues around what's going to be an appropriate business model for this. What's the appropriate artistic model for it? How can people make it work for them? What are the issues of scale? Who are the appropriate people to really deliver it?

I'd like to play a very short clip if this works for me, before we start with our first speaker.

[video clip]

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Siobhán Bourke: What strikes me first is that it sounds like it's in the cinema, doesn't it? Also I think if you do the analysis of the names, Helen Mirren has a huge background in film, Danny Boyle is a big cinema name, so it's quite interesting. I just thought I'd show that to let people get some sense of what that was about.

So our first speaker this morning is Jessica Fuller. Jessica manages her own company, Still Point Productions, and is the key developer of Platform Ireland. I'll just say to you while Jessica sets up, on your seats we've left short biogs on the three speakers, and we've also given definitions of some of the terms. This is an area that is really quite problematic, trying to agree what the various terms mean. There's only five or six there but just to give people a sense of what we mean when we use these terms Digital, Simulcast, Alternative Content and I hope that is of use. *[These definitions can be found at the end of this document.]*

The other thing I should say to you is that many of you know that the Arts Council, the Film Board and the Department have been involved in the last 18 months to two years with a digitisation project. They currently have a round to spend about €500,000 on the provision of digital projectors in cinemas and arts centres. So a number of arts centres currently have these 2K projectors and they will be the Town Hall in Galway and the Mermaid in Bray. Then the cinemas that would have them would be the IFI, obviously, and the Lighthouse Cinema. The mobile cinema also has a digital projector. There is also a desire that in time there will be a regional network that will have 2K projectors which would mean that this kind of material can be broadcast into venues.

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Jessica Fuller: I do apologise. That's technology for you – the standard line at a digital presentation. We've a long way to go, but there's lots of fun on the way. Bear with me for two moments everybody. Can I say thank you, by the way, to everybody in ITI while I'm setting this up, for giving us the opportunity.

Siobhán Bourke: The other thing is that at the end of this session we'll have a roving mike and we'll take questions. Everybody's very keen to get involved in the conversation about this. I would say we've passed the innovation stage and we're in the kind of early adapter stage of this technology, so there will be lots of questions and hopefully there will be some answers.

Jessica Fuller: Well thank you everybody, I will start. I'm Jessica Fuller. I've been working professionally in the arts and culture sector for twenty-odd years now. I'm also a punter. I go to stuff and I want to be in the audience. I should preface what I'm saying by saying that what this is about is, the arc is about the originators of work right through to the audience who view and engage with that work. That's the arc I'm interested in. We're in a recession. We have half a million people on social welfare at the moment. That's €200 a week. We've got to find a way of still engaging those people who are under-resourced. We're under-resourced. We have to find new ways. Art is not going to stop being made, so we have to find other ways of engaging with the audiences and to keep that train going.

I've also worked in the music industry and music publishing. I have a publishing company with my husband. Reasonably successful. I have worked in film and television. Somewhere in all of that mix over the last few years I identified what I think might be an opportunity for the niche professional arts sector in this country. I have to preface this with a warning. What I'm about to talk about is not about replacing the live experience because that's one of the fears in this country, that we'll take away the live experience. It's about opening another door. You can see there that there are opportunities and we want to enhance those opportunities and exploit positively the opportunities that are sitting right in front of our noses. Mary Cloake addressed the issue of innovation. If we are going to truly innovate we've got to get out of this sector and start engaging cross-sectorally with ICT, with the legal sector, unfortunately, with aspects of more commercial elements of the entertainment world, as it's called. A lot of the time we're doing that but we need to maybe raise it above the line to make it really work for us in what are some very challenging times.

Now that I've got that out of the way, a bit of background. I'm born and bred in Dublin, but I now live in Carrick-on-Shannon and I don't get to half as much as I want to see. I have friends and family who are sometimes more home-ridden for whatever reason, financial or family reasons. I have internet and I have television, but at the moment I am really only getting a very limited access to the kind of content that I know exists, particularly in the Irish arts and culture world. I can turn on Sky Arts and I see some wonderful stuff. I watch Balcony TV, we have MuZu, we have an awful lot of stuff. And we have our national broadcaster, who we keep throwing cabbages at for not adequately documenting the world of arts and culture in this country. We can't keep throwing cabbages at it. Our sector, the arts and culture sector, is responsible for documenting and capturing its own world and bringing it to audiences. The national broadcaster doesn't have the exclusive remit to do that, and we now have the technological capacity to work with the audio-visual industry to make alternative and new methods of bringing our work to audiences. That's only a small range of stuff that I can flick on at the flick of a button or watch it on my iPhone if I want to.

So somewhere in all of that mix – and I do again preface it with, this is a 'might'. It won't solve all of the world's problems. There are elements in it that might work, and we are at very, very foetal stages of development, I would say. It's a big long road and some of it will work. Some of you in the room have already worked with me on the trial of Platform Ireland, and what it is is essentially a website or a channel. It is a doorway into delivering the work that is work by the professional arts and cultural community, and then work that is documented by the audio-visual industry about that world. We have a middle centre, and we try and bring that work via an audio-visual mechanism or technological mechanism to audiences in Ireland and also internationally.

Now, how on earth do we do that? Effectively, the idea of Platform Ireland is simply an arts channel. It is a Sky Arts, or it is a Current TV or it is an RTE Arts or maybe a Setanta Arts some time in the future, I don't know. Move over Setanta Sports. What the idea is that it is a professionally curated arts channel that presents and showcases professionally produced content about the professional Irish arts, culture and creative sectors, as we merge the definitions of what we do in the creative worlds. We bring that work, be it a two-minute interview with Garry Hines from Druid, or be it a three-hour opera from Opera Ireland and everything else between and betwixt. We bring it to audiences who might want to see what we're about in this fabulous world. Both in Ireland and worldwide. We aggregate it in and we distribute the content out. It is critical to point out that it should be managed by an editorial board that has the capacity to define policy

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around what is determined to be of sufficient quality to deliver to audiences. But at the end of the day, what we want to do is to engage, to entertain and to inform.

This idea was mooted first in 2005. Channel 4 tried to do it in 2004, Setanta Arts bought it out, and it became a digital channel on television because technology hadn't moved on at that stage. We didn't have YouTube, we had nothing like that. I started research on it and what I call AP, which is the analysis paralysis period. I sat down with a pen, and didn't do an awful lot other than scribble. We created a sample site last year and that happened because we got together with forty organisations from the sector and we got backing from the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport and we launched a sample site. The basic elements of that through the process where we were trying to trial how a channel on the internet might on earth work, and that has been a lot of fun.

I would say to everybody, I've had an extremely sharp learning curve. I've had to learn a lot of new languages, particularly when you're talking to technical people who think you're completely thick because you don't understand an awful lot of stuff. What I have discovered very much in the last few years when talking to people in the Irish arts and cultural sector, we know about social media, we know about video channels, but we're very scared about the language and we have an awful lot to learn. So there's opportunity there, but we need investment in resources. We need investment in learning.

As part of that learning and investment and model development, what I did was, we did satellite production so we could model proof the idea, so we'd get cameras into a venue and we could actually deliver something to audiences. So we did that in 2008 and in 2009. We live simulcasted Opera Ireland's opening night of *Madame Butterfly* and *Don Giovanni*. We did it to Temple Bar, who were great partners, and we did it to Liberty Hall and up to a hotel in Smithfield, to enormous success. We concept-proofed that we can get in, we can work with the production company, we can work with all of the technical team and we can bring in the audio-visual team and merge those worlds. So there's innovation at the get go. We have all of that documented if people are interested. We delivered it to audiences capacity-full in Temple Bar. They couldn't get the people in under the arches to watch it on the night. Now it was free. We're good at that in Ireland. That's something we have to change actually. I don't know what it's like in other countries, but we've got to set our rates a little bit higher and not budge.

What we were trying to say was, ok we can do it by satellite, now let's look at technology. We set up the trial site and we started pulling content in, as I say, from a range of production companies. Thank you to all in the room here who engaged with it. We pulled stuff initially through YouTube and Vimeo. The objective was to give a working example. We did a mini-audit of available Irish cultural content that has already been produced, never mind the stuff that we could commence producing. I tell you, there's some block of stuff there. We're working with the RTÉs of this world, with the TG4s of this world, the independent producers in the audio visual industry and saying, work with us, and then what we're trying to say is that there's a whole world out here, you know. Start joining dots and let's work together. They have the skill set to produce professional broadcast-quality work. We are the artists who originate that work. So we need to merge a bit if we're interested in bringing that work that way to audiences.

There are the aims of the trial. I wanted to establish whether this should be explored further or not. We achieved it. The potential functions are there. We can talk through it. We can roll them off. It's everything we're trying to do in terms of what we want to deliver to our arts audiences. I've met with 1,500 organisations in the last year to do this, cross-sectorally. It's on a list. If you talk about innovation and merging of worlds, both nationally and internationally, everybody has said yes, except within the arts sector. The extraordinary reluctance within the core arts sector is something we've all got to start looking at, and get over our fear, I would say, and start working a little bit more together. But I have ICT going, yes we can do it, we can deliver tomorrow. I have the legal agencies saying, yes let's do it but we'd like a lot of money beforehand. Etcetera, etcetera. There's a document about that trial available on request.

We moved forward in July. We got noted in a green paper, which was thanks to Grainne Millar in Temple Bar Cultural Trust driving that agenda, and we're working on a business plan at the moment to drive the next area, which is to concept-proof aspects of how an arts channel might work, being able to deliver it through the internet and onwards.

So I come back to the original, Platform Ireland. We know we want to get audiences, but how might that look. We've started a domestic arts news service. It's a trial. It's got funding from the Arts Council and a number of local authorities. That's on the site and you can all look at it. We're looking at how we might actually start telling people all about our world, audio-visually. How we document it, and how we archive that work for the future. I won't go into details, but I'm more than happy to talk to people after. The next thing is live production, and we're doing another live production with a

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production company which I cannot name, but who have experience in the area. We haven't got the funding as yet sorted, but within one month's time we'll be doing a live streaming of an opening night. Delivering the production live exclusively through platformireland.ie to the internet for the whole world. It's a trial, so it's free for everybody, because there will be mistakes made, but that's how you learn. Learning by doing.

We're also going to take it to the next stage, and this has never been done except in the sporting area. We're working with a number of venues, internationally and throughout Ireland to deliver to large screen. Again the technology of this is quite new, so we're digging roads with the fibre network providers to try and get the upload and download speeds of broadband adequate. So I've gone into the building trade as well in the last few weeks. Again, more about that, because Ron will contextualise that with satellite.

And finally we'll be looking at archive development, because that's about rooting out what work is there and what it is going to cost us to take work that is sitting in archive, convert it, bring it out, show it to people, and then what it costs to keep paying people, because one of the things we've discovered particularly though this work is that the Irish arts sector is quite happy to keep flinging its work out for free. It is quite happy to put stuff up on YouTube. It's not clearing the work. It's not paying people residual payments for the work that is going out. And then we all scream and rant and shout and say it's not fair. We're not being treated fairly. But if we don't start setting the agenda for fair remuneration of our work, we're going to continue to exploit ourselves badly and we'll continue to be exploited at more commercial levels if we don't start looking at that. We won't solve it in a day, but these are the kind of issues we've looked up.

So we've content issues, the issue of available, suitable, professionally produced, legally cleared content that has a lasting current value as cultural IP. The quality of original live work – you know, we've got stuff that's good enough to put live in theatres and in spaces or out on the streets. Is it good enough then to translate, and can it be reproduced to an adequate delivery quality to bring to audiences, warts and all? We've to look at rationales. We're doing all of this. I'll just say one thing, that it is way more complex than I'm presenting here, but it is doable. You break it down into small parts. If we work together. Obviously, standards, policy, service provision. I'm acutely aware, again, of talking to audiences, theatre companies in particular, who now suddenly have a new layer in their organisations where they're trying to produce work, generate income and now suddenly they have to do online media work. So they have their administrators now trying to actually be marketing and promotion personnel online and have a whole other sub-company managing. I don't know, have you that experience? Where you go, god damn it, the release should have gone up. We have to manage Facebook. We have to get something on YouTube, etc. I think in terms of the models of how organisations have been built up to now, we have to look at how we re-resource that, maybe.

Legals, legals, legals. Linda will talk about that, I am sure, because she has hit similar walls to us. The financial, the technical, Ron will come in on this. All of these aspects have to be looked at and we're looking at them in great detail presently. What I would say is that we need to review how we create, manage and deliver work to audiences wherever they are, and I know that Una Carmody is looking at this in great detail with organisations at the moment. There are additional and alternative ways of doing that, so we need to explore those. But we need to make sure we protect the originators of that work, and that's where the real detail is, and that's research and slow work. The potential benefits I'll skip on, because I'll talk of those again. Again, we're talking about the training, the up-skilling, the re-resourcing. How the sector engages with audiences and vice versa. The trials and the tribulations. I have this on my wall, because it's where we're at [*shows slide on screen*]. It a picture of where potentially we're able to get to, but it's a long way away. It's an iceberg, if nobody can see it, with a tip at the top of it.

Essentially, from this point forward, I'd say taking Mary Cloake's point about innovation: engage. Let's start talking. Let's not be afraid of looking really silly because we don't understand what digital means or what the internet means or the world wide web. The ICT sector wants to engage with us, and there's a great opportunity in all of this. The sports sector is interested in engaging with us, believe it or not.

So I'll leave it with an invitation. Those of you who are working with us, please continue to do so. You'll be hearing from us very soon. We've re-coded the site only this week and put up some new stuff, and we'll be back to you. Those of you who haven't started working with us, please talk to us. Patiently, is the key. Thank you to those who have engaged and provided money to date. I'm happy to answer questions about how it has been funded. I'll leave it at that. Thank you for listening.

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Siobhán Bourke: We're going to take questions at the end, so I think we'll just move straight to Linda Crooks. Linda is now with the Traverse Theatre. She's been there for the last seven months as the Administrative Director, and prior to that she was in the Royal Lyceum as their Producer. She's going to speak about the recent Traverse Live.

Linda Crooks: Good morning everybody. I'm going to do a bit of a journey, so bear with me. It's less structured than Jessica's I'm afraid.

Basically I want to take you back to my motivation and why I'm doing what I'm doing. About 25 years ago, actually probably a bit more, I was working in the NHS and was very frustrated and saw an advert for a job in the Traverse. I'd been very aware of the Traverse, but not, I would say, a regular theatre-goer. I came from the country, so it was difficult to go on a regular basis. I was lucky. I got the job. I arrived on the first day and they didn't know what to do with me and stuck me in a rehearsal room. That was the beginning of a relationship, a captivating, enchanting and life-changing experience. Everything I've done since then is about trying to get people to see and experience what I've experienced. To have that life-changing moment.

There have been many opportunities, many different diversions along the way. I did spend some time working with a touring theatre company and we tried to get a dance piece with that company commissioned for television. It was commissioned, however it was very unsuccessful because dance doesn't really work if you can't see the dancers' feet. So that was my first experience of trying to reconcile very different cultures and not quite making it work. Other experiences involved working with the South Bank Show, again trying to reconcile live theatre with a broadcast medium, all the pressures that involves. And inevitably a lot of toys got thrown out of the pram along the way. But, again, trying to fulfill this ambition to do what I'm doing to as wide an audience as possible.

I was talking to Joe earlier on and he said, why did you leave the Lyceum to go to the Traverse? Because I'd left it behind, and I'd remembered it as this very lovely, very warm, cosy jumper, nice pace of life, manageable. Everything was a different pace. Manageable. That was, I'd forgotten, 25 years ago. It's a very, very different way now. I started back, as Siobhán said, seven months ago, and the pace is very, very different. I have to be a very different being, animal, to what I would have had to be 25 years ago.

One of the first things Dominic Hill, the Artistic Director, mentioned in passing was that for the festival he wanted to do a live broadcast of the breakfast shows. So I sort of listened to that, but didn't exactly take on board what it meant. Said, yes, yes, I'll get on with the rights, thinking how the hell am I going to take five new plays with agents and writers that I don't really have an established relationship with and say, come with us, come on this journey and trust us. We're doing it for the best possible reasons. The work will be out there. We're going to be at the cutting edge of digital technology. It's absolutely right for the Traverse brand for us to be doing this. Weeks passed, months passed, and I still hadn't reconciled the crucial issue of the rights. And I had a big problem with it.

Dominic had delivered for me something that I'd waited for my whole life. A project that was actually going to promote what we do to as wide an audience as possible. And in particular, rehearsed readings, so it was work in progress. Getting a bit of the magic that captivated me in the first instance. They let me in. and I fundamentally believe that if we can let people in, then the value that we have will just grow exponentially. So Dominic had presented me with this, but it was fraught with all sorts of issues.

Our co-producers on this were a company that hadn't quite come in to being, and Dominic's relationship with them was through Don Boyd, a very well established Scottish filmmaker who most notably worked with Jarman, but he's been active for at least 40-odd years. So he and Dominic hit it off, and Dominic said to me, you'll love Don. He's just like me. Indeed they are very similar. They are geniuses, they are entrepreneurial, they're adventurers. But if you're the person who's got to try and make that work, as much as you love them and understand the vision, the practicalities get in the way. The other thing for me was also essentially protecting – remember I'd only just come back into the Traverse – protecting the essential relationship with our service providers, the writers. To take them on this journey. In actual fact, I have to say that the groups that we engaged with, the actors, the writers, the directors, all signed up for this. I think it says a lot for the Traverse's brand and for the reputation of Dominic and his relationship with writers in particular.

But again going back to what Jessica was saying, there's so much we don't know. There are so many difficulties along the way. And on the back of this I've become very aware of the value of the content and not undervaluing what it is that we have to sell. We do it brilliantly, and it's notable that on the back of this exercise with High Brow, we have been approached by Sky, we have been approached by another television production company, and I'm just becoming very,

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very nervous about what value we place on what we do. How do we quantify it? What's the benchmark for it? We're so grateful, in the arts, when anybody gives us a bit of attention, we tend to go, oh please, love us. We're delighted you love us. Have more of us. We've got to be so careful because we're working in shark-infested waters. I should say that I've also worked with the Film Festival in Edinburgh, so I have a bit of an insight into the very, very different cultures.

Again, just another thing to contextualise, that the changes in Scotland with Creative Scotland coming in to being – Creative Scotland is of course the merger of Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen. Anecdotally, there was an attempt to make this happen several years ago. Probably about 20 years ago or so. In the belief that these bedfellows, of course they'll stick together, and of course – what's the word you used about people coming together and there being a natural symbiosis? Synergising. Yes, but you've got to be careful of arranged marriages, because there is a long way to go before you learn to love one another, and it might never happen. Just be mindful of that.

The rights thing is the thing I'm most concerned with. However, I go back to where I started. If this is a means of getting what we do out to as wide a group of people as possible – not just the audience, the punters. I am one too. But to talented people who can see opportunity for themselves to deliver and develop a cultural voice. Who can actually say, I want to be like that, in the way that I did when I walked into that room and saw this new piece of writing being developed. Actors just finding themselves in a room and imagining wonderful things. For me the world comes to Edinburgh and that's a huge learning opportunity for the people of Edinburgh, and the fact that the Traverse is also engaged in this taking stuff out as well is a fantastic forum for people to engage with. Thank you.

Siobhán Bourke: Our final speaker is Ron Inglis. Many people probably know Ron from his work with the Arts Council and Film Board on digital cinema, but he currently works as the Director of Regional Screen Scotland.

Ron Inglis: Thank you. Good morning everyone. Very quickly, because we're running maybe a wee bit behind, I started out in theatre but that became, eventually, cinema. I've got quite a lot of practical experience working in multi-arts venues and it's actually about venues that I want to focus on a little bit here. How this new opportunity can be delivered in venues, what kind of results you might experience as a result of it coming into your venue. I'll maybe start with one or two things about the kind of venue that are taking these live broadcasts. I'm going to concentrate probably more on the satellite provision of things, rather than internet provision.

In the UK, which I'm afraid is the only market that I've got information for really, the New York Metropolitan Opera series is now very well established. Generally speaking the entire season of performances are sold out in advance. Now, that represents for the venues that are taking it, a very considerable amount of new income which is income paid in advance and that helps their business. But very interestingly it's also had a quite nice peripheral benefit to things like Friends schemes and subscription schemes. Any of you who are running venues, you might be interested in this. If you are doing these live broadcasts and you offer your friends or your subscribers a priority booking period, then what you might find is that in fact the number of subscribers or friends goes up quite a bit, because that is the only way they can get tickets for these live events. That has definitely happened. It's been noted, quite a substantial effect that's happened in, particularly, Tyneside Cinema, which is in Newcastle. They've actually been so successful with these things that the performances don't just go in to one of their four auditoria, they've had to extend it into other auditoria, so they're running it in several auditoria at once because it's proving so popular.

Moving to a completely different situation. In Sweden there is a group of community venues, I think it's called *[unclear]*. Apologies because I'm not Swedish and can't say that properly, but I do know the people who run it quite well. They run a large number of venues, and these can be anything from a relatively small hall to maybe over a 1,000 seater. Most of them in rural areas, but some in urban areas. They've been taking New York Metropolitan Opera and playing it very, very successfully. Generally speaking the entire season is selling out in the rural areas for an average ticket price of €18. That is something that is of great benefit to the sustainability of these venues and it allows them to do other things. I think one of the aspects of the live performance that is of importance to venues is that it changes some of your business, so that it can be very profitable if you do it properly, and this allows you to do other things.

About doing it properly, just a couple of brief comments on that. If you are taking a live thing like this, the places that have been successful do emphasise that you must treat it as though it was a real live performance. Your staff must behave as though the people who are performing are actually there. Your audience will expect that kind of level of behaviour, that level of service. Don't just treat it as a piece of film, which some places treat as a bit of a casual thing. Treat it as though it is the real music, theatre, opera or whatever it is that you're putting on. That of course extends to things like your bar, where you can make reasonable extra business from the intervals that you find with these things.

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Again, another little anecdote from Tyneside Cinema. The New York Metropolitan Opera – sorry to keep coming back to that, but that's the most established one – have produced a lot of very, very compelling material that is shown during the intervals. What was happening during the Tyneside screenings was that when the intervals came, the audiences stayed in the cinema and didn't go to the bar. So being entrepreneurial, what they decided to do was to put some large flat screen televisions in the bar to show the material, and now their bar sales are back up. Something just to bear in mind.

But that kind of extra material was one of the things that people were very appreciative of. The kind of behind-the-scenes interviews, contextual discussions with directors or other people, that kind of material which goes along with the performance was found to be of great interest to the audiences and highly appreciated.

I'm not wanting to go on too long because I know we do have a little bit of a time constraint, but I just wanted to briefly go over some of the satellite issues and explain a little bit about what this is. Some of you may already have them, but for those of you who don't, what's proving to be the more common way of delivering this material is through a satellite broadcast. If you want to receive this as a venue, you need to obviously get one of the appropriate satellite dishes installed, and there are planning issues in many cases about putting a fairly large satellite dish on top of your building. The normal size is 1.2 metres. They're not particularly expensive. The whole set-up can be put in for maybe €2,000 or €3,000. It does depend on what system you have already within your venue.

There is a technical quality issue around, and one of the biggest companies dealing with satellites is a company called Arqiva, who are an international organisation, and they specialise in taking material and uploading it to satellite as well as taking it down. Actually they produce this quite useful little guide to alternative content called Going Live, which is on their website. You can download it. They're really becoming the dominant player in a lot of this alternative content. They currently only make their systems available to venues which have the full cinema digital projector equipment. That is a little bit of a problem because that is the rather expensive, extravagant projection equipment. The reason they're doing that at the moment is that it allows them, it allows this company, Arqiva, to operate a system that ensures reliability of these screenings. That's, again, something that's pretty important. If people are paying €20-25 a ticket to see a performance, they don't want it suddenly breaking up or freezing or disappearing. They're wanting a reliable performance. That's what Arqiva are aiming for.

That absolutely isn't the only way of doing it. You can operate on a lower technical standard which requires a good version of the kind of projectors that are being used here. And a good sound system. That can be installed for a comparatively small amount of money. You should be able to do that for about €15,000 to set up a system that would work very well in a rural area, and could produce fantastic service to that community.

The scheduling of some of these performances is another issue that is causing some venues some real difficulties. Everybody wants the Saturday evening slot. The pressure on that from various directions can be considerable. It's quite interesting that NT Live have chosen to go out on Thursday because Friday is the day when new cinema releases start, Thursday is the sort of tail-end of the week in a way. So Thursday is the night that they've chosen, and that's proving reasonably successful in terms of getting in to cinemas, getting in to venues. It's far less easy to take on something like the New York Met, because that is Saturday evening, and cinema film distributors don't like giving up that evening slot. There can be quite a lot of competition around what part of the week you're going to give to these alternative content things.

Just lastly on that one, to point out that with the growth in this, it's a bit of a Wild West situation at the moment in terms of legalities. People have been talking about that. Technicalities. There are no real standards out there. And operationally it's a bit of a Wild West. There are going to be, probably this year, something in the region of about 80 or 90 alternative content events available for venues to take. It's clearly impossible for people to handle all of that. They're going to have to make programming choices about which ones you take. There are constraints out there. If you sign up with one series from a certain provider, that precludes from other series. So it's not an open choice that you're going to be facing. You are going to have to pick and choose and programme, just like you programme anything else.

I think that is all I would want to say at this stage, but I'm very interested in hearing what kind of comments you have. Thank you very much.

Siobhán Bourke: Because we're under severe time constraints at this point I should put it straight out to the floor, and if people have questions they'd like to ask any of our panel members, or pitch in with any ideas, would you mind just saying your name.

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Audience 1: My name is Chris Campbell. I'm with the Royal Court Theatre in London, but I was working at the National Theatre during the setting up of that first NT Live season, and I just wanted to make two very quick points. One is on the selection of the plays to broadcast. I think somebody mentioned the cinematic quality of that commercial, and it's true that it is a cinema commercial, although we did launch the season on the considerable broad shoulders of Dame Helen Mirren, the second show we did was a difficult, comparatively unpopular Shakespeare comedy with no stars in it at all. What I'm saying is we decided, consciously, not to seek a cinema-friendly programming, and they are still selecting plays, almost deliberately for their difficulty from time to time, to make sure it's not confused with an inferior film.

The other thing I wanted to say was that the one area that took us completely by surprise in terms of demand was college towns in the United States of America. All of whom want it. An almost inexhaustible market. And apparently almost inexhaustible resources. Every single college town in the US wants to watch these things, for your information.

Jessica Fuller: Just to come in on that, we're actually just discovering similarly that there is a demand, particularly in the US, for this kind of content in college towns. So Ireland has an enormous opportunity, given our favourite word of the moment, the Diaspora, in particular. But we've got to get good quality content there.

Particularly with resources and capital resources now being looked at, we need to look at how we kit out venues digitally to enable organisations to take in content and deliver content out in a myriad of ways. That is a technical issue and one that needs to be looked at. From a satellite point of view, Arqiva are one of the companies, but we have a number of our own here in Ireland as well. We worked with Nemeton and we worked with a number of other companies who we brought in through Nemeton to do that. These are regionally based, so in an era where we need to start giving jobs, these people are saying yes, we'll work with you, talk to us. So I'd like to make that point as well.

Audience 2: My name is Sarah Durcan and I work with The Corn Exchange. I'm interested to know how it works financially with the rights, particularly with writers and actors. At the moment we are about to present a show in Mexico, and usually when you do a contract with festivals and so on, you're covered with the publicity and so on. Quite late in the day we got a request to broadcast, not just a clip of the show, but the entire show on a new TV channel. So that's a new departure for us and how to deal with that legally and financially, and particularly how to price that as a company is an issue. And how we would follow up on that in years to come, that it can be worked into contracts at an earlier stage and correctly priced. And that there is some comeback for your artists and for your actors in particular. I'm just wondering what is your experience of that and are there any general rules emerging?

Siobhán Bourke: Before you answer that, would you mind if we took a question from Willie White [Project Arts Centre] as well.

Audience 3: Thank you. My question is supplementary to Sarah's, which is, Jessica described the reservation of performing arts companies. I don't think that it's because they think that the internet is going to steal their soul, it's that they have genuine issues around the capital investment, the extra money that's required to make the performance suitable for internet broadcast. Also they have, retrospectively if they want to exploit the works that they've done before, and also prospectively, whole series of new types of legal arrangements that they have to come to both with the writers but also with the performers, designers etc. I think that's the point that they're at. If they can be facilitated moving beyond that, then you might see work being broadcast. There's very little knowledge of that kind in the performing arts sector at the moment.

Linda Crooks: I think Ron's description of it being like the Wild West is very accurate. We are trailblazers, and as such there aren't obvious models for us to refer to. We certainly didn't get it right at the Traverse. I didn't go on too much about the actual practicalities of it. I went on one of my vision things, so I apologise for that. But I think we need help. I think we really do need help to support us through all of the shark-infested waters that we're venturing in to. I was talking about the Creative Scotland model that's come in to being. An intellectual property department would be a very helpful thing to have access to to give you advice as to what you should be looking out for. In terms of our partners, High Brow, they're London-based and they have a very high-powered media lawyer who is on their board and working for them. What chance do I stand against that kind of knowledge and experience? So I think that in answer to your question, the rights thing, I worked very closely with the writers' agents because they had better experience than I did of what to look out for. It became about partnerships, ironically, about working out who could best serve the bigger picture and at the same time trying to protect your own position.

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Jessica Fuller: Yes, it is Wild West, but we do have models or elements of models from other sectors. The music industry is one which has forged this a very long time ago in terms of how it sets its value on a piece of art. The audio-visual industry, likewise has models. There are unions. Now we don't have a visual rights agency. *[unclear]* have been driving at that agenda for a long time. We've been talking to a lot of these, trying to find our way through the muddle. But it's something for the arts sector to start looking at how it sets its value in perpetuity on different platforms, and what value it wants to get out the far side. We're looking at very different terrain here for the arts sector where it's looking at exploitation in its most positive sense, financially, and we've got to learn to put a value on it. We're at a great point of opportunity, I think. Very scary though.

Siobhán Bourke: Wearing my hat as working in television and then working in theatre, the thing that strikes me about it is first of all the costs are enormous, just even to make the project. The Traverse was five cameras. It's a huge undertaking to just capture the material. Then you're doing a live mix, perhaps, if it's going out live. So you've got editing, you've got OB facilities. The cost in just creating the content are enormous, and one has to be able to somehow recoup those. Then there are all the rights issues of course, with the writers and the actors, the whole lot. And the company.

In some discussions I've had with people here there's a lot of talk about what we need to do as a sector is to go look at how sports is organised. The local club championships can be televised by RTÉ or TG4. There has to be payments. How are those payments structured. And then the sell-on rights if they're sold on. Or Setanta do them and they put them out globally. That we should be able to look at what happens in sport, because sport would have the local, the club, the regional, the national and then the sports that go out internationally, and that there may be some ways for us to work that out.

There is also a thing in television, especially, but in film too, this idea that your rights are bought out in perpetuity, in all media in the world, on the globe, forever, ever yet to be determined. So when you sign the contract that is it. That, I suppose is what the really scary bit of it is, is that you are signing away all your rights. The standard thing in Ireland is actually, if you make television drama, you only buy out a few territories. So in theory you should be going back to the actors if that project is sold again to buy out the other territories. Clearly this isn't going to work in a scenario where people are going out the one night to five different countries, and how are we going to buy out those rights.

Jessica Fuller: The marketing one is the model we're looking at. It's a non-exclusive *[unclear]* to as broad an audience as possible. We need to, as a sector, have the legal sector on this, and we need to do battle on it.

Siobhán Bourke: The other side, as far as I'm concerned really, is that we're way too small here. We don't have the resources. We're going to be listening and watching to see how the National Theatre do it. What kinds of arrangements they come to, what would be appropriate to what their doing. Our law is very similar to their law, the entertainment law is more or less the same. I think there will be a lot of watching what goes out, what the first people have done as they've got to the first frontiers. What kinds of resolutions they've arrived at.

Ron Inglis: Can I just add something, again, from the venue point of view. The amount that a venue would normally expect to pay to have this alternative content coming into the venue. It varies obviously, but the sort of rule of thumb that seems to be operating at the moment is that the rental or the fee, rather, is about 50% of your box office is paid for these live events.

Audience 4: I'm Alison McKenna from b*spoke Theatre Company. Chris, you may be able to come back on this, but I was at a conversation where Nick spoke about NT Live and it's still currently a loss leader. It's going really well, but the cost of the cameras – and I don't mean to rain on your parade, because the success seems to be taking projects in the UK and screening them in America, taking things from New York and screening them in London. But the cost of making sure that those cameras are high enough quality, and that the actors involved, the designers involved, that their work is reflected to the best standard it can be, the costs are huge.

It's also part of their deal that they don't go to towns that have theatres, because they don't want to take audiences out of the theatre to give them a seat in the cinema. So what they're trying to do is trial and error, is that they are predominantly trying to go to places that don't have a huge local theatre audiences. And I think I would be interested, because I'm an actor first and foremost, I want to know, what percentage of that money – a lot of Irish actors don't work for huge salaries to begin with. Who's going to make the money here? Actually in terms of contracts, we are one of the few countries that signed up for buy out contracts for actors. It's not normal in the UK, and it doesn't have to be normal

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depending on how your agent approaches it. But I want to know, when that product is sold on, for however long it's sold on for, I can see that the director and the writer are going to have first dibs on it, but where do the artists stand? It doesn't mean that I'm against it. I'm not actually, but I want to know what it means.

Jessica Fuller: It's really important to mention RAAP here – Recorded Artists Actors Performers www.raap.ie the same way that the music industry, you sign up to RAAP and anything that goes out, you can get a claim on it. These are the kinds of models that we need to look at. That you get your money as well through that. It's dependent on the original content. This is where we've got to take responsibility to start looking at what we're signing off on. It's really important.

Siobhán Bourke: I'm awfully sorry guys, but it's now 11.15. I'd like to thank you very much for your contributions.

ENDS

GLOSSARY OF DIGITAL TERMS

Digital theatre

The use of digital technology to distribute and project live theatre. It can be distributed via hard drives and/or satellite and projected using a digital projector.

Live Theatre Streaming

Theatre is filmed live and streamed by satellite, cable or internet live to an audience. Streaming: A technique for transferring data where it is processed as a steady and continuous stream.

Simulcast

Simulcast, shorthand for "simultaneous broadcast" refers to programmes or event broadcast across more than one medium, or more than one service on the same medium, at the same time. Simulcasts can be for one territory or for many.

Alternative Content

This is screening anything in a cinema that isn't a movie, from concert films, to operas, ballets, theatre, and sports events. The screenings can be "live" or "pre-recorded".

Digital equipment

2K projectors: Digital projectors capable of 2K resolution are increasingly being deployed in Ireland. 2K refers to images with 2,048 pixels of horizontal resolution and are DCI standard

DCI compliant

Describes standards and products that meet Hollywood studios' exhibition requirement.

Thanks to the following for assistance with definitions:

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Platformireland.ie

Wikipedia

Webopedia