Case study: Lammermuir Festival Autumn Special

Tell us about Lammermuir Festival.

The Lammermuir Festival was founded in 2010. It is a classical music festival taking place in various locations around East Lothian in September each year under the strapline Beautiful Music in Beautiful Places. We present circa 30 events each year to around 7000 attenders. The festival won the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards for Festivals in 2017. It has a turnover of circa £300K per annum, is funded from a mixture of private and public sources and generates around £750K economic benefit for East Lothian and Scotland each year.

What were the key reasons for creating a digital event?

- To provide product for our regular audience and others starved of live music
- To provide employment for freelance musicians during the Covid crisis
- To maintain the visibility of the festival during an (almost) fallow year

Tell us about your digital event.

We produced 12 events over a 12-day period. 11 of them took place in a church in East Lothian and one was relayed from Theatre Royal Glasgow. These events were streamed in sound and video live or as live.

Did you come across any challenges?

We made the decision to do the event online very late as, until the end of July, we were holding out hopes of doing some live events. So, all the work of tying up filming, ticketing and website had to be done very, very fast. We decided to do an online festival on August 3 and launched it on August 20.

Provision of sold, fast broadband in broadcast buildings was an issue. We solved it in an unconventional way. We ran an ethernet cable from the rectory next door into the church. There was a very strong and reliable BT feed. Had this not worked we would have worked with the local wireless broadband provider. This broadband issue was the major reason that the majority of the festival was streamed ‘as live’ (not edited) rather than actually live.
What was your approach?

We created a subset of what a normal Lammermuir Festival would look like and streamed it one per day over 12 days and added in an announcer. 12 events of around 75 mins each were created and filmed with 3 remotely controlled cameras. We used our filming company Rhino Productions and the platform used was Vimeo.

How did you monetize your event?

We were the first classical festival in Scotland (and as far as we are aware only the second in the UK) to monetise events and so we were very cautious about pricing. We sold both individual tickets at £5 per concert view and a £33 pass for the whole festival. Apart from the financial imperatives we felt strongly that people value something that they have paid for more than free product.

We used the Fringe Box Office whereby attenders booked shows as per normal and received confirmation of booking 24 hours before the show - they received an email with the relevant URL for their booking. They also received a reminder 3 hours before the show. This worked remarkably smoothly. We would have to say that the Fringe Box Office were exceptionally helpful and efficient both with systems and with customer care. The service was branded as Lammermuir Festival on tickets, email and phone line which removed the feeling of dealing through an agency.

We charged for all events and sold a large number of passes which is interesting for events such as this in the future. We set very conservative targets and exceeded them. In terms of other revenue streams, a number of our friends and donors were happy to support activity this financial year rather than deferring donations to 2021. Similarly, Creative Scotland’s Open Project Funding stayed in place. Without this we would not have been able to proceed.

Why did you decide to make concerts available for up to two weeks after event rather than a one view only?

While we wanted to create the feeling of a festival, we also wanted people to be able to catch up with events they might have missed. Also, people might want to watch events twice. We will review this for next year.
Will you be making any content / performances available and free to watch now the event is over?

We haven’t decided yet. We might use them to maintain festival awareness through social media during the winter. We might use them for fundraising purpose as yet unrefined. We didn’t have time to sort out the rights issues around artists and further use, but we don’t expect this to be problematic.

How did you promote your digital event?

• Email to our emailing list pointing at our website. We had written to those for whom we only had postal addresses to ensure that the emailing list was as exhaustive as it could be
• The usual social media outlets; Instagram, Facebook, Twitter
• Two adverts in the local newspaper to raise consciousness that something was happening in the county

Results

• Quantitatively we are still looking at the booking stats for quantity and place of origin, but we know that there was significant international attendance. Ticket buyers were from Canada, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and United States.
• Qualitatively we have looked at all press coverage (very positive) and attender feedback which has again been very positive.
• Online donations were significant and from a very substantial proportion of the ticket buyers

Conclusion

• The event was an unqualified success.
• There is a stronger demand than we suspected for properly curated and produced online classical events.
• The festival can achieve substantial audience reach which can drive future live attendance from outside Scotland.
• The older demographic audience have worked out digital technology and are comfortable with it. In fact, many came to us with suggestions for improvement based on their experiences with other online cultural providers.
• We substantially under-priced it. We were told this by a number of attenders
• We needed more preparation time to create a smoother visual experience although we had no negative feedback about this.
• Streaming is by no means as expensive as one might have suspected.
• Ticketing for online activity can be simple and easy to use.
• We will certainly continue with this strand as part of our work even if we are allowed to be fully live next year.
• Online content can be used to draw people to a live event.
• Online content can strengthen relationships with core audiences.
• There are opportunities to include online only activities in a live programme such as events in inaccessible or impractical venues.