

# Hitting the high notes

**James Barrett** looks at how Sky Arts took opera to the masses as part of a brand awareness campaign.

**T**rinny and Susannah, Terry and Lampard, Ant and Dec...there have been some memorable double acts in recent times.

And a new partnership came to life when television entertainment channel Sky Arts decided to take its brand of high-end programming to the masses. The channel formed an alliance with national opera house Glyndebourne for the first time, to host a live event that delivered an operatic performance to an interested audience.

Working with experiential marketing agency Sense, Sky Arts hit upon hosting a live outdoor screening of *L'elisir d'amore* at Grosvenor Park in Chester. The aim of the screening was to expand the Sky Arts brand and raise awareness of its support of the arts industry, making it accessible to all via a memorable brand experience.

"Grosvenor Park was chosen after surveying a number of sites in the area," says director at Sense, Louise Garrod. "Chester was identified by Sky as a region key to creating new brand advocates as Arts subscribers were fairly low."

Grosvenor Park has Victorian roots, which Garrod says aligned itself to the Glyndebourne brand. It is also in the centre of the city, thus equipped with healthy transportation links. An audience capacity of 1,000 was set and it was made an all-ticket affair,



The event represented Sky Arts first live screening of opera to a pre-ticketed audience

giving a further taste of exclusivity to proceedings.

To start spreading the word, a selection of media channels were chosen. *The Saturday Times Culture* supplement and radio stations Classic FM and Smooth FM promoted the event on a national scale.

"We ran a competition, available only to *Saturday Times* subscribers, which drew exceptional response. However, when collating ticket requests, we noticed people from as far away as Guernsey were applying," says

Garrod. "We felt that by the time the event arrived, would these people actually attend?"

Sense decided to increase the local marketing to counter this. Local newspapers and radio stations were already running the competition, and Chester Council and local businesses were bought onboard to further spread the word to the community.

As the public applied for tickets, those successful were given a special code that allowed them access to a Sky Arts Live website. There, they

## feature

punched in their details and tickets were posted out.

“Sense introduced the website as a way to gather data and to offer the participant something that felt exclusive,” says Garrod. Sky Arts senior marketing manager, Alyssa Bonic adds: “The bespoke website proved a great way to interact with attendees before and after the event.”

It was felt the event should have premium features that would be associated with a high-end activity such as opera. Giveaway bags were handed out, which included promotional Sky and Glyndebourne CDs, postcards, a notebook and pen and a hardback *Sky and the Arts* book. Italian caterer Carluccio’s provided luxury food hampers.

“The picnics were detailed on the website and could be pre-ordered, or attendees could bring their own if they wished,” says Bonic. “We made sure bar staff were dressed smartly, used top-end glassware and the hampers contained quality Italian meats and wine.”

The opportunity to push home the Sky Arts brand wasn’t undertaken lightly. The tickets, event site branding, signage and programmes were all decked out primarily in the black, yellow and pink colours of the Sky Arts brand. It was estimated that

#### Audience feedback:

- 95 per cent of consumers would attend a repeat event
- 48 per cent would pay in excess of £20 for a ticket
- 86 per cent said the event made them think more favourably about Sky
- 66 per cent of non-subscribers were thinking of signing up
- 91 per cent of subscribers would recommend Sky to a friend
- 15 per cent of attendees posted testimonials on the website unprompted



Has anyone seen the remote?: a large, HD ready screen broadcasted the performance

80 per cent of the fixed budget was used on this creative. “That also included the quality TV screen and sound. We didn’t want to scrimp on making the event look amazing and memorable,” adds Garrod.

The only thing Sky couldn’t control was the actual sky above. What would happen if the weather took a turn for the worst? “Typically, the heavens did open 10 minutes before the live screening,” says Garrod. However, not missing a trick, staff were on hand to offer Sky branded ponchos and umbrellas to the crowd.

“The on-site personnel were briefed face-to-face three hours before the event started. This consolidated the online training each received via briefing manuals and event information,” says Bonic, who adds that each team member was assigned to roles that played to individual strengths.

Opera singer Alfie Boe opened the event, where just under 800 people settled down in front of a 10m by 10m HD ready television and viewed

the live Glyndebourne performance of *L’elisir d’amore* in the returning sunshine.

“Given that the event was pulled off in under six weeks, everyone was happy with the attendance figure. The feedback showed us that the audience were happy,” says Garrod.

Once the last note was sung, Sky Arts and Sense went about collating the results (see audience feedback). “It was critical to gauge the audience feedback quickly. We decided to talk to some people as they left the event, and we followed up all with an e-mail questionnaire,” says Bonic.

Garrod adds: “Within the short time frame we had, the event delivered an engaging brand experience. Consumers with limited exposure to the arts were provided with a memorable evening, resulting in a positive shift in perception towards Sky and the arts.”

Judging by the results, it seems that the only melodrama at Grosvenor Park was seen on the Glyndebourne stage.