Plan your meetings

HELPING YOU PLAN BETTER MEETINGS AND EVENTS

ANATOMY OF A MEETING PLANNER

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How the Atlanta Opera created a live webcast of its 24-Hour Opera Project

On Jan. 21, 2012, the Atlanta Opera webcasted content for the first time in its 50-year history. It had an audience of 762 viewers, which has grown exponentially since then. Plan Your Meetings spoke with Atlanta Opera Communications Manager Laura Soldati about how they did it.

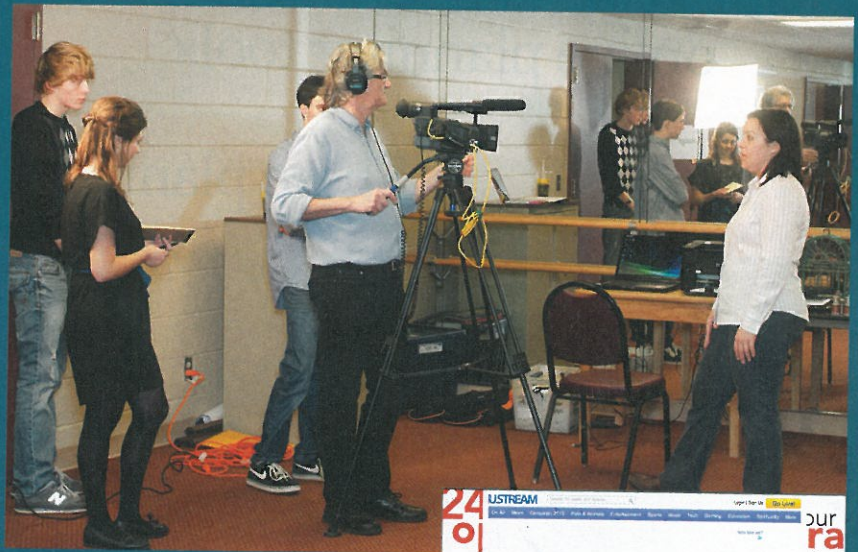**HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO USE USTREAM.COM?**

It was the only streaming site I had heard of or used, it was free and I had used it for five or six webcasts I had done for the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. It was not only a good host, but it could account for multiple views and wouldn't crash, and it didn't require that big of a bandwidth. We wanted interactivity, and people could vote for an audience favorite [using its chat feature].

HOW DID YOU PROMOTE THE EVENT?

We started out [with] a media alert, and with each pickup, we made sure that they had details on the webcast. We did blog posts, Twitter posts and word of mouth. Marketing and communications intern Ellen Sturgill had an idea to put a hyperlinked banner by our signatures on our emails, so anytime an email went out, people would know we had a webcast going on. We created an icon that we could distribute virally — there were thousands of people who saw it and clicked on it. The media was really very supportive. [The webcast] was the angle they were most interested in. And we got a lot of follow-up in the industry, people involved with small opera companies asking us how we did it, how we funded it.

WHERE DID YOU FIND YOUR TECHNICAL TEAM?

I have to give Dave Stevens props, he directed the webcast. He used to work for Turner Broadcasting, and he now owns his own company (Stevens Internet Productions). He volunteered his time to come and do the webcast, and we were able to work with student interns who have a background in filmmaking. So, all the stars kind of aligned on this.

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE MOVING PARTS HE HAD TO COORDINATE?

He had two cameras, specialized lighting, and he worked in the back in a "green room" with a sound board and a switchboard. He had two camera operators in the house, positioned stage right and stage left, so he could get different vantage points. And he'd switch back and forth, just like it was a broadcast. His background is with sporting events, which is perfect for live performance, because there's a lot of movement. He was able to predict when things were going to happen. We did pay for one professional to make sure the lighting was good. But with [Steve's] experience and the team he was able to bring on, he was able to produce a beautiful broadcast.

WHAT KIND OF FEEDBACK DID YOU GET?

Mostly people wanted to know how we did it. Since opera companies are kind of folding left and right and don't have the kind of budgets they used to have, they're looking for ways to reach new audiences and cheaper ways to do it. They were impressed with the quality of it and the feeling of being up close and personal with the performers. The feedback we're getting is that it captured the essence

Want to view the archived broadcast of the 24-Hour Opera Project? Go to Ez.com/atlopera.

of what we wanted to accomplish: that opera is constantly evolving and that we're willing to bring it to people in any way that we can. It's not this elitist art form. Opera is evolving at the speed of light.

HOW MUCH DID IT COST?

I'd say that the entire webcast, because it was staffed by volunteers who had their own equipment, probably cost under $1,000.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU'D SUGGEST TO SOMEONE PLANNING A LIVE BROADCAST TO MAKE IT AN EASIER PROCESS?

Consult with people who have done it before. And consider your goals because it will result in a better product. We wanted to promote new works and give up-and-coming artists, composers and librettists an opportunity for [exposure]. Opera isn't all calibrated and traditional, it's actually quite lively and crazy and fun and full of all these fantastic neuroses. We wanted to showcase opera at its best … and I think we did.