Asunder · conference presentation

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"...and then all the world began to roar"

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

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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
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

*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
- Robert Hope (Hepple)
- George Thompson
- Garnet Wolsey Fyfe
- Arthur Linfoot
- Plus: Lizzie Holmes and Lisbeth Simm (no found photographs)

-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

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

Rehearsals, Mining Cart, Image © Imperial War Museums

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:

- Sunderland; Roker; Hendon; Blyth;
- South Tyneside; Gateshead; Newcastle; Durham

CINEMA SCREENINGS

- Special screenings for schools
- Screenings with Q&As

2018 SCREENINGS

Late 2018:
- The Women’s Library, LSE
- International Women’s Day
- Sheffield Museums

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 Willis, 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 Archive 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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