Asunder · conference presentation

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

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"...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
Shffield 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

· 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

PROJECT AIMS
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

Arthur Linfoot
George Thompson
Robert Hope (Hepple)

Garnet Wolsey Fyfe

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, Schoenberg’s Pierrot Lunaire in 1912. Bela Bartok 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
PERFORMANCES WITH LIVE MUSIC

Asunder sheet music  
Conductor Hugh Brunt

Asunder premiere programme

Rehearsal 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

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

Late 2018:
– Sage Gateshead
  a performance with live music is planned for the WW1 Armistice Centenary in November
– BBC Broadcast
– DVD release

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.”
– Michael 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!”
– Vicky Wint, 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

REVIEWS

“*a fascinating kaleidoscope*”
– Chronic

“*very special indeed*”
– Living North

“*Asunder casts its spell*”
– Sunderland Echo

“Montage shots of residential streets, the remnants of industry and shipbuilding, relics of the conflict itself, fashion a meticulous mosaic of themed segments, captured with Johnson’s trademark painterly eye for detail”
– Culture Vulture

AWARDS

Nominated for Learning on Screen BUFVC 2018
Archives Award

Nominated for BAFTSS 2018
Best Experimental Practice Research Portfolio Award

WINNER of Journal Culture 2017
Best Event of the Year

Nominated for Focal International 2017
Best Use of Footage in a Factual Production

Shortlisted for Living North 2016
Performance of the Year

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