

**Ed Newsome, Head of Marketing, Welsh National Opera and
Cath Hume, Consultant, Museums at Night
*Connecting with your local communities***

Ed Newsome has worked in the arts for over a decade. He began his career at his home theatre, the Sunderland Empire, as a marketing assistant and in 2003, he moved to Wales to generate and develop audiences for his beloved art form, opera. Ed Newsome has been Head of Marketing at Welsh National Opera since 2008. During this time Ed implemented the learning from the first attitudinal segmentation of its kind in the UK and has developed pricing models designed to encourage audiences to attend more frequently and consume a broader diet of opera.

In the summer of 2012, Cath Hume joined the AMA as Programme Manager. She also works as a consultant and has worked with organisations including DCMS, MLA and Arts Council England contributing to the evaluation of the latter's audience development project *A Night Less Ordinary*. She has been the independent evaluator for Museums at Night since 2010 and is also a visiting lecturer in Cultural Policy and Arts Administration at the University of Surrey. Cath has written audience development strategies for heritage and environment organisations such as Natural England, Surrey County Council and Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB. Prior to working freelance, Cath was the Director of Smart Audiences, an audience development agency based in the South East.

This seminar looked at the importance of social, connected and network focused marketing to create and tap into communities around the arts.

Ed Newsome

Cath and I are going to talk about community engagement. What we mean by that is learning, participation, education, and outreach; all of those connected elements.

Here are some definitions:

COMMUNITY: Any population that is currently or may in the future engage with your organisation. These can be online or offline and made up of visitors, non-visitors, artists or professionals who are local, national or international.

ENGAGEMENT: Participation, involvement and connection of that community with an arts organisation. Someone who is engaged in this context is not a passive spectator but someone who is a part of the art.

Can community engagement projects develop audiences? If not, what does that mean for arts organisations and marketers? And if so, then how do we apply it?

Welsh National Opera (WNO) was set up in the 1940s by singers who were part-timers and by day they were miners, doctors, teachers and members of the community. After the Second World War, they wanted a better world and so set this

up as a community. It became full time in the 1960s. Today, WNO is an acclaimed, award-winning arts organisation performing each year in ten towns in Wales and the western half of England to 120,000 people with main scale opera performances and we have a large and increasingly engaged digital audience. I would encourage you to work out how you can maximise your resources for community engagement, according to your remit and the size and nature of your organisation and think about how this will impact on audiences and potential audiences. 250 people work for WNO in total, including a full time chorus of 40, a full time orchestra of 60 as well as costume makers, set builders and administrators. As well as what we receive through the box office, sponsorship and individual giving, we also receive funding both from the Arts Council of Wales and Arts Council England, so we have an obligation to the people served by our touring footprint.

Throughout its history, WNO has worked with communities where it tours. In 2001 that work was stepped up with the foundation of the Max department, so called because it maximises the resources of the company. It was the ambition of Max that WNO and the community we serve should develop side by side as equal partners in an adventurous programme of work, drawing on the inspiring creativity of all its participants. The work that Max does is dedicated to transforming lives. Max is currently working with 10,000 participants per year.

WNO would say that community engagement does help develop audiences for mainstream opera performances in some ways, yet in others it does not. We have two distinct approaches. The vast majority of work that Max undertakes is designed to connect the company with community to deliver valuable outcomes to the individuals within those communities and from the wider community. Emotionally, this work is designed to impact positively on people's lives; it isn't necessarily about getting them into the theatres. Surf Tales, part of a three year programme of work we did in South Wales called Street Songs aimed to engage young males aged 14 to 25 using sport and youth culture as a vehicle for personal expression and self development. The project combined surfing lessons and composition lessons so the outcome would be a surf film in the 1960s tradition. It was screened at a surf film festival in Porthcawl. 65 per cent of participants said that they had developed communication, people or creative skills. Interestingly, 67 per cent of participants stated the project made them feel more positive about opera. We didn't set out with the express purpose of doing this but we do it because we believe the constituent parts of opera can change people's lives for the better. We would say that community engagement can help develop audiences when we build community projects around our main scale work. We realise that extrinsic social motivations can often be as influential as intrinsic ones in audiences making a decision to attend.

Everything we do at WNO is driven by our vision, mission, values and strategic principles as shown below:

- VISION** A culture in which there's widespread belief among people from all backgrounds that opera can be for them.
- MISSION** We want to encourage as many people as possible to share our own passion for opera by attending performances or participating in our activities. We will achieve this by taking world-class opera to new and existing audiences across the UK and by staging productions and activities that will surprise, delight and provoke those audiences.
- VALUES** As a company we are passionate, accessible, ambitious, collaborative, nurturing, adventurous, approachable, welcoming, excellent, professional.

6

STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

- We will provide a wide programme of opera experiences for the widest possible public.
- Excellence will be at the heart of everything we do.
- Our opera will be achieved through an ensemble company, combining a thrilling fusion of music and theatre, underpinned by vocal, choral and orchestral excellence.
- We will extend the range and reach of the company by responding creatively and flexibly to the diverse communities we serve, often challenging established perceptions of opera.
- We will do everything we can to increase audiences for WNO specifically and opera generally.

7

Street Songs, a project supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation was a programme consisting of 25 projects, 412 sessions and almost 5,000 participants over three years. It involved WNO actively going out into two communities; Cardiff Bay and the Valleys. Both communities are trying to reinvent themselves in a post-industrial world, both have personal relationships with music (The Manic Street Preachers are

the quintessential Valleys band while Shirley Bassey is from the Bay). Both areas suffer from deprivation and high unemployment.

Introducing opera to these communities was not easy. The first hurdle to overcome was to address deep seated preconceptions of opera. We saw opera as a way to unlock personal stories and community histories, leading to

transformative and memorable projects for the participants. Across the 25 projects, participants included ex-offenders, homeless people, people with substance misuse issues, members of the travelling community, school children, music students and care home residents. The project linked opera with other art forms and means of expression to make a difference: from rap to surfing, from animation, to sculpture and film, puppetry and boxing.



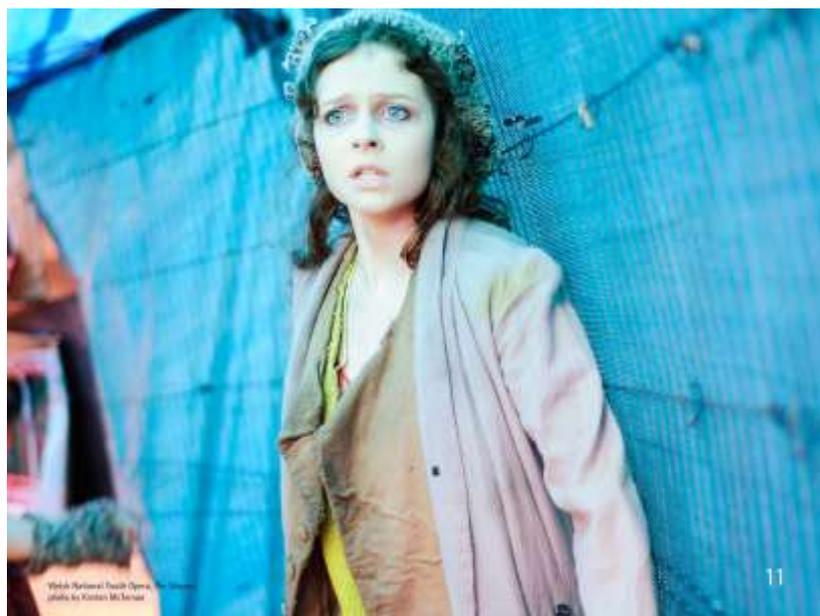
We asked all participants *'What is it like to live in the Valleys today?'* The marketing department helped recruit participants, much of it achieved through social relationship network marketing. We built a buzz by going to businesses, individuals and community leaders. The image above shows a song project involving the young at heart. This project showed that there is a connection between these engagement projects and our fully scaled performances. Craig is serenading the people on the coach on their way to see Falstaff at the Wales Millennium Centre (WMC), Cardiff. Many of the people on that bus had never been to an opera before and we still see some of them at performances today.

Max also made connections with leaders in European Objective 1 areas, working to introduce members of their communities to opera. When we opened the WMC in 2005 our seating capacity rose from 1,200 to 1,700 and we wanted to reach a wider audience so we reduced our prices massively. We have 100 tickets with a full view at only £5 each. People use this to take risks with operas that they are not familiar with.

One of the Street Songs projects took place in Cardiff. The WMC is on the edge of the inner city area of Butetown. When the centre opened, many local people felt it wasn't for them. We invited the local community in to take part in a project called Song Bus, opening up a dialogue with community leaders. A bus was hired and turned into a singing hub; people coming onto the bus could play instruments, rap or sing and get their first taste of opera. The bus toured around the town in key locations and was regularly parked outside WMC as a link.

Wrexham Street Songs is the main project Max are working on at the moment. Our first project is an 'opera soap opera', with nine episodes being filmed within the community and songs written by the community. Young film makers are given their

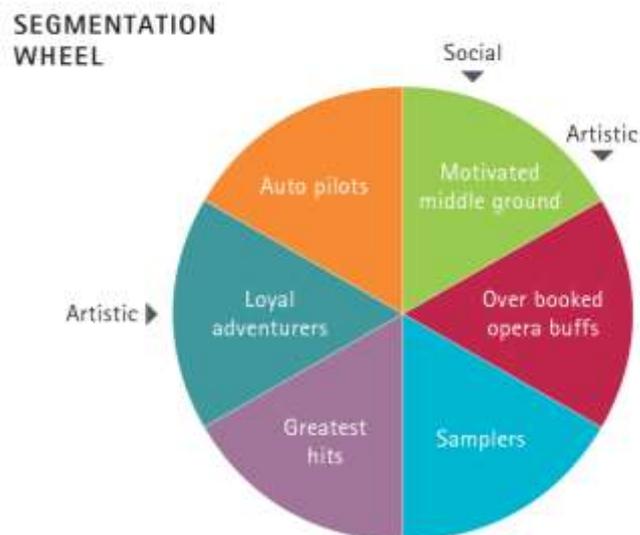
first opportunity to develop their creative skills. The aim is to build relationships between WNO and the community and two of the main issues were a lack of aspiration / role models and a lack of identity. Wrexham is a long way away from our nearest main scale venue. Next year, using a test drive model, we are going to start putting on an opera bus from Wrexham, with incentivised tickets. We will have pre-performance talks on the bus and will engage people with things like opera karaoke and will put on two of these every year for the remainder of the project. The other key issue is that this work is very intensive in terms of resources and time so the marketing department always needs to ask how many people this work is engaging with. Next year, we are going to create a community newsletter which we will deliver to every door we can within targeted areas of Wrexham.



WNYO creates a new ensemble every two years, involving singers, musicians and technicians. They put on a production and it gives young people a taste of what it is like to be involved in the creation of opera. The strange thing is, people often come to opera later in life, usually around the age of 40. So not everyone we engage with as youths will necessarily stay with opera immediately but we hope it will enrich their lives and that they will return to it later. Engagement must be subject to SMART objectives so that we can measure how successful the various campaigns have been.

In many projects that help develop audiences, and increase the risk, frequency and loyalty of existing audiences, we use members of the community as ambassadors for the company and the art form. As John Nell and Richard Reeves have said, the four Ps (Product, Price, Place and Promotion) are being overtaken by the four Cs (Community, Co-creation, Customisation and Conversation). A sense of community is a tangible benefit of the arts, as Alan Brown emphasised in the course of three extraordinary addresses at this conference between 2006 and 2008. Anyone wanting to understand his thinking on this matter should read his paper 'An Architecture of Value' on the Wolf Brown web site.

In 2008, we worked with Wolf Brown and Baker Richards on an attitudinal segmentation study to understand what motivated our existing audience to attend.



The key characteristics of the Motivated Middle Ground were: they wanted to learn more about opera and have a voracious appetite for the art form; they are below average in terms of experience and confidence; they are loyal to the company; they currently attend once a year; they are conservative in taste; and they need convincing that they will enjoy the story and music of an opera; they are very high on all motivations, especially to spend *'quality time with family or friends, to celebrate special occasions and to enjoy the elegance and pageantry of opera'*. This group is made up of social initiators and they would attend more frequently than they currently

do. Working with Max, we created the Extra programme which used community engagement to develop the behaviour of the existing audience segments and introduce new audiences. We had two priorities for the Motivated Middle Ground; firstly, to build their confidence to attend work less familiar (and we created the whole story event for that which used singers and dramaturges and musicians to bring the story of each opera to life a week before we performed it) and secondly to realise that this segment is socially motivated and they wanted to be seen to introduce younger family members and friends to opera because going out for them is a social experience. We are happy for people to attend for all sorts of social reasons, not just for the art form; they might attend because the date fits with a birthday or anniversary and that is fine with us.



We created family workshops for this segment based around family main scale productions such as *The Magic Flute*. The workshops were successful and we are beginning to build a sustainable family audience for the first time. During our Afternoon Teas, members of our orchestra performed a light classical programme themed around the evening's opera. It is a social event geared around people talking:

Research has shown that a substantial number of attenders following these Afternoon Teas were attending an opera for the first time.

We also do post-show talks. We did one recently after a production of *Tristan and Isolde* and it was like a counselling session because of all the emotions the performance had stirred up.

We have run community choirs for five years, during which time they have performed everything from Beethoven Nine to *Aida* and world premiere commissions. Many choir members started out not as opera attenders but as Classic FM listeners who wanted to sing the pieces they loved.



The most engaged segment of our existing audience is our Loyal Adventurers. There is a high proportion of Loyal Adventurers within the community choir. They advocate for the company and the art form to people in their communities.

In summary, whether you carry out audience engagement for its own sake or to help with audience development, it should be driven by your strategic principles, mission, vision and values. Marketers should accept that many projects are not designed to develop audiences. However, bear in mind how audience engagement projects can play a part in this. Understanding what a project is designed to do is absolutely crucial if you are to understand its value. Below are some points you may wish to consider:

KEY POINTS AND QUESTIONS

- Meaningful community engagement starts from the same place as effective arts marketing – audience (participant) knowledge.
- Do you understand the role of community engagement in your organisation?
- Are audience development and community engagement linked in your organisation?
- Who is your community engagement for and why? What is the value? What are the aims?
- Can you use community and education resources to serve the marketing strategy?
- Take ownership over community engagement which seeks to develop audiences.

One final caveat: network and relationship marketing cannot replace the traditional marketing toolkit immediately, it will happen over time. Use the audience engagement methods you hear about at this year's conference to bolster your marketing.

Cath Hume

I am going to talk about Connect 10, a project which took a different approach to engaging communities and networks. Connect 10 is part of a national festival called *Museums at Night*, a programme managed by Culture 24. Culture 24 is a digital cultural publishing organisation and they run web sites, the main one of which is culture24.org.uk

There is a database of over 6,000 cultural organisations on this web site and they publish articles, listings and other items, the aim of which is to persuade people to engage with their web site and go and try some cultural activity. *Museums at Night* is open to any cultural organisation (museum, gallery, heritage, house, etc.), it happens every year over one weekend in May and there are no entry criteria. All that is asked

of the organisations is that they open late, beyond their usual opening hours, and do something a bit different. The idea is that they try to engage people by offering a new event. For example, Newlyn in Cornwall last year did an all night print making workshop. We have just carried out the evaluation for this year's Museums at Night. It gets bigger every year. The statistics from this year are:

- 416 arts and heritage venues
- 537 events
- 121,000 visits
- 4% of visitors had never been to an arts or heritage venue prior to Museums at Night
- 36% of visitors were new to the venue they visited
- 95% of visitors rated their experience as 7, 8, 9 or 10
- 94% of visitors were inspired to visit other venues
- PR campaign generating AVE of £3.4 million

Connect 10 is a new programme strand for this year funded by Arts Council England. An organisation called Love Art London contacted lots of artists and managed to get ten of them to be the prize in a competition. The artists were people like Bob and Roberta Smith, The Jelly People, the taxidermist Polly Morgan and the idea was that the winners of the competition would win one of those artists to appear at their organisation for one night during Museums at Night. All they had to do was submit an idea for an event for their chosen artist. Hundreds of organisations submitted events and they were whittled down to 28 finalists and these finalists had to compete in an online competition. The organisations had to reach out to their communities and networks and get them to vote in the online competition.

The Working Class Movement Library Salford was one of the winning finalists. It is a very small organisation with only two and a half staff members. Their audience base tends to be older people. They decided to enter the competition but didn't think they would get to the next stage. They entered because they wanted to attract visitors who do not normally go to libraries.

To get lots of votes, they thought creatively and did two things that really worked: firstly, they set up a reciprocal Twitter relationship with another organisation that was in the competition but against whom they were not competing so when one tweeted the other would re Tweet. Secondly, they contacted FC United of Manchester, a semi-professional football club currently playing in the Northern Premier League and local to the Working Class Movement Library. They share the same ethos; both organisations are about community. FC United of Manchester helped the library to get votes and by the end of the competition they had amassed 2,000 votes, more than any other finalist. This was a good example of thinking creatively about reaching out to partnership organisations. They wanted to do an interactive event. They won Simon Roberts and decided to email people asking them to be filmed explaining their passion for the library so that there would be a legacy the library could build on.

Not only did they win Simon Roberts but they also won £500 which they used to pay a specialist to put on a really effective event. The project fulfilled its objectives in that it reached out to lots of people. Part of its evaluation revealed:

'It really did raise our profile...for example speaking to people from the Arts Council who would never have known about us before.'

'People who came thought about us in a different way and thought 'there's a place I can go for visual inspiration' alongside thinking "there's a place that I can see interesting books".'

'It was definitely a much younger age range than our normal events get.'

'We have a lot more followers on Facebook and Twitter now. We have the communication base there now and so can use this to reach out to more people.'

What is going to be challenging now for them is to work out how to move forwards and build on the success of this project. 50 per cent of the people who answered the visitor survey at the Working Class Movement Library said this was the first time they had visited the venue. Another organisation that took part in Connect 10 was The Ragged School Museum and 71 per cent of their visitors had never been to their venue before. At Discovery Point, 24 per cent of visitors were new.

The second project I would like to talk about is the Victoria Gallery, Liverpool. They are a small organisation, based on the university campus. Their aims were to raise awareness among students and staff on the campus; local people; nationally. Their approach to the competition involved:

- Twitter and Facebook – fairly new to social media so used this an opportunity to explore this channel
- 'Rewarded' voters with re-tweets and Follow Friday (FF) recommendations
- Engaged visitors to other exhibitions
- Leaflets around the library
- Flyers around the university

The Victoria Gallery won Polly Morgan, the taxidermist. They were very pleased with the results. They wanted new people to come and they think that happened and are now trying to work out how to retain those visitors and persuade them to attend again. The project has also changed their approach to programming; previously they did not have an evening programme of events but now they are considering it. They have also attracted a younger age range.

What lessons have we learned from Connect 10?

Think long-term and strategically:

- Does the work that you are doing flow from your organisation's mission and objectives?
- How are you going to monitor your success?
- Do you have an on-going engagement plan?

So what does this mean for the organisations involved?

- Create space for the organisation to try new things
- Reach out to your engaged communities – they are a source of support, ideas and advocacy
- Your programme can be a tool to engage communities
- Think about what people want and need and let this inform your programme
- Be creative about building partnerships
- Working together gets results

Big splash activity can kick-start engagement with communities and networks BUT you need to think long-term – how are you going to build rewarding relationships with communities?

Final thoughts from both speakers

Museums at Night

- Think long-term, be strategic
- Create space
- Reach out to engaged communities
- Build creative partnerships
- Think about your organisation holistically

Welsh National Opera

- Meaningful community engagement starts from the same place as effective arts marketing.
- Do you understand the role of community engagement in your organisation?
- Are audience development and community engagement linked in your organisation?
- Who is your community engagement for and why? What is the value, what are the aims?
- Can you use community and education resources to serve the marketing strategy?
- Take ownership over community engagement which seeks to develop audiences.

[Cath and Ed invited delegates to consider these two questions in pairs then to feed back to the group]

- 1) Who are the communities you are currently engaging and who would you like to engage?
- 2) How will engaging with the communities that you have identified as 'would like to engage' contribute to your organisation's mission and objectives?

Delegate feedback and questions:

Katie Elston, Battersea Arts Centre: *I was interested in the WNO team going out and talking to the local communities. Who from WNO carried out this work? My organisation is about to start a similar engagement exercise with local communities.*

EN: There are four people in the marketing team. They are probably spending about 40 per cent of their time on the engagement programmes and the rest on the main scale work. Max has a producer for each series or strands of projects and we tie up with them. It becomes a lot easier when you have achieved a critical mass of people advocating for the company. Some of the connections were made by phone, some were face to face.

John Walker, English Touring Opera: *Do you have any tips for marketing departments wanting to reach out and connect with local community leaders? I'd probably start by reading the local papers lots to find out the best people to talk to.*

EN: That's a real challenge for us because we are based in Cardiff and we serve communities as diverse as Liverpool and Oxford. Our Max colleagues spend a lot of time going out and having meetings. Sometimes they form advisory groups for projects. We walk around the towns and find out who the influential people are. We find that information from the papers, from digital media and these involve spending time on desk research. When you begin to meet people, connections are made and suddenly the numbers can increase dramatically. This was certainly our experience in Wrexham.

Glen Meskell, Curious Minds: *With Museums at Night and the Victoria Gallery Liverpool, what would you say is the single biggest thing that has increased participation?*

CH: It's difficult to give you one single answer. In Liverpool, it was collective working; for example, lots of organisations in Liverpool get involved in Light Night for Museums at Night so there's a big presence with lots of things going on. The main thing is for lots of people to be doing it, collective endeavour.