

tête à tête

Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival 2011

Evaluation



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OCTOBER 2011

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1. Aims of Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival 2011

The following short report considers the overarching aims of the Festival, evaluation results, analysis of how far the aims were reached and recommendations for 2012.

1.1 Aims

- To demonstrate that artistic excellence is encouraged by creating an environment that nurtures, questions and supports.
- To help audience development and artistic planning/continuity by ensuring that the festival takes place at the same time and place each year.
- To use a range of evaluation methods for audience feedback (both on- and off- line) to show audience relevance, public benefit and aid objective artistic development.
- To broaden and deepen the on-line Tête à Tête Festival, so that it fully complements the live event thereby: broadening audience access, acting as a promotional tool for individual artists/companies and offering a way for artists to review and reflect on their work.
- To strengthen partnerships/knowledge exchange within the sector by hosting and facilitating a range of formal and informal networking events and activities.
- To reach a wider audience and break down the perception that opera is 'not for me' – specifically use the *Lite Bite* outside programme to increase audience access to high quality opera and as a mechanism for audience development e.g. to bring new audience into the venue.
- To maintain a challenging programme for the core loyal audience to continue a sense of operatic discovery.
- To offer a support fund for artists/companies who may find the financial/management process to produce work too much. E.g. provide additional stage management, logistical support, petty cash.
- To deliver the Festival successfully, bringing ongoing stability to Tête à Tête by implementing the Tête à Tête Business Plan and Marketing Strategy 2010 – 2013.

2. Outcomes

2.1 Ticket Sales & Attendance

The work was performed "Inside" on 12 days and nights between 4-21st August 2011 at Riverside Studios, Hammersmith. Four studios were used, with a capacity of 150/100/150/30 respectively to show the 55 separate productions.

The 'Outside' programme saw 48 performances during the 4-21st August of 4 separate productions shown in a variety of unusual public spaces and places across West London including parks, shopping centres, markets and pubs. There were also additional performance of these in the Riverside Studio foyer, terrace and bar.

The "On-line" Festival went live on the 4th August and saw weekly taster videos uploaded and every production within the Festival available to watch in full on-line within 4 days of its "Inside" presentation.

As in previous years the pricing strategy had the objective of encouraging access as well as making multiple evening purchases excellent value for money to encourage loyal audiences for a particular production to see other work on the same evening. Ticket prices, were held at 2010 levels, for a single performance at £6 (£4 concession). This was despite general inflationary pressures on fixed costs.

	Opera Festival 2007	Opera Festival 2008	Opera Festival 2009	Opera Festival 2010	Opera Festival 2011
Never Seen Opera	5%	9%	9.5%	5.5%	1%
Never Seen New Opera	19%	25%	30.7%	30%	26%
Auditorium Audience	1700	1937	2963	3038	2674
Outside Audience	N/A	2000	5000	5000	4000
On-line Audience (plays at time of writing)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3068
Additions to Data Base	150	200	215	147	63

Attendance Figures In-side The Theatre

DATE	AUDIENCE	COMPS
Thursday 04/08	163	61
Friday 05/08	139	27
Saturday 06/08	159	35
Sunday 07/08	234	55
Thursday 11/08	224	51
Friday 12/08	264	80
Saturday 13/08	231	54
Sunday 14/08	188	51
Thursday 18/08	322	65
Friday 19/08	304	44
Saturday 20/08	253	56
Sunday 21/08	193	51
Total	2674	630

Of the 630 comps:

- 185 were "Participant Sharing Scheme" tickets were performers of any show can see any show for free but Tête à Tête pays for the ticket so participants do not lose out on box office.
- 75 were from a free ticket reciprocal scheme between WNO and Glyndebourne for their education performers to see each others work.
- 140 were from participants for their own show, most did not give many comps out at all but the figure is inflated by 5 companies wanting many tickets.
- 160 were Tête à Tête management and Front of House volunteers
- 70 were press and bloggers tickets

Attendance Figures Outside

The 'Outside' programme is estimated to have decreased audiences from 5000 in 2010 to 4000 in 2011 Over 600 leaflets were distributed at these performances and anecdotal observation of audiences suggests that a number of the 'Outside' festival audience did attend the 'Inside' venue programme

Viewing Figures of the On-line Festival

At the time of writing the productions uploaded to the Tête à Tête: Library of New Opera from the 2012 Festival have received 3068 viewings in over 70 countries world wide.

2.2 Data Base Records

At the close of the Festival the total database contained 6345 records. (1688 mailing addresses of and 4657 emails). The database size now exceeds the target of 4000 set for 2011 and an increased target for 2012 will need to be considered.

2.3 Website Sales Tracking

Views Per Month

Beginning of June	100's
June	5,850
July	10,840
August	16,016
September	3,859

The views per month increased dramatically through the Festival from the 100's in early June to a peak of 16,016 in August. The main referral site (where they clicked from) was Facebook followed by Hotmail/Twitter

A certain amount of traffic was also generated through individual production/artist websites e.g. Ergo Phizmiz.

Unsurprisingly, the key areas on the site that people navigated to were the Home page, About Festival and individual artists/production pages.

There is no guidance about conversion rates from website hits to ticket sales for Contemporary Opera. The tracking of who clicks "Buy Tickets" and from where in the site should be recorded in the future so comparisons can be made year on year.

2.4 Media Coverage

The Festival excellent critical ratings: Previews/ reviews were found in a wide range of national, regional and local press titles including: The Times (3 Star), Telegraph (4 Star), The Standard (4 star), Sunday Times *Book It*, Time Out, BBC Music Magazine, The Stage, Opera Magazine etc. However, some obvious opportunities such as being in the TimeOut Festival Guide were missed. Broadcast media included BBC London, BBC4 Front Row, BBC 3 In Tune.

Media messages and reviews consistently spoke of the Festival as a whole, rather than individual productions. This shows the Festival is being commented on for its ethos and importance as an "institution" not just because of the work it hosts. They also stressed the successful combination of innovation, quality and the involvement of the audience.

Audience Access Key Messages

- The ambitious 'Inside' audience attendance target for 2011 of 3200 was underachieved, with a total of 2674 sold tickets with an average of 233 tickets per night.
- There are outstanding audience figures for the On-line Festival
- The 2010 anecdotal evidence that suggested a core audience is being developed appears to be supported by data from this year. This suggests that 98% of feedback respondents from this years Festival had attended in 2010. This compares to 36% of 2010 respondents talking about 2009. (30% of the audience attended the Festival 3+ times).
- It is therefore unsurprising with such a loyal audience that the figure for 'Never Seen Opera' was 1%, down from 5.5% in 2010 and that there was a slight drop in the percentage of bookers who had 'Never Seen New Opera'.

- There are a number of reasons that the momentum in new audience development may have slowed for 2011.
 - The London Riots took place in the middle of the Festival run. Evidence from other Off West End theatres, cinema's, bars and restaurants during this period showed that revenues were negatively impacted: "The recent London Riots have decimated audience levels" – Greenwich Playhouse.
 - The overall marketing spend in support of this year's Festival may not have been sufficient to maintain a 'reach and frequency' in targeting potential new audience.
 - It was held at a time when other large news stories were dominating the media. The risk of not achieving 'stand out' in all media was high.
 - The programme for 2011, whilst reflecting important and meaningful social issues and concerns such as war, the environment and the impact of a worsening economy could have been seen as 'too challenging' and serious for those new to opera/new opera wanting a more escapist experience.

3. Financial outturn

The Festival cost £99,376, this was £3,300 more than in 2010, and came in on budget.

4. Audience Feedback Evaluation

4.1 Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative feedback questionnaires were collected from audiences at the exit of each show, via post and on-line. Further feedback was collected via a handheld video/audio camera. Front of House volunteers also documented their observations.

4.2 Sampling Size and Confidence Level

Questions asked were similar to previous years to allow for comparison. The overall response levels were from 388 completed feedback forms, a return rate of 19%. This is 6% higher than last years.

There are slightly different levels of questionnaires completed when comparing specific questions between 2010 and 2011 so absolute inference should be avoided as any trends in the data should be seen as indicative only.

The overall sample size of 388 allows confidence levels to be set at 95% with a confidence interval of 5%. Conclusions therefore can be said to apply to at least 95% of the audience +/- 5%. Please note that with slightly smaller response levels e.g. 162 will reduce the confidence level to +/- 7.5%.

4.3 Scoring ratings and audience data

The following rating were used:

1. Sorry, didn't work for me
2. Not bad, but could have been better
3. Good, worked for me sure
4. Bloomin' marvellous

Overall Festival Experience

Rating	Experience '10	Experience' 11
4	62%	60%
3	35%	37%
2	2.5%	1.5%
1	0.5%	1.5%
Total Responses	221	136

Overall, 97% of respondents gave a positive opinion. This is a high approval rating, particularly given the challenging and innovative nature of the programme in 2011.

Did the experience change their opinion of what new opera could be?

Opinion changed	2010	%	2011	%
Yes, for the better	147	61	96	62
Yes, for the worse	2	1	6	4
No, not changed	91	38	52	34
Total responses	240		154	

(NB those commenting for the worse said this in response to *'The Third Policeman'*, which divided opinion strongly, being complimented on and well reviewed as well.)

Despite the issues of comparing two unequal data sets (see above in methodology) it is interesting to note that there is little significant difference between 2010 and 2011. The 34% who have not had their perception changed, may be as a result of repeat attendance of a loyal audience. For the minority who felt that their opinion had been 'changed for the worse' all had attended the production of *'The Third Policeman'*.

Previous experience with opera and new opera

Respondents were asked to indicate when they had last seen an opera and a new opera.

Have seen in...	Seen Opera '10	Seen new opera '10	Seen opera '11	Seen new opera '11
last 6 months	55.5%	32%	63%	36%
last year	19%	18%	13%	23%
last 5 years	20%	20%	19%	15%
Never	5.5%	30%	1%	26%
Total responses	234	223	160	155

Given the 'repeat' purchase behaviour of the Tête à Tête loyal audience it is no surprise that 76% claimed to have seen an opera in the past year and 60% new opera (Slightly up on 2010). It is thought that this might be an under-estimate given the data collected in 4.3 (this may be due to the low sample numbers collected on some questions, which leads to reduced confidence limits).

Would they attend again, recommend Tête à Tête to anyone else, have they attended before and is the mission being met?

	Attend again? '10	Attend again? '11	Recommend 2010	Recommend 2011	Attended before? '10	Attended before? '11	Meeting mission'10	Meeting mission'10
Yes	96%	97.6%	94%	98.7%	36%	98.7%	96%	99.5%
No	4%	2.4%	6%	1.3%	64%	1.3%	4%	0.5%
Total responses	159	250	155	246	157	246	126	228

The very positive results of 2010 have been maintained and even increased. The target for a recommendation has been strongly exceeded. It also appears that those that claimed they would attend again in 2010 actually did in 2011. This shows the creation of a loyal audience, excited about the whole Festival rather than having loyalty for one production who yet again claim that they will return. This is particularly exciting given some of the challenging subject matter of productions this year. The 2011 programme certainly appealed to those that attended.

How many times attended festival this year?

Times Attended	% 2010	% 2011
1	40	37
2	30.5	33
3	9	14
4	12	6
5+	8.5	10
Total responses	164	

As has been the case with other results, a similar pattern to 2010 has emerged. Over a third of the audience repeatedly attends with claimed attendance of 3+ times.

Age range

Age	No. 2010	% 2010	No. 2011	% 2011
Under 16	4	1.6%	4	2%
17-22	6	2.4%	5	3%
23-28	27	11%	15	10%
29-45	74	30%	45	28%
46-55	47	19%	42	26%
56-65	38	15.5%	26	16%
66+	49	20.5%	24	15%
Total Responses	245		161	

Nearly 25% of the Festival's audience are comparatively young (under 28). The largest group is in the 'middle years' of 29 – 55, which represents almost 54% of the audience. The older segment (66+) which had increased in 2010 appears to be falling back slightly in 2011. The 'Salad Days' effect, which may have attracted older people into the Festival may be reducing.

What did respondents do during the day?

The majority of respondents worked in the professions, education (Teacher, Professor, Students), the arts (Actor, Theatre Director, Artist etc) and the media. In terms of target group they most closely aligned to those groups who are highly engaged with the arts e.g. Urban Arts Eclectic and Traditional Culture Cultures. ¹

Where had they heard about *The Opera Festival*?

How Heard About	2010 %	2011%
Somebody else booked	11	12
Newspapers/radio/PR	12	6
Word Of Mouth	20	30 * predominantly artists
Tube Poster	2.5	n/a
Riverside Brochure/website	6	7
Tête à Tête mailing list	15	10
Tête à Tête website	11	10
Tête à Tête email lists/forwarded	13	18
Picked up a brochure	3.5	2
Tête à Tête App.	NA	3
Social Media	6	2
Total responses	315	168

Personal recommendation continues to be the most significant and growing means of marketing communication (42% versus 31% in 2010). Various online digital media e.g. social media, website, and the new Tête à Tête iPhone app have collectively driven 40% of awareness (up 10% on last year). It should be noted that the app secured 71 downloads over one month, benchmarked as good by the App Store.

More traditional media (e.g. broadcast/print and mail) has conversely dropped noticeably to 6% versus for 12% for PR and 10% versus 15% for the posted brochure. It is not known if this was due to the very active news agenda, that was current at the time of the Festival (London Riots and economic concerns), a comparatively low spend on print and distribution in comparison to last year (no tube posters ran this year and brochures/leaflets were not distributed widely) or if there is a genuine move towards 'on-line' as a means of gathering information by the target audience. Activity generated through the Riverside Studio's partnership has been maintained at approximately 10%.

There is a danger that a purely on-line strategy may not 'reach' key target audience segments or the lack of support from other more traditional media may not create the 'frequency' of awareness needed to drive the potential target audience to consider 'buying'.

Qualitative Feedback

The key themes from qualitative feedback.

- Ensuring that the venue 'audience experience' is as high quality as possible. Quality levels appeared inconsistent e.g. shows not starting on time

¹ Arts audiences: Insight (2011) Arts Council England 2011

- Debate concerning the definition of opera.
- A very small number of productions were not well enough developed or artistically of a high enough standard.
- Overall support and enthusiasm for the Festival proposition, mission and experience.

Strengths

“Thank you, a beautiful and inspiring experience”
 “Thank goodness for Tête à Tête. We need more things like this.”
 “Only experience of opera before this festival was in over-priced, stuffy with an aging audience theatre. Tonight completely changed my understanding of opera! It was relevant, original, inspiring, fresh – I loved it!”
 “Love that you can see 4 things in an evening”
 “Always love this festival. More workshops and discussions would be good.”

Challenges

“An excellent Festival let down by ill-prepared participants”
 “Singing not all high quality!”
 “Tête à Tête should rethink the mission statement re ‘opera for all’ as it is not all opera, ie Requiem, Glyndebourne was jolly well not an opera but a community Musical.”
 “The *Third Policeman* makes me never want to come to the festival again. How Dare you! Torture! Very Angry”

5. Artists feedback

100% of artists fed back via an interview questionnaire. 100% gave the Festival 4 or 5*.

The main reasons for taking part in the Festival:

- To be associated with the Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival brand
- The opportunity to perform in London
- Video presence on the Tête à Tête: Library of New Opera and photos
- Audience feedback
- Press support the Festival ethos and this empowers them to feel confident

There was only one concern which was mentioned by 5 participants, that Tête à Tête ensures the pianos are of a better quality/maintained.

6. Conclusion - Were the Aims Achieved?

- **Artistic excellence in a nurturing environment** – Many of the media previews, reviews and features concerning the Festival commended Tête à Tête in this regard. The audience feedback saw an overwhelming 97% positive reaction with 99% recommending. The participating artist feedback was unanimous in its confirmation that Tête à Tête supports artists to develop art in very practical ways.
- **Continuity** – The Festival has continued to take place in August at the same venue. This has now happened between 2007 – 2011. This has undoubtedly contributed to the building up of a core loyal audience.
- **Audience Relevance, Public Benefit and Artistic Development** – The Festival audience (many of whom come from a youthful demographic) has given very high positive feedback (90% plus) in a range of attitude dimensions e.g. likely to attend again. They have clearly enjoyed a very contemporary programme exploring many up-to-date debates on a wide range of important and controversial topics. The overall public has benefited by work accessed via different mechanisms e.g. in the Outside and via digital channels

as well as ticket prices being highly accessible. 55 separate productions have had the opportunity to present work, to have that work reviewed via the creative process, audience feedback and media review.

- **Provide a Festival Online** - The increase in audiences and the wide geographical hit of the Online Festival has been a tremendous success with little evidence of promotion. This is an area to focus on for strategic development.
- **Partnership and Networking** – The promotion of the “participant sharing scheme” was well used by the artists helping them put their own work into context and discussing ideas and sharing experiences.
- **Challenging the Core Audience** – It is thought a high proportion of the 2011 Festival audience had previously been to the Festival. The 2011 programme was particularly challenging, yet the feedback remained consistent/ or exceeded previous years positive views.
- **Breaking Down the Public’s Perception that Opera is “not for me.”** - The estimated number of audience decreased in the ‘Outside’ programme from 5000 to 4000. However anecdotal evidence suggests that some of the ‘Inside’ audience had been attracted by activity they had seen outside the venue. Performances were moved this year from shopping centres to parks to secure a more leisurely and larger audience however this was weather dependent and as the weather was not very warm did not give the crowds anticipated.
- **Supporting Artists** – A variety of activities to support artists was put in place e.g. a range of guides on: marketing, technical staging, fundraising, how to get the best out of the festival and audience development. Publicity on each show in the Festival was sent in advance to a carefully screened promoters/VIP list of 356. In addition the Participant Feedbacks shows this aim was achieved very well and in many ways.
- **Tête à Tête Delivering the Business Plan and Marketing Strategy 2010-2013** – Delivering each Festival enables the whole organisation (Board, artistic team, administrators, artist producers, venue partners etc) to gain better operational knowledge and efficiencies into how the planning process can be made real and more effective. During 2011 the first steps have been taken to bring greater organisational stability by putting in place the complete ‘Inside, Outside, Online’ new opera Festival.

8. Recommendations for 2012 and beyond

Artist Development - Resource Centre for Artist Producers

Continue to research the need for and offer a range of relevant and effective tools to support the continuous development of artist producers at various stages (Student, Emerging Professional, Seasoned Professional and Mature Professionals.) A wide range of research indicates that this type of training and development support is needed. See *Musicians Have Your Say* (Musicians Benevolent Fund 2007) and *New Yorkshire Music Final Report, the hub 2007*. Research insight suggests that debt is a career long issue (average wage £16,300) for all musicians and that understanding how to develop artistically and to be financially sustainable is vital.

- Review and add to the list of ‘*How to Guides...*’ already published in print and online. Survey artists about their needs.
- Promote the Festival more strategically to the sector and promoters of New Opera. Research what information and resources would be of use to them and how to make it available on line.
- Consider other options for artistic support e.g. programmes to support artists from other art forms to work in opera.

- Look at how the very best productions from the festival might be supported and developed further e.g. work with regional production houses to jointly develop ideas.

Audience Development - Online Festival to be Broadened and Deepened

- To consider what content and social media could be used more widely, might be monetised and reflect the needs of a purely on-line audience e.g. year long twitter conversation, mobile web page, on-going apps or opera purely commissioned for an on-line audience (the audience feedbacks on story line that is then created etc). Ensure a year round programme of on-line content and new material is presented to audiences and promote this strategically.
- Consider investing in more sophisticated on-line measurement tools e.g. Google Analytics etc to improve the understanding of what level of on-line activity is required to drive seat sales etc. Track users who hit the "Buy Ticket".
- Consider how to track the conversion of audiences from the Outside and On-line Festival to Inside the theatre.
- Build further links with National training establishments and student bodies via a drive on social media.
- Set up evaluation mechanisms to test how the audience might be developed from the Online Festival to the Inside Festival.

Tête à Tête Development

- Begin a programme of Institutional Marketing bringing together the Library of New Opera, Promoter/Vips List, Friends, Alumni and the promotion of out of Festival activity by building up a year-long relationship with these people via newsletters, on-line updates. Considering small commissions for on-line viewing as the driving force. This will keep up momentum and interest and cement the loyalty to Tête à Tête by circumnavigating the venue/participating companies.
- To scope and plan with regional opera leaders e.g. Glyndebourne, Scottish Opera, Welsh National Opera opportunities to work in collaboration to support regional networking to help widen the scope of participating artists within the Festival.
- To show the legacy of the Festival via a research programme to track Festival Alumni.
- To review the aims of the Outside Festival and to programme and book locations accordingly.
- To use the Tête à Tête: Library of New Opera to promote Tête à Tête activity internationally to Opera institutions/ organisations and artistic communities.
- To produce the TAT business plan 2012-15.