Asunder · Conference Presentation

JOHNSON, Esther <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8884-4192>

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:
http://shura.shu.ac.uk/17497/

______________________________

This document is the author deposited version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Published version


______________________________

Copyright and re-use policy

See http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html
"...and then all the world began to roar"

ASUNDER
The story of an English town in the First World War

Esther Johnson
Professor of Film and Media Arts
Sheffield Hallam University
asunder1916.uk
@1916asunder
blanchepictures.com

2016 commemorative project for the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, with a particular focus on the North East

Primarily funded by:
14–18 NOW WW1 Centenary Art Commissions across the UK and
Sunderland Cultural Partnership

PROJECT AIMS

• to uncover untold stories of WW1 with a focus on Sunderland and the North East of England
• to experiment with mixing archive with contemporary footage shot especially for the film
• to create a narrative that weaves oral history testimonies, diary entries and memoirs from those that lived through WW1 with newspaper stories published in 1914–18 editions of the Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette
• to collaborate with musicians from the North East to create an original soundtrack to be performed live at the premiere

14–18 NOW WW1 Centenary Art Commissions across the UK
Sunderland Cultural Partnership
Sunderland City Council
Newcastle
MAC Sunderland
Department for Culture Media & Sport
Lottery Funded
University of Sunderland
Music

- Orchestral score inspired by early 1900s experiments in music
- Use of woodwind and celeste popular in late 1800s/early 1900s. Decision not to use brass and traditional notions instrumentation for war.
- Researched traditional folk songs – found The Rigs of Sunderland Fair about an ideal day at the fair, sung A cappella in the film
- Researched Music Hall and early recorded music technologies such as wax cylinders
- Score – Orchestral and string quartet version

“One of the things which intrigued me especially about this project was our love of the orchestral music from that period. Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring premiered in 1913, Schönberg’s Pierrot Lunaire in 1912. Béla Bartók and Maurice Ravel were composing, as was Claude Debussy, so it was a time of huge change in harmony and composition and we’ve dipped into that period for inspiration a lot.”

– Peter Brewis from Field Music

Narrative Research

- Diary Entries
- Essays
- Memoirs
- 1914–18 Newspapers
- Oral History Testimonies

Film Characters

Individuals from the North East

Margaret Holmes
Norman Gaudie
Bella Reay
Garnet Wolsey Fyfe
Arthur Linfoot
George Thompson
Robert Hope (Hepple)

Plus: Lizzie Holmes and Lisbeth Simm (no found photographs)

Music

- Orchestral score inspired by early 1900s experiments in music
- Use of woodwind and celeste popular in late 1800s/early 1900s. Decision not to use brass and traditional notions instrumentation for war.
- Researched traditional folk songs – found The Rigs of Sunderland Fair about an ideal day at the fair, sung A cappella in the film
- Researched Music Hall and early recorded music technologies such as wax cylinders
- Score – Orchestral and string quartet version

“One of the things which intrigued me especially about this project was our love of the orchestral music from that period. Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring premiered in 1913, Schönberg’s Pierrot Lunaire in 1912. Béla Bartók and Maurice Ravel were composing, as was Claude Debussy, so it was a time of huge change in harmony and composition and we’ve dipped into that period for inspiration a lot.”

– Peter Brewis from Field Music

Film Characters

Individuals from the North East

Margaret Holmes
Norman Gaudie
Bella Reay
Garnet Wolsey Fyfe
Arthur Linfoot
George Thompson
Robert Hope (Hepple)

Plus: Lizzie Holmes and Lisbeth Simm (no found photographs)
PERFORMANCES WITH LIVE MUSIC

Asunder sheet music  Conductor Hugh Brunt  Asunder premiere programme

Rehearsals and recording at Sage Gateshead

Asunder team with Royal Northern Sinfonia

Performances with Live Music
PREMIERE – 10.07.16
Sunderland Empire Theatre
Premiere included additional Asunder inspired arts activities
Barbican London
12.02.17

ARCHIVE RESEARCH

IMAGERY
STUDIO RESEARCH

Themes of Archive Film

Search for Ghost Signs

Textural Visual Research

Mapping Timeline for Film and events in 1916

ARCHIVE FILM

90+ archive films used from 4 film archives

CONTEMPORARY FILM

locations in the North East as they are now
COMMUNITY SCREENINGS
Screenings taking place in locations in which
the film characters once lived and knew:
e.g. Sunderland; Roker; Hendon; Blyth;
South Tyneside; Gateshead; Newcastle; Durham

CINEMA SCREENINGS
– Special screenings for schools
– Screenings with Q&As

2018 SCREENINGS
– The Women's Library, LSE
– International Women’s Day
– Sheffield Museums
– Sage Gateshead – performance with live music
  on the Armistice anniversary

http://asunder1916.uk/events

PREMIERE AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

“In the plethora of events marking the centenary of the
First World War and especially the Somme,
Asunder really stood out for me: its highly imaginative
concept, brilliant storytelling, geographical and cultural
specificity, above all its power to move and connect with
the reality of events 100 years ago.
A fantastic piece of work.”
– Simon Chaplin, Writer

“The film was meticulously researched and put together
to evoke so many emotions, what a tribute…
I think the resounding set of applause at the end of the
show said it all!”
– Very Viv, Sir James Knott Trust

“Asunder was phenomenal!”
– Brenda Graham, Sunderland Heritage Forum

“I thought it was amazing and loved every minute.
The stories were so lovely and left you wanting to find out
more – faultless.”
– Louise Clamp, Sunderland Vibrancy Group

“The show was incredibly moving and powerful, I was
very emotional at points.”
– Lynne Patience, Sunderland resident

AWARDS

Winner Journal Culture 2017
Best Event of the Year
Shortlisted for Living North 2016
Performance of the Year

“very special indeed”
– Living North

“Asunder casts its spell”
– Sunderland Echo

“A fascinating kaleidoscope”
– Chronicle

Asunder

asunder1916.uk
@1916asunder
blanchepictures.com
esther@blanchepictures.com

REVIEWS