**Transcript - Podcast**

**Host:** Simon Bradley

**Speakers:** Donald Shaw, Celtic Connections

Simon Bradley 0:02

So, welcome to today's UHI Music seminar. We’re very excited and very appreciative to have Donald Shaw with us today. Donald Shaw has had a massive effect and continues to have a very significant effects on the musical landscape of Scotland. First of all, with his work with the seminal Gaelic super-group ‘Capercaillie’ and over the last decade or so, steering the January festival Celtic Connections, which has now been going for over 20 years and is major focal point of the cultural diet of Scotland. A UHI welcome to Donald Shaw, who has very kindly agreed to share some of his insight. Donald and I are going to start off discussing some of the issues that are facing the music industry just now, but we look forward to bringing in comments from staff, and students. So my name is Simon Bradley. I lead the MA music and environment. So Donald a big welcome, and thanks so much for joining us. A few technical issues today! Which is part of the, of the new landscape. As musicians we have always had technical issues to deal with in any kind of live, you know, experience, but we've got additional ones now, we've all had to learn new skills, and I'm sure you can relate to that from this years’ experience with Celtic connections.

Donald Shaw: 1:22

Indeed, yeah, I've spent a good number of hours on Zoom meetings with various employees of Vimeo, essentially, the big challenge for us when we realised, quite late in the year, that actually there would be no audiences that could come and experience the normal Celtic Connections, and we decided to kind of fully get immersed in the idea of an online festival. One of the first challenges was trying to ascertain what might be the best platform, both from a ticketing point of view and from a point of view of streaming, we didn't actually kind of hit the green light on it until early October, so the turnaround for us was pretty quick. We didn't film anything until November, we spent most of October trying to realise how best it might suit Celtic Connection’s audience worldwide, and also, and most importantly the musicians themselves in terms of performances. A big part of that was the technology, I mean, by then we were able to look back, few reports from other festivals around the country who tried to do similar events and get some kind of sense of what had worked and what hadn't worked. So, after a lot of research, we kind of decided that the Vimeo platform was the best for us, partly because we knew it could contain quite a high load of traffic at any one point, we knew that we could have 24 hour support that they would create their own human resources support for people, maybe couldn't figure out a way to make the link work, etc, etc. But most importantly, was the quality. So on a higher level with them you have you're paying the sort of premium price to use a platform, they have high quality end-coders, which, when we were uploading the footage, they would work out what was required in terms of how good your bandwidth was. So essentially, wherever you were in the world, however, poor or good your broadband was, the footage would change resolution to suit. So that was one of the major factors. And the other thing was really security of the footage, YouTube has, has quite a poor track record on security of footage, even unlisted ticketing can be hacked quite easily. So yeah, that's where we ended up but that was, that was a real learning curve. And also, I think by the time we announced – which was really not until December – we decided that the priority was two or three areas. Essentially, the first one was connecting with musicians again, giving them the space to perform, trying to get them to feel like it was a natural process for them to leave their house, travel, walk to get to a venue, and get on stage and play with a, with their pals again which for some artists for some bands they hadn't done that for a year. That's not a given. I mean it's not, it's not just like getting on a bike again really, you know, particularly if it's not solos or duos, if you’ve got bands and they haven't played for a number of months. So, there was a kind of emotional element to it as well where, although there was, you know, we had real encouraging signs from a lot of musicians that they wanted to be involved. There was also quite a lot of hesitation about what it would feel like to just come together and play again.

I think it's important not to underestimate what an audience does for a musician. It's interesting because often if you, for many of us who may not even remember when they pick up an instrument when they're a kid and they, you know, they started getting taught an instrument. After a few years, to try and remember what that process was where you learn an instrument, and you became more adept and skilled at it, you kind of just forget about that process a little bit, you might remember some of the teaching you had, but you don't tend to sort of suddenly wake up one day and go, I can do this really well now. It is a very very gradual process. And I think it's the same process with live performance, other than the fact that for a lot of people they probably do remember the first time they played in public, and they probably found it pretty scary experience. And so, they might remember that because it was a quite profound moment, but then the more they did that, the more they forget about the, the incremental steps that that brings to what they do, in terms of proving what they do and also finessing how they feel comfortable about playing in front of an audience.

And so, the question is, let's say to a percentage, how much does an audience actually facilitate what you do? Now I’ve sat on stage with amateur musicians before, I mean musicians who are very much doing it just as something part time, and eh…they're absolutely comfortable sitting down playing music in that situation, but if you then take them out of that situation, put them in a room with no audience, and ask them to play the same music…they feel disconnected in some way, and they actually struggle to do what it is that they're doing. It's a bit like sometimes, you know, putting your head and rubbing your stomach round at the same time, you know it seems like a simple process and they've done it for years, but then they can't do it anymore.

So, my point is that I certainly experienced that this year we got some fantastic performances on film, but I was acutely aware of the fact that for some musicians, their natural habitat is when there's an audience there. And, and we have to…I think in the online environment, if we're working in terms of producers or organisers or is that we, we have to be aware of that for musicians. It's not quite as straightforward. I don't know it's a bit like emm…doing something, you know, you know, in the sense where there’s a sense of danger. You're on the side of the stage and there's an audience and then you got get pushed out onto the stage, you find out extra, you have to deliver, you have to, you know, you have to perform, you really have a choice. And so, if that extra element of danger is not there, it can be compromising a thing. Yeah, so anyway going back to the process - that technical process…

Once we decided to film it was really just hard to retrain as a low budget TV producer and work, work out a way where we could take our funding…So, Celtic Connections is very highly reliant on box office. As a festival, probably around about 75% is funded by box office. So we knew that we weren't going to have that, really, because at that point we weren't really expecting an income revenue stream from the online programme because we had no idea really what the value of that was, I think that's the other thing we were acutely aware that through the year we witnessed some bands that might have quite a big audience normally who, who might be getting 150 or 200 people viewing what they were doing, or we might see an artist that we thought was not so much on the radar of a big audience, was actually getting two or 3000 viewings. So, there was in many sense no rhyme or reason to a lot of the audience figures that were coming to witness what was going on online. There's also that element of online fatigue or clashing. We didn't really know what the numbers might be. So, from a business case point of view we couldn't put forward a business case to gospel life of the city council that involved much in the way of income from streaming, because we didn't know what to expect. So essentially what we had to do was, was persuade our, our funders, Creative Scotland, Scottish Government, Xpo, and to a certain extent the council…we had to persuade them that any funding that they would normally give us that we could take that money and be as adaptable as possible, to support as many musicians as possible in Scotland for first and foremost, but then also support the ecosystem of the folk scene and performance scene, whether that's technicians across sound and lights and stage management etc. S

So that was our goal, and we did that by opening up half a dozen venues in Glasgow and trying to make them feel like a natural performance space again, particularly the concert hall. We then had this process where we had to work out a way of making the best use of a filming company in one day to get as much content, filmed and recorded in one day, edited, and prepared for presentation, and that all happens very quickly. In fact, when Celtic connections launched on Friday, the 16th of January or whatever, at that point, there was only two nights performances, actually, on the Vimeo platform ready. Everything was a 24…we literally lived in an edit suite for all the festival and we were literally finishing by maybe three o'clock in the afternoon, uploading by half past five, and the audience was there at half past 7. So I wouldn’t recommend that! I’m not doing that again. But thankfully, we had we didn't have technical glitches with Vimeo because we had, you know, we had a big support from them on that.

The biggest problem really is letting go, I mean it's like anything. It's like when you make a record, it’s…you know when you make a record and you have footage, when you have multi cameras, and you have options, you know, going back reminded me of the great Brian Eagle comment, when he said you never finish your record, you just abandon it. Well, it felt like that with the edits, you'd be in the edit suite, and it was good, and it was half past 2, and it was great…and you’d say can I just do that, can I just do that…and really, you would never finish it, you had to at some point say, Okay, we got to go here because it's not gonna, there's gonna be no film for the audience at 7.

It is a whole new world. I think, now, there may be a case…essentially it was a big success for us, because of its reach. We didn't expect the reach. We reached 65 countries around the world. Within the festival, we did what we'd never done before because it hadn't made sense, we, we actually did some micro marketing if you like internationally. For instance, on the opening night which eventually was viewed 75,000 times…within that opening night, we noticed a spike in certain cities for instance Buenos Aires we had something like 140 people watched it, so the next day we took a 50 pound advert and Facebook in Buenos Aires, and connected with some of the music scene there, and then we had another 400 people watched it the next day. So we did some micro-marketing like that, where we just watched the stats, but actually what was most encouraging was, in many cases, the amount of messaging from within Scotland and England and Ireland, you know, even people in the Hebrides writing saying…it's not practical for us to come to Glasgow in January, and we've always heard with the festival we know friends who had gone to it or played at it and so it’s great to be able to see a bit of what this is all about. So, we felt we had a lot, a lot of plus points in terms of reaching new audiences. Will happen again like that? I don't know. I think there is a case for a hybrid festival but essentially, if you film a live gig, you're into a big area of compromise in terms of the audio quality.

One of the things that struck me about the filming of the bands in somewhere like the Concert Hall, on the stage, with a monitor system, was essentially you're not fighting against the PA sonically so it's more like being in a recording studio. You have a bit monitoring, but there's no colorization really going into the microphones like a PA does, you know, so it meant that we could record a very high level. A lot of time we were using studio quality microphones instead of live microphones. I love that, as a musician, I love that, you know. I've never enjoyed listening back to like gigs, the audio quality of that I've never particularly enjoyed it. So, I loved that the dynamics where there, that nothing was being spoiled by the colorization of the PA itself. But is that a possible model going forward? Because we all want to be playing live again and surely, we will be by next January. So, for us, do we somehow consolidate the success of this last year by filming events? Em…it's a big question and one, one, we don't know the answer to, because filming a live gig needs a lot more resources, and when do we put it out, do we really do that same thing of 24 hours later or…so, these are questions were, will, will pick up on later in the year, but that's the basics of how the online festival felt for us, yeah…

Simon Bradley 14:13

Thanks for that Donald, it's a remarkable story of a brave new world, as you mentioned, and some points I wanted to pick up on on the emotional side of performance…because it's almost like this is some kind of big thought experiment and we're guinea pigs. And you know, we've turned everything on its head, and we're just trying to really feel, what does it all mean and how do we adapt to it?

Last week we had Peter Wood and Margaret Robertson from Shetland, and we were chatting actually about, you know…I’m in the Western Isles, and I've never seen as much of Celtic Connections as I have this year. I bought the online pass, and I can certainly buy into the, you know the advantages of the pristine sound, you've got a ringside seat, you can even rewind and listen to a song again. You can stop…you've got that control. So, there are certain advantages but just to tie that up, myself and Margaret, eh…you know, living in Shetland, she said even if you did go down to Glasgow for the weekend, and if you go down as a couple, it could be quite easily, you will get much changed from £1000 pounds. But she said even if she was going to do that, or performing got it, she would still be interested in buying the ticket in addition to that. So, it wasn't a replacement for it, it’s almost like additionality…that now we've got a taste for it, is there a demand, that's going to be still there once we, you know, we've all got the vaccines and we can do live performances again? Perhaps that's something that's permanently changed. You've kind of alluded to that, the opportunities of micro targeting, you know, the global audience. There are opportunities, as well as that, I mean I know you like football…changing the subject somewhat…but that that the emotional side of performance. Once you strip away that the crowd of an audience, I was amazed how different football was as an experience, but also another point that I wanted to make was, and it was actually about stand-up comedy. Another performance thing. And were saying that at the end of a run, it's perfect because you've got that feedback and honing of your craft tuning of your performance with the audience, so it is really a different, a different job performing in the kind of live studio, kind of hybrid scenario that the musicians did, with remarkable success I thought in Celtic Connections. I just wanted to pick up two of the acts that I saw. One was the Elephant Sessions, who did a great job…they were in the Ironworks and that's a club environment, and I had the headphones on, I turned the lights down, but I wanted to ask about, kind of, augmented reality possibilities? And really using the modern technologies in headphones and filming to maybe see if that was something that you might consider if you did online concerts in the future? And also to some of the artists that really kind of lost themselves, they found the flow. And that was what I look for. There was some points of concerts where the musicians, they almost forgot that they were performing in front of a camera, and I thought that was really nice to see. That was for me was like the yardstick I was using to kind of judge how successful or not the concert was. So, there's a few points there, but I don't if you've got any comments on those Donald…

Donald Shaw 17:26

Yeah, no, that is interesting. You know, I certainly witnessed that with a lot of performances, because there is…you say there’s no audience but there is certainly that pressure of, it's quite intimidating having like four cameras pointed right at you. And also, you understand quite quickly that there's a time pressure for them playing that there is only the opportunity to do this two or three times, and ideally only once. So, I certainly witnessed was with some of the bands, or some of the artists, where they found themselves in the moment. I think you're right; I think that idea of some kind of immersive experience. Now, there has been a bit of that going on…a couple of the festivals in in North America, we looked at them. I think it might have been Edmonton Folk Festival, we watched their online…and they'd created this kind of map where you could go to whichever stage you wanted. And, eh…you know, the band had the original backdrop of the stage. There was a sort of a bar area, and they had this ticketing process that they really encouraged, which brought groups together. Now, the difference was at that time, there was less concern about people being in a house, you know, maybe four or six people. But we know with that festival, some people were like camping in their sitting room, and you know ended up their jobs or beer and so, and you could present on the side, so…maybe that's going to happen maybe that's more of an element that will be there. I think the problem for all of us is, where is it going? We don’t really know.

The reality is, do kind of versions of this virus crop up over the next 10 or 20 years and we're all in this little bit of a state of limbo? In which case, the points that you're making right now are hugely relevant, because we need to think about making the future as good as it can be for us as musicians, or do we do, what I know a lot of other musicians have done, which is really, they're just holding out for it to come back, and a lot of people are suffering ill mental health through that process, I'm aware of that. I actually think, even if we do go back it's going to still take, you know, at least a year. I think it's important for musicians to constantly be looking at how to reimagine their world, both technically and in terms of performance. At the heart of music is communication, and it gives us a language that can be shared with anyone in the world. It essentially removes barriers, immediately, but particularly in the physical sense, in the sense that you can walk into a bar and illustrate the world, and you can sit down and make music with someone, and you don't need to be able to speak their language, you can just make music with them. And it's that sense of community, even on a small level. Community can be two people. So, it's that sense of community that's the hardest thing not for us to have at this time.

Simon Bradley 20:40

Thanks for that, Donald. Yeah, I mean, going back to the experience of, you know, sitting in Uist and watching the Elephant Sessions, sat at my desk! And then of course there's no kind of post gig or pre gig, you know…it's sat as a bit of screen time. I mean, I thought it did a wonderful job, but your right, that sense of web music sits, its function within a much wider human picture is one of the areas that we’ll really have to…

Donald Shaw 21:06

…but I also think that, I've probably gone on record this year saying, I'm still hugely disappointed – after God knows how many surveys and research papers have been written over the last 30 or 40 years – I'm still disappointed at a government level, how there's still very little messaging about the value of social cohesion through music. And disappointed that in the kind of climax of the Brexit discussions, you know, we turn on the telly and every other day, they were talking about how their red lines were being moved all the time and there was this big moment where was coming down for fishing contracts. And the fishing industry in England is worth less than 20% of what the art industry is in England, and the arts industry generally in the UK, way outperforms most other industries, including IT, including agriculture and so on. So from a business point of view, it will have made sense for them to give a bit more priority to the arts, generally. But also, this element of wellbeing, that all of us on this panel I'm sure are aware of, particularly in a time when people are struggling through a health issue. It should be being raised at government level, the value of the arts for people to get through that. And I think that certainly we felt within Celtic Connections, when we still did some online schools concerts, and we did some discussions with some of the teachers, they talked about the fact that if they could just close the school for a week and just draw pictures, and make music that would have a way bigger effect than anything else they could do at that point. And I feel that that strategy has to be increased, in terms of all elements of education, and I think it's important for people like ourselves, all of us that are on this panel to be aware of that and to facilitate music as a healer. Interestingly through a lot of performances that we've heard at Celtic connections, we've had many musicians that have come from stressful environments. We've had artists like Fatima de Awara from Mali who now lives in Paris, and she performed last year's festival to 2000 people in the Tram Way. Fantastic African songs, and her story is one of having to leave Mali, due to ISIS and she, she ran away, she ended up in Paris, but, you know, she talked about her songs being like pills. Like medicine. She’d wake up in the morning and she would sing a song, you know, because she was suffering from not being with her parents and. And that was her medicinal way of getting through the process. I find that fascinating, that on a lower level, you know discussions with musicians when we, when we did the online process of musicians coming in, that was the one consistent thing I heard was, it just feels good to do this and I don't know why, and it just feels good to do it you know. So, going off kilter there…just…I think that is important.

Simon Bradley 24:17

Thanks. I think that's a massive issue for perhaps the framing of music as a kind of glamourous, superstar adulation…kind of that musician up there, and the audience down below in the pit as it were…but music, of course that's one aspect of music, but music is so much more. Community music, expression, wellbeing, health…these issues that you've touched upon. And that message seems to get lost. There's plenty of studies, and even like, you know the managers forum. They've, they've identified creative skills as the skills of the future. They're the ones that are not going to be automated. And it's the kind of political decision making where people are influenced by perceptions, perhaps, more than realities…that the benefits of music, which are demonstrable, are not fully accounted for and we suffer perhaps as a sector because of that. That framing of musician. And perhaps that's a wider question; a massive question.

One thing I wanted to do is to bring in some, some of the many people who, people have messaged me and said there’s so much to ask. I can't think of a question! But Katie, you had a question about the online festival. Katie, are you able to speak and if anyone else has got a question, if they message me? I'll try and bring you in…

Katie Masheter 25: 36

As a massive fan of Celtic connections. Really sad not to be travelling down to Glasgow with all my chums this year, we really thoroughly enjoyed the online version. I know lots of friends who have benefited as musicians performing and actually expressed as a bit of a lifeline ahead of Christmas and things. So yeah, I had a question, kind of around the event management I guess…a lot of people wondering how they charge for online performance highly charged for him shooting their creativity, and I had a query on ticketing. I had a chat with Eden Court yesterday who was saying that there's been a lot of studies done around, actually the donation per person, as to how much you can afford is often the preferred method? But you went down the ticketing route, so just keen to know a bit more about why that was, and how many people maybe bought those festival passes V the purchasing kind of individual performances…?

Donald Shaw 26:28

Sure. Yeah. No, it's uh…it was it was a challenge for us, because we felt we finessed our live ticketing pricing structure to a great degree over the 20 years have Celtic Connections. You know, I would argue that Celtic Connections as a festival, has tried to align itself as a festival of the people, if you like, and I think our live ticket prices, if you were to look at an artist, a headline artist that came in to play in Glasgow out with Celtic Connections…their ticket would be much more expensive than, than, what we were presenting it as, and that's, you know, against the rising costs of venues and production. So, we tried as much as possible to always be inclusive from a pricing point of view. I think with the online thing, there's two things that are worth saying. We felt that…I had great concerns, actually…that there was too much free content available throughout this last year, and I was concerned that musicians were too ready to give themselves free on YouTube or wherever. And I wouldn't comment negatively on it myself because in some cases, it was the musicians choices and they felt that they, they were giving something back to the people which is fair. But the reality is that most good minded folk, understand the value of the arts and will pay for it if it's distinct that it's worthwhile. And so, I think we need to be careful to not feel embarrassed about actually just putting even a minimal structural price on something and saying, look, I have to put a price on this, and we have to put a value on it! And actually the value in many cases is not for the people that know, it's not for the people that normally buy tickets, and it's not for the musicians. It's for the rest of the world to start waking up and understanding that, because the big multinational companies that have moved in like Amazon and Spotify and Apple Music, basically hastily created these extraordinary contracts with major record labels. With Sony and EMI and Warner Brothers, a good number of years ago, where they scooped up the big names within those contracts, and those contracts didn't look so bad, actually for those big names because they dished out multimillion pound deals to the labels that owned those artists.

But, in amongst, of course, the genre-led music…folk, jazz, and to some extent, classical, orchestral experimental, blues etc. – we’re kind of stuck with that model for selling our music, and kind of overnight went from, where somebody would say, I heard this track on the radio, I really love what they do, I'm going to check them out…oh look, you can download their album for £7.99 on iTunes. Well actually, that's okay, but now, you hear on the radio and go, I'll just click it on the phone, I can listen to it 1000 times from Spotify and that's worth 10 pence. So almost overnight, that changed…so, sorry, I've not answered your question yet!

So, in terms of pricing, we wanted to try and be somewhere in between, where it was not so cheap because it was kind of, you know, almost an insult to the quality of music, and at the same time not so expensive that we were making it elitist in any way. And how did we get there? Well we did a lot of research, we actually at the point that we went on sale, we had figures that showed in the last 300 main online concerts in Europe, approximately 35% of a normal audience were picking up on the sale of that. Or, to put it another way, the audience was prepared to pay 35% of a normal ticket price, which is a better way of looking at it. So, essentially, if someone was used to paying 20 pounds, that they would pay maybe £7 to view that as opposed to actually the experience.

So we did a bit of research on that, and we knew at the point, once we kind of really gone as far as we could with our budget, we knew that we had a fantastic list of artists, so we thought that packaged together, that was a really attractive element. That you could potentially see all of those artists, even if you've never seen some of them before, and we really like the idea that potentially someone who loves you know, Elephant Sessions, you know…it can work both ways! Generational it can be a younger fan who likes Elephant Sessions, but then happens to stumble upon someone like Rab Noakes...and goes, I don't know who that old guy is, but I really liked his stuff, you know. Or, maybe the other way around where someone who's used to that generation of Dick Cotton and Rab Noakes, and you might stumble upon Elephant Sessions and say, I thought this was gonna be a complete racket but actually I love this, this is cool. So, we did have that at the back of our mind, the overall ticket, you buy a ticket to watch. Now we knew that individually the concept would be roughly £7, so across 20 days if you wanted to buy a ticket, every day that was going to cost you nearly £200. So, the £35 ticket seemed like an amazing value. And also we were able to do that because as I said earlier, we hadn't really structured in much of an income stream from those tickets, so I think Glasgow Life were fiercely taken aback. Well I was, anyway. Eventually we did about 15,000 tickets for the passes, and we did another nearly another 15,000 individual tickets.

After VAT and everything, maybe half a million dollars’ worth of tickets from, from that stream. Which I'd love to see ended up being a big bonus to me and our staff, but no, it will be reinvested heavily into the next festival. So, it was a huge success, and it gives us other areas that we can, we can work on, like education and commissions. And so yeah, so the pricing structure, I think what for us. My advice would be an individual concert, still to be around you should still be around about that seven to 10 pound mark, five to 10 pounds, I think there has been good results from donations. I know Skerryvore’s Daniel said that they went down that route, where they made it two pounds, but pay what you can and you know he's, they basically I think half their audience paid two pounds and half their audience were paying anything up to 30 quid, you know, on donations. So, I think it really varies. I think it's a difficult business model. I mean right now if you said to me, that sounds like a great business, well why don't you go and do a week's festival and, books some acts, and etc etc. Actually, when you start to factor in broadcast quality camera shoots, audio recording, editing, etc. actually there's not a lot of money left at the end of the day. We were lucky because we had a safety net of some funding, so we genuinely thought two or 3000 people might buy the tickets, we didn't see that coming. And I think it just depends. I think it depends on the nature of the audience and the reach, but yeah…

Simon Bradley 33:10

Thanks for that Donald, that’s really insightful. And I always think of, when it comes to monetizing music, of the GillianWell song, they will do it anyway. Don’t know if you know it? Maybe this is an opportunity to address that, and find better…better ways of monetizing digitally accessed music. A couple of things that…I'm going to open a poll, and if you could just all...it’s just very short…that would be most appreciated, and I've got a question from Nick Green. Nick Green, are you able to…?

Nick Green 33:37

I am, yes. Simon, Alan has several questions that he's posted in chat, as well. Yeah, Donald, I wanted to pick up on something you mentioned this notion of online fatigue, eh…and obviously talking about sort of mental health but is this balance this sort of work life balance idea that you can have shown me that he says…so many of us, particularly lecturers and schoolteachers and things we're spending inordinate amounts of time in front of students in meetings, and we're on-screen time all the time. And yet, leisure time with the current restrictions, also tend to be spent online, a lot of the time so we sat in front of screens, all the time. Interestingly though, taking that point, I took the plunge last weekend, there's a band that I've loved for years that I saw they were rare, they'd actually they were raising money for a ticketed event last weekend, and it was through a Crowdfunder, and it was really the whole point of the crowdfunding was to try and keep the band afloat. Right. They exceeded their target, but if you committed to certain amounts of money, you got a certain amount to the actually one to one workshops that we're doing vocal tuition…

Donald Shaw 34: 53

Wow. Who was the band?

Nick Green 34:55

It was the Unthanks.

Donald Shaw 34: 56

Oh, the Unthanks. Yeah, of course, yeah.

Nick Green 34:57

So, I watched the first…I think actually the first online concert that I've paid for actually last weekend. I’m sorry to admit I haven't paid to watch any of Celtic Connections, but eh…really been enjoying the BBC Alba footage. The highlights have been excellent.

Donald Shaw 35:12

Good, yeah, well that was an interesting point. I would just share that…we did, that's another aspect…that we did decide quite early on to spend more on the production and make it broadcast quality, and we felt that…I knew in the background, just because of some people I've been speaking to…I knew in the background that the BBC were struggling for content, obviously because they weren't having the situations where they could film artists, so, so we did make a proposal to the BBC, where we said look, this footage is going to be broadcast quality, and that helped a bit in terms of getting some of it onto both BBC Scotland and BBC Alba, for some of the stuff we actually filmed. Just to pick up on the fatigue thing, you know what I think is important for musicians, because I'm guilty of it as well, I'm guilty of forgetting about why I even got into this in the first place. And it's really important to…it's funny because people talk about trying to have a diary in your day and saying, well, I better spend an hour doing those emails, and a bit of doing this and doing that, but a creative diary can be very difficult, sometimes you just don't feel it, you know, and that's okay, it's okay just to not feel it. But there is another aspect to that where, to try and get into the zone, you might need to just go through the pain barrier of 20 minutes, might be the same as yoga! You go through a pain barrier, we don't really want to be there and it's feeling a bit uncomfortable, just to take that time with your instrument, music or composing or whatever. Give yourself the chance of going through a pain barrier of not feeling it, and then you start to feel it, and then it's kind of like after coming out of having had a swim in cold water, you just feel so great about yourself, and I think that screens can't really do that, I mean screens are basically, that's the sort of administrative side of what you do and that's okay, but that's not going to give you what you wanted when you first started to do what you're doing as a musician. And I think you're right, it's difficult for the balance for teachers and instructors, and I do think that we have to encourage creativity, you know, and just…it's funny, isn't it, it's like, you know whenever I was at school, forty years ago I had a teacher just kept saying to me, just practice, nothing else matters. Just practice, nothing else matters. But I'd kind of forgotten that, you know, I'd forgotten about that. I mean I don't practice I'm guilty of not practice and because I think there's more important things to do, but regardless of the fact that it's not good for your technical prowess to not practice, more importantly, it's not good for your state of mind, because you start to lose track of why it is that you do what you do. So yeah, I think you're right, it's just, it's just a balance we all need to find.

Simon Bradley 37: 45

Thanks Nick and Donald. And we’ve got Alan Baird, has got a question, I believe…

Alan Baird 37:48

Yeah, I'll try and...try and not ramble, but a couple of weeks ago I did the Paisley Book Festival. I'm in Paisley, and it was fully digital. And I wondered, like if you knew the stats from…so because everything was literature, I was worried about not getting a lot of people tuning in live, it was all on YouTube and it went live at a certain time, I was at one o'clock in the afternoon. 63 people tuned in to watch live but many more watched sort of on catch up so the views ended up being over five hundred, and from my sort of social media things I could see it I got new followers and people messaging me since the event. Have you got any stats about are you developing new audiences by people being able to watch on catch-up and discover new music that way?

Donald Shaw 38:31

Yeah, Absolutely. And in fact, we were worried about the technical challenges of going live because originally we were going to go live, and have some kind of social media element to it. But in the end, we knew the technical challenges were too much, but I think a quoted the opening night…I thought that was interest our opening night, we had about 14,000, views. Which is interesting for me because normally it'd be 1800 people in the concert hall, then they go home and that's it. You know, it's done. So, there's 14,000 people, but by the end of the week, it had been watched 75,000 times. Now, clearly because of the number of tickets we sold, that means some people must have watched it two or three times, which is also fantastic you know? If they feel like it's good enough to do that, because I think sometimes live streams can seem like sort of as a disposable format. What's interesting about the BBC now, is BBC iPlayer for example…that was set up that the iPlayer was only facilitated for a catch up process for people who had missed the screening, but now, iPlayer is no broadcaster in itself. So, for example, BBC are making programmes that are going straight iPlayer, it doesn't even have a live broadcast date doesn't even have broadcast on the TV because that's culturally much more what's, what's happening, and actually stats you're talking about make sense! They’re saying that potentially, you're looking at five to seven times the number of audience from a live stream to playback, and that's just…I think that just reflects peoples use of time I think.

Simon Bradley 40:04

Donald's this has been really interesting, really insightful. We're just really appreciative that you've made the time to join us, you know, as you say, it is a brave new world, you know, we wouldn't have been able to do this, for example, without the technology, and let's hope we can fashion a better-fused virtual and real world. I personally feel, there will be a rebound, I know revaluing of the things…because of the expression, you only appreciate something when it's taken away from you.

Yeah and I think that so many things have been taken away from us that, I think, I for one, in conversation with many other people I think that, you know there is a desire to bounce back as much as we are able, and also perhaps learn some of the lessons, and take advantage of some of the opportunities that have been fashioned using the technology.

From our point of view as educators, all our students have to do mini Celtic Connections and instead of performing live in Stornoway in front of the theatre, they have to record themselves, which is a difficult, you know, difficult thing. And it's not just…we had Charlie Webster from the film course, given the technical things about you know which cameras to use framing, lighting, but that's only part of it! It's also getting the performance and the motivation and the spark and reaching that flow state where the music is really singing and connecting directly to you. Despite the camera, despite the technology, making it as much as we can. And I think certainly from my point of view, watching the concerts on the Celtic Connections Festival this year, there were moments where you did forget that you were watching it. I remember it was one of the groups, it was Elephant Sessions, who were bussing to be back, they were really excited by it. Declan O’Rourke, you know the, it wasn't so bad in the end it was almost like…he seemed very nervous, but in the end he was kind of getting the buzz from that. And I also think that James Grant’s quote about miming to 12 million punters on Wogan, is kind of reminiscent that…you know musicians have had to deal with artificial, constructed ways of getting the music, across. But the love of the music is enduring, and that is – I think – what we all have to keep in mind and I'm sure we're all minded to do that.

So big – let's get these emojis going! – big thanks to Donald.

Donald Shaw 42:17

Thanks very much to you all. That's one thing that's come over the last year hopefully we can see ourselves as a strong collective, all helping each other to reach the same destination. And absolutely if anyone needs any information shared that's helpful from the Celtic Connections model then happy to do that. I know it's different for everyone in positions but if anyone needs anything, just let me know…

Simon Bradley 42:41

Donald, thanks so much. Really appreciate it, and it was a pleasure chatting to you today.

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