

Project Report

VIP Night Out



L to R Mrs Eleanor McKee, Tom Jackson (violinist, Ulster Orchestra) and Jamie Clare McKee

'It was an experience I would never have thought of going to but was surprised, I really enjoyed it.'

'Very interesting, very relaxing. First time, love to go again.'

'I was blown away. It was magnificent.'

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1. SUMMARY

The VIP Night Out project used the Test Drive the Arts model to attract first time arts attenders from the most deprived areas in Belfast. Of a target group of 2500 households, 365 people responded to the offer to have a VIP Night Out, including complimentary tickets, programmes and drinks reception. This represents an exceptional response rate of 13%. The project partners, Grand Opera House, Ulster Orchestra and Waterfront Hall offered 158 tickets to opera, ballet, classical music and theatre events.

Respondents were invited to complete pre and post event questionnaires to explore their awareness and experience of classical arts and the venues and to see how their attitudes changed after their VIP Night Out. The results showed an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response and a transformation of attitudes effected through the experience of attending. Headline results are as follows:

- 65% said that they responded to the offer because they had never been before
- 100% enjoyed the event they attended
- 72% found the experience different to how they expected it would be
- 91% enjoyed it more than they expected
- 92% would be interested in going to something similar in the future
- 93% would be interested in receiving information about other arts events

From these results this pilot project demonstrates that the Test Drive model is effective at attracting first time arts attenders from areas of deprivation. As a piece of action research the project offers learning and recommendations for further depth research and for delivering a similar project on a larger scale.

2. Background

This project was funded by Belfast City Council with the aim of piloting approaches to develop audiences for the arts within Belfast's most deprived areas. Working with a modest budget, the project was conceived as a small-scale pilot to help inform the future development of larger scale and longer term initiatives.

Quantitative research shows low penetration of arts attendance within these areas, while little qualitative research exists to explain why. By removing some commonly assumed barriers such as financial cost and lack of awareness, and reducing others, such as perceptions of social risk, this project set out to discover attitudes towards the product offering by the target group and if their experience changed their pre-attendance attitudes.

Audiences NI led the project, working with three partner organisations: Grand Opera House, Ulster Orchestra and Waterfront Hall.

2. Background cont ...

The following objectives were agreed:

1. To target households from selected Super Output Areas in Belfast with a high ranking by Multiple Deprivation Measure
2. To deliver 120 new audience members (whether by artform or venue) from these areas
3. To research respondents' attitudes to opera, ballet, classical music and theatre and perceived barriers to attendance
4. To research respondents' attitudes to the participating venues: Grand Opera House and Waterfront Hall and perceived barriers to attendance
5. To test different approaches within the Test Drive framework
6. To generate positive media coverage around the project

3. Project Description

In order to fulfil the agreed objectives, Audiences NI adopted the Test Drive the Arts framework, an audience development model devised by Arts About Manchester. This model holds that unsold seats are a perishable commodity that can be viewed as a valuable audience development opportunity. By offering complimentary tickets to selected non attenders, the model reduces risk and allows the new audience to 'sample' or test drive the product. The idea is that if they like it, they will progress to pro-actively buying tickets and engaging in a longer term relationship with the venue / organisation.

The target audience for VIP Night Out was considerably more challenging than that of any documented Test Drive project. The only benchmark was the Creative Belfast initiative in January 2006, where a similar audience demographic was targeted by direct mail with a free showcase event at the Waterfront Hall. The response rate was 2.4%.

Based on this, we set a target of 3 - 5% response rate, which would generate 120 new attendances from a target group of 2500 households.

Initially the three project partners agreed to offer 30 tickets free of charge to each of the following events:

- Aida, Waterfront Hall, 1 April (opera)
- Swan Lake on Ice, Grand Opera House, Tuesday 24 April (ballet on ice)
- The Woman in Black, Grand Opera House Monday 7 May (theatre)
- Ulster Orchestra concert, Waterfront Hall, Friday 25 May (classical music)

Subsequently the Ulster Orchestra offered 26 extra tickets for the concert on 25 May and 8 tickets for a second concert (11 May) and the Waterfront Hall offered 4 extra tickets for the performance of Aida.

3.1 Methodology: Selection of data & participants

Belfast City Council supplied a list of 36 electoral wards from its Development and Outreach Initiative Application Form identified as among the 50% most deprived areas in Northern Ireland, as the target group. Potentially these wards represent 187, 200 households.

Given the small project budget it was necessary to apply a tiered process of quantitative and qualitative filtering to arrive at an appropriate number of households to target (2500) in relation to available tickets.

Firstly we cross-referenced the households within the 36 electoral wards with the Super Output Area (SOA) geography employed by the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2005. This Measure identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across Northern Ireland

Secondly we screened the data by Proximity to Venues, in an attempt to remove any possible transport barriers. Thirdly we screened by Mosaic NI type. Mosaic NI is a demographic classification tool based on postcodes.

Additionally the numbers of households were arrived at by household records that were available to hire commercially.

[See Appendix 1 for Data Selection Process]

3.2 Step-by-step

Using the final target base the project comprised the following steps:

- Target group of 2500 were direct mailed a personalised letter of invitation to have a 'VIP Night Out', with a choice of events. The offer was made on a first come, first served basis, with a week to respond.
- The events were split across venues, ie one at Waterfront Hall, one at Grand Opera House.
- Respondents had to book tickets via the selected venue box office, using a tracking phrase – VIP Night Out.
- Successful respondents received a Welcome Pack by post, including: their tickets, practical information on dress code, directions and a pre-performance questionnaire.
- On the evening, respondents were met at a Welcome Desk staffed by Audiences NI. Here they were to hand over their completed questionnaires to receive a second Welcome Pack comprising a complimentary programme, entry to reception at the interval and a second questionnaire, with FREEPOST return envelope.
- Audiences NI staff hosted the interval reception, allowing them to carry out observational research and encourage verbal feedback.
- Completed pre- and post-event questionnaires were collated and analysed.

3.3 Response

The response to the initial direct mail letter was overwhelming, with an estimated 365 callers, representing a 13% response rate. The initial ticket allocation was taken up within 2 hours.

The Waterfront Hall captured unsuccessful respondents' data (ie names and addresses) over subsequent days, resulting in a 'reserve list' of 138 respondents. The GOH Box Office prioritised paying customer calls and were unable to capture data of VIP Night Out respondents, but estimated that they took a further 150 queries.

Given that the response was so great, the project plan had to be revised. In particular it became apparent that the disappointment of the many unsuccessful respondents could work negatively towards the participating venues. To counter this, the reserve list were mailed with an offer of tickets to see the Ulster Orchestra, who kindly offered 34 additional tickets.

To make the process as fair as possible, and to extend the scope of the research element, this time tickets were offered on a prize draw basis, with the entry requirement being completion of a short survey. This was to be returned by a provided Freepost envelope; therefore there was no cost to the recipient.

This approach yielded 37 entries, representing a response rate of 27% to the second mailing.

3.4 Attendance At Events

Despite the overwhelming response to the ticket offer, actual attendance showed a drop-off. Levels of no-shows ranged from 3% to over 50%, averaging at 63% turn-out. [See Table 1] NB No-shows were gauged on whether the ticket holders made themselves known at the Welcome Desk; it is possible that ticket holders went straight into the auditorium without presenting at the Welcome Desk to pick up complimentary programme and drinks voucher.

Two different approaches were tried out regarding actual attendance. For the first two events all ticket holders were phoned with a reminder; for the other three events they were not phoned. For the two events where phone calls were made, one showed the highest turnout rate at 93%; the other showed a below average turnout rate at 47%.

Table 1. Actual attendance per show as % of tickets issued

Event	Tickets issued	No shows	% Attendance
Aida at Waterfront Hall, 1 April	34	18	47%
Swan Lake on Ice, Grand Opera House, Tuesday 24 April	30	2	93%
The Woman in Black, Monday 7 May	30	18	47%
Ulster Orchestra concert, Friday 11 May	8	Unknown	Unknown
Ulster Orchestra concert, Friday 25 May	56	24	57%
TOTAL	158 tickets in total		
AVERAGE			63%

Follow up telephone calls were made, where possible, to no-shows to find out a) whether the ticket holders had in fact turned up unnoticed and b) if they hadn't, why not. Responses included sudden family illness, bereavement and 'forgot it was on'.

The event that achieved far and away the highest turn-out rate (93%) was Swan Lake on Ice at the Grand Opera House. There could be a number of explanatory factors for this. Firstly the show was held on a Tuesday evening, with phone calls made to ticket holders made by 5pm on the same day, thus reducing the time lag between prompt and event.

The other event for which ticket holders were reminded by telephone occurred on a Sunday evening, with phone calls made on the preceding Friday. This yielded a much lower turn out rate, which could be accounted for by the 2 day time lag between prompt and event.

With such small sample sizes and variable product offering it is difficult to draw any conclusions. What is clear is that 100% take up of tickets does not result in 100% turn out and that complimentary tickets, however presented, may still be treated as 'low commitment'.

4. Findings of Research

Pre-event questionnaires explored motivations for response, levels of awareness and experience of arts attendance. Additionally some demographic questions were included. Sixty five respondents returned pre event questionnaires, with the following results:

What most interested respondents about the VIP Night Out Offer?

- 65% stated their primary reason was that they had never been before
- 20% stated their primary reason was that they wanted to treat a friend
- Only 1 respondent (1.5%) stated that their primary reason was that it was free

Did respondents know the event was on before they received their offer letter?

- 82% were not aware of the show they were attending before they received their letter.

What kind of arts and entertainment events had respondents been to previously?

- 46% stated that they had never been to any theatre, classical music, opera or ballet events before.
- 46% indicated that they had been to see theatre (but not necessarily professional productions).

If respondents had never been before, why not?

- 29% indicated that they considered the tickets to be too expensive
- 27% indicated that the respondent had just never thought about going

In particular, these were the reasons given by 11 of the 12 respondents who had never been to see any of the artforms before.

Had respondents ever been to the Waterfront Hall before?

- 50% stated that they had never been to the Waterfront Hall (NB According to the Waterfront Hall box office, 47% of the VIP Night Out participants had previously attended events but none had attended opera or classical music events.)

Of those who said they had been before only 3 respondents gave any indication of when this was, indicating date ranges between 1 and 4 years. Previous attendance tended to centre on popular events, such as an ABBA Tribute act, Charlie Landsbrough and the Chinese Circus.

Had respondents ever been to the Grand Opera House before?

- 39% stated that they had never been to the Grand Opera House. (NB None of these patrons had a previous transactional history on the Grand Opera House box office.)
- Of those who said they had been before, only 6 respondents gave any indication of when this was, ranging between 1 and 40 years. Specified events were popular / family shows such as The Three Bears, a Variety show, Cats and Charlie Landsborough.

4. Findings of Research cont...

Did respondents have internet access?

- 55% had internet access

What sex were the respondents?

- 70% were female, 30% were male

What age ranges were respondents?

- 48% were aged 35 – 55 years
- 26% were aged 20 -34 years
- 26% were aged 55 and over.

Were respondents interested in getting information on future events?

- 93% indicated that they would be interested in receiving information on other events.

Post Event Questionnaire Results

Participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire after their VIP Night Out to see if their attitudes and expectations had changed.

Did respondents enjoy the event?

- 100% enjoyed the event they attended

Did respondents find the event different to how they expected, and if so why?

- 72% found the experience different to how they expected it would be

Did they enjoy it more or less than they expected to?

- 91% found it more enjoyable, 9% found it less enjoyable

Would respondents be interested in going to something similar in the future?

- 92% would be interested in going along to something similar in the future, although 5 stated that it would be dependent on the cost

For full details of qualitative responses please see Appendix 3.

5. Achievement of Objectives

The project achieved 5 of its 6 objectives successfully as follows:

1. To target households from selected Super Output Areas in Belfast with a high ranking by Multiple Deprivation Measure.

The sophisticated data selection process ensured that only households within the most deprived areas of Belfast / Northern Ireland were targeted.

2. To deliver 120 new audience members (whether by artform or venue) from these areas

The project exceeded its target and generated 158 new (by artform or venue) audience members.

The high response rate (13% compared to benchmark of 2.4% of Creative Belfast) can be explained by the following factors:

- Personalised cover letter explaining the offer
- Tailored copy and information to provide reassurance and reduce perceived risk
- Choice of product, venue and date
- Sophisticated process of data selection using Mosaic NI to effectively target

3. To research respondents' attitudes to opera, ballet, classical music and theatre and perceived barriers to attendance

From the short pre-event questionnaires, the principal barriers to attendance appear to be prohibitive cost of tickets and lack of familiarity / awareness of the product. Perhaps most interestingly, the overwhelming majority of participants enjoyed the event more than they had expected to and a majority said they would be interested in receiving information about other similar events.

Pre-attendance expectations that the event would be 'boring', 'monotonous', 'formal' or that they 'wouldn't understand the story' suggest that this target group held largely negative perceptions of classical arts events.

However the post questionnaire responses showed a dramatic shift in attitudes. Comments demonstrated a high level of enjoyment and enthusiasm. A full list of comments can be found in the appendix but here is a sample:

'I love the orchestra and the drama of it all.'

'I was surprised I enjoyed it so much.'

'It was very inspirational and casual.'

5. Achievement of Objectives cont...

This suggests that the Test Drive model works when used within a TSN (Targetting Social Need) context; that if someone has an opportunity to experience an unfamiliar art form, their perceptual barriers can be broken down and their attitudes transformed by experience. The longer term potential for transforming this initial experience into a regular attendance at arts events would need to be tested and tracked.

4. To research respondents' attitudes to the participating venues: Grand Opera House and Waterfront Hall and perceived barriers to attendance

Attitudes to the venues were to be measured by the response to the initial mailing ie which venue would 'sell out' first. Given the massive response and limited number of available tickets, this proved impossible to gauge as both appeared to sell out equally quickly.

From the questionnaire, it was significant that 61% said that they had been to the Grand Opera House previously and 50% said that they had been to the Waterfront before. Given the target demographic, and results of previous analyses which show low penetration in these areas, this may come as something of a surprise.

However it must be noted that these statistics were not borne out by the venues' box office systems.

This suggests a number of possibilities: that the individual had not been responsible for making their previous booking(s); that their data had not been captured; that their visit pre-dated the current box office systems. This highlights an issue with attempting to access genuine 'first time' attenders.

However in the case of this project, the emphasis was on generating first time attenders by artform, ie specifically to classical arts. Where respondents stated they had been to the venue previously they specified popular events, such as tribute bands.

5. To test two different approaches within the Test Drive framework

Two contrasting approaches were tested at two different stages of the project.

- a. Whereas the first mailing invited response by telephone on a first come first served basis, the second mailing required respondents to complete and return a questionnaire to be included in a prize draw. It is interesting that the second approach generated a higher percentage response rate (27% compared with 13%), though of course the first mailing was a 'cold' call whereas the second mailing targeted people who had already expressed an active interest.
- b. Reminder telephone calls were used for the first two shows, while for the other three, participants were not reminded. The results do not show a consistent level of response, and a larger sample size would be necessary to test these approaches more fully.

5. Achievement of Objectives cont...

6. To generate positive media coverage

Originally the intention was to generate media coverage from participants immediately after their first experience of the arts. However after the first event, it became apparent that there was a high degree of sensitivity among the participants. At the Welcome Desk we discovered that there was some trepidation about attending such an event for the first time and that a direct approach with for example, a TV camera, would be entirely inappropriate, given that the aim of the project was to make participants feel as relaxed as possible.

Therefore we revised this objective. At the final event we asked every participant if they would feel comfortable having their photograph taken. Many declined but of those who agreed we selected a mother and her 15 year old daughter who were happy to have their picture taken. This picture was issued along with a press release to local press via Belfast City Council's Corporate Communications.

6. Recommendations

Our recommendations are based on the following learning outcomes.

The level of response to the initial offer was unexpectedly high and did open up the possibility of respondents being frustrated and disappointed. With hindsight, the response mechanism employed in the second mailing (return and completion of a questionnaire), would have been a more equitable approach. This would have facilitated the generation of research and data capture as well as reducing pressure on busy box offices. However it is likely it would also have generated a lower response rate.

The high level of no shows at the events was disappointing. Not only was it frustrating in that tickets could have gone to other applicants, but the reduced numbers at the interval receptions did affect the atmosphere adversely.

However there isn't really a way round this. It is resource intensive and impractical to telephone every ticket holder and even then this approach does not guarantee full turn out. If the venue had unreserved seating, it would be possible to over-allocate tickets by 10%, but even this is high risk, should all invitees turn up.

Recommendations

1. Given the findings from the post event questionnaires, we would strongly recommend that this group of new audiences are followed up with a subsequent ticket offer from the individual arts organisations. It would appear that there is a degree of price sensitivity (this being the top reason the respondents hadn't previously attended, as well as the caveat expressed by those who would consider re-attending). Therefore we would recommend a personalized letter of invitation offering an exclusive discounted ticket offer eg 'Tickets for a tenner'. A socially motivating offer eg 'Bring a friend for free', might also work well with this group.

6. Recommendations cont...

2. We would also suggest that further research would be required to explore some of the findings in depth. In particular we would recommend that focus groups would allow for attitudinal probing.
3. Given the relatively small sample sizes we would also suggest that the Test Drive model could be carried out on a much larger scale, harnessing some of the learning from this project. A larger project would also offset potential criticism that the project was exclusive to a selected number of households.

If we were to run a similar project on a larger scale in the future we would suggest the following amendments:

- That a dedicated call centre / box office with trained staff be set up to take calls rather than the individual venue box offices. This would relieve pressure on venue box offices and allow them to carry on selling tickets rather than fielding calls. This would also facilitate a degree of screening of participants and enable comprehensive data capture.
- That the initial letter of offer includes Terms and Conditions to prevent misuse.
- That the initial response is invited through a screening mechanism such as the completion of a questionnaire or if a call centre is used, that the script includes questions to screen possible previous attenders.
- That receptions are either on a larger scale or alternatively drinks vouchers for the bar could be provided so that the participants don't feel that they are being 'hived off' from the main bustle of the interval.

7. Outputs

The outputs of the project may be summarised as follows:

- A piece of action research on response to initial offering.
- Qualitative research on attitudes towards the offering, before and after.
- A new audience group for subsequent development by the individual venues.
- A case study specific to Northern Ireland using the Test Drive model.
- Pilot project to inform future audience development initiatives.
- A report for dissemination across the Northern Irish arts sector.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Data Selection

By Super Output Area

Audiences NI cross-referenced the 36 electoral wards with Super Output Area geography and found that they represent a total of 104 SOAs. An average SOA contains 1800 households; therefore at this stage the potential number of households is 187,200.

By Proximity to city centre venues

Audiences NI mapped out the 104 SOAs and identified 18 SOAs closest to the participating venues, Grand Opera House and Waterfront Hall. (See Fig 1.)

Fig. 1 SOAs identified by ward and proximity to venues

Ward Name	SOA Name	LGD	MDM SCORE	RANK OF MDM (where 1 is most deprived)
Ballymacarrett	Ballymacarrett_3	Belfast	72.94	10
Ballymacarrett	Ballymacarrett_1	Belfast	62.43	27
Ballymacarrett	Ballymacarrett_2	Belfast	56.65	37
Botanic	Botanic_5	Belfast	44.58	85
Duncairn	Duncairn_1	Belfast	67.05	17
Duncairn	Duncairn_2	Belfast	55.76	44
Falls	Falls_2	Belfast	81.52	3
Falls	Falls_3	Belfast	77.09	6
Falls	Falls_1	Belfast	69.5	14
New Lodge	New Lodge_2	Belfast	74.09	8
New Lodge	New Lodge_1	Belfast	73.5	9
New Lodge	New Lodge_3	Belfast	68.76	15
Shaftesbury	Shaftesbury_1	Belfast	56.09	40
Shaftesbury	Shaftesbury_2	Belfast	53.81	49
Shaftesbury	Shaftesbury_3	Belfast	46.66	73
Shankill	Shankill_2	Belfast	81.92	2
Shankill	Shankill_1	Belfast	74.94	7
Woodstock	Woodstock_2	Belfast	49.16	64

By MDM ranking

Of the 18 SOAs, 7 are within the top ten SOAs ranked by MDM in Northern Ireland; the remainder are within the top 85 ie these areas are within the top 10% of most deprived areas in NI.

At this stage the potential number of households was 32,400.

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Audiences NI then matched the SOAs with post codes so that the data provider could obtain counts of available-to-mail consumer households.

By Mosaic NI

Mosaic NI enhanced data selection by Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM) by identifying types of households within SOAs, so that for example, pockets of affluence could be identified and excluded. Mosaic cuts through the issue of averaging in SOA and identifies differences within deprived areas in terms of:

- Demographic make-up
- Lifestyles
- Needs

We worked with Experian (providers of Mosaic NI) to carry out detailed analysis on the selected SOAs. The resultant profiles showed us volumes of 'types' of households within the areas and allowed us to focus on the most likely households to respond to our offer. For example, we chose to exclude Breadline Pensioners with long term illness or disability that would prevent them from travelling to an event.

Having proceeded through the filters as above we were able to hire the requisite number of household records in the confidence that a) they were among the most deprived in NI and b) that the offer went to those with no obvious barriers to attendance such as poor health.

8. Appendices cont...

Appendix 2.1: Pre-event questionnaire

In return for your VIP Night Out we would like you to fill in this questionnaire and bring it along on Sunday 1 April. You can hand it over at the Welcome Desk in exchange for your free programme and drinks vouchers.

1. What most interested you about the VIP Night Out offer? (please tick your MAIN reason)

- The fact that it was free
- I'd never been to the opera before and wanted to try it out
- I wanted to treat a friend to a night out
- Other – please specify

2. Before you received the letter, did you know Aida opera was on at the Waterfront?

- Yes
- No

3. Have you ever been to any of the following kinds of events:

- Opera
- Ballet
- Classical Music
- Theatre

4. If No to any of the above, what are your main reasons for not going:

- Tickets are too expensive
- I don't really know what's on
- I wouldn't enjoy it
- I never thought about it
- Please give any other reasons:

5. Have you been to the Waterfront Hall before?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, when did you last go and what did you see (if you can remember)?

8. Appendices cont...

6. Have you been to the Grand Opera House before?

- Yes
- No

7. Do you have access to the internet?

- Yes
- No

8. What age range are you in:

- 15 – 19 years old
- 20 – 24 years old
- 25 – 34
- 35 – 44
- 45 – 54
- 55 – 64
- 65 +

9. Are you interested in getting information about other events (please note these will not necessarily be free events)?

- Yes
- No

Name

Address

Postcode

Email

Telephone Number

Thank you. Enjoy your VIP Night Out.

8. Appendices cont...

Appendix 2.2: Post event questionnaire

1. Did you enjoy your VIP night out?

- Yes
- No

Please tell us what you thought of it. (Just a few words will do.)

2. Was it different to how you expected?

- Yes
- No

If yes, did you enjoy it more than you expected or less?

- Enjoyed it more.
- Enjoyed it less.

Please tell us why.

3. Would you be interested in attending again if you had to pay for the tickets? (Tickets start at £16, with concession rates available.)

- Yes
- No

If No, why not?

- I didn't enjoy it enough to come back
- I wouldn't pay for tickets
- Other – please tell us.

Many thanks. Please hand this back at the Welcome Desk on your way out.

8. Appendices cont...

Appendix 3 : Comments from completed questionnaires

Aida	Very good.
	Visually stunning.
	It was very nice
	I thought it was good. The singing was excellent and the costumes were colourful.
	It was an unexpected surprise
	Great music, brilliant voices.
Swan Lake	More relaxed, less formal than I imagined. Very entertaining night.
	I thought it was wonderful. The skating, music and costumes.
	Very relaxing.
	Very good. Better than we thought it would be.
Woman In Black	It was interesting in its approach and role changes in well thought out linkages to experienced thespians. The effects and sudden appearance were effective. Appropriate ambiance.
	I thought it was very good, enjoyed it and would go back to see it again.
	The play was a bit slow first half, enjoyed second half much more.
Ulster Orchestra	Very interesting, very relaxing. First time, love to go again.
	Very good.
	It was an experience I would never have thought of going to but was surprised, I really enjoyed it.
	I found the music exciting and crystal clear.
	It was alright.
	I love the orchestra and the drama of it all.
	I was surprised I enjoyed it so much.
	I was blown away. It was magnificent.

8. Appendices cont...

Aida	Enjoyed it more	Very good performance.
	Enjoyed it more	Because I haven't been before
	Enjoyed it more	I didn't know what an opera would be like in the Waterfront.
	Enjoyed it more	Thought it would be a lot more monotonous.

Swan Lake	Enjoyed it more	Not as formal as I expected
	Enjoyed it more	I just really enjoyed it because I didn't know what to expect.
	Enjoyed it more	Relaxing, nice music and good to watch.
	Enjoyed it more	Could understand story.
	Enjoyed it more	I loved the story, dance and skating.

Woman In Black	Enjoyed it more	I knew it was a ghost story, but not as good as it played out to be.
	Enjoyed it less	I thought there would be more actors on stage.

Ulster Orchestra	Enjoyed it more	I didn't know what to expect, excited, all hyper. It's the first time in my life I've heard that kind of music, conductor explained, made me relax.
	Enjoyed it less	Disappointed with VIP reception at interval.
	Enjoyed it more	I thought it would be boring but I found it really interesting.
	Enjoyed it more	Beautiful concert in good surroundings.
	Enjoyed it more	The music was good
	Enjoyed it more	I honestly thought it would be boring. It was lovely such a big range were there and how captivating the music was. Although I was given a programme, I was in tune with the moods of the music/artists which was unexpected from me as I would always turn over channels etc when I hear classical or orchestra music.
	Enjoyed it more	It was very inspirational and casual.

8. Appendices cont...

Appendix 4: Press Release

Initiative introduces new audiences to the arts

May 2007

Over 150 people in Belfast have had the chance to experience the magic of live opera, ballet and classical music for the first time as part of an innovative project aimed at broadening access to the arts. Funded by Belfast City Council and led by Audiences NI, the audience development agency for Northern Ireland, the initiative involved the Grand Opera House, Ulster Orchestra and Waterfront Hall. Between them the arts organisations offered over 150 best available tickets at five performances in April and May, with a combined value of around £3,500. Tickets were allocated on a first come first served basis and successful participants were asked to fill in short questionnaires as part of the project's research element to identify barriers to attending the arts.

Project Manager Alice Jackson from Audiences NI said,

'The initiative, VIP Night Out, is based on a recognised audience development model, Test Drive the Arts, where people who have never been to the arts before are offered the chance to 'try out' a performance for free, in the same way you might test drive a car. The idea is that they'll enjoy their first experience so much they'll want to come back.

Given that this project specifically focused on opera and classical music, we were particularly delighted by the response – the majority of the participants said they enjoyed their experience even more than they expected and that they would attend a similar event in the future. A typical comment was 'It was an experience I would never have thought of going to, but was surprised I really enjoyed it.'

We were also particularly pleased that the project attracted young and old alike – from teenagers to senior citizens – and that their experience proved uplifting and inspiring. For example one young girl enjoyed seeing the Ulster Orchestra so much that she's considering taking up the violin.'

For the VIP Night Out initiative, participants were offered a complimentary package of tickets, programmes and interval drinks to experience a choice of opera, ballet and classical music performances at the Grand Opera House or Waterfront Hall. They were asked to complete questionnaires before and after their VIP Night Out to see if their perceptions of classical arts had changed. As well as bringing new people to the arts, the project has resulted in a significant piece of research into barriers to arts attendance, which will help other NI arts organisations broaden access and develop new audiences.

Councillor Bernie Kelly, Chair of the Arts sub-committee at Belfast City Council commented:

8. Appendices cont...

"Belfast City Council is keen to encourage everyone to enjoy the rich cultural experience that the city has to offer. The Test Drive the Arts partnership with Audiences NI has been a tremendous success and an important opportunity for us to challenge some of the preconceptions about arts attendance. We hope that this work will provide useful information to inform future initiatives."

ENDS

Notes for Editors

Audiences NI is the dedicated audience development agency for Northern Ireland, set up by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in 2004. It has over 30 members, drawn from venues, festivals, theatre companies and local authorities across Northern Ireland.

For more information go to www.audiencesni.com.