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Widening the Horizon – a way to share your experiences

The topic is two things: a new Finnish online forum www.film-tech.fi and its American parent www.film-tech.com and the "opera night" project in Studio 123, Kuusankoski.

At some point or other during the fist struggle of the movie industry turning digital, everyone has had the same idea; it'd be great if you could take this problem, be it KDM's, ingesting a file, subtitles, lamp life, how to treat 3D glasses... and go ask someone who knows. This is the main function of film-tech.fi, to bring together as many people as possible, from as many fields of digital cinema as possible, so anyone can share knowledge, ask questions and have them answered or talk about any issues at all concerning cinema, and not just digital cinema. Whatever problem you're having, chances are someone's already been there. We want to encourage those people who have been there, to share, to help. And as time goes by, each of us will have the chance to be the helpful one!

Film-tech.fi started out by the founders (Jussi Siponen and Elise Brandt) both writing on the American site F-t.com. We simply thought that having the same kind of forum in Finnish would serve everyone in the field since so many don't either read/write/speak English at all, very little or just don't feel comfortable functioning in other languages than their own. Jussi is the tech-savvy one and built up the forum, and we both maintain and moderate it, not that there have been much moderation issues yet. We now have 80 members and do hope that the number will grow, a lot. We wish to welcome all Finnish-speakers in the cinema world to register as members, and encourage everyone outside Finland to take a full advantage of the American version, whose members number in the thousands. Or -indeed- to build their own for their own country!

As to our experiences in the so-called alternative content:

Finnkino did it first. Live feeds, success. Since then we have been sold the idea of going live, via satellite and through complicated technical procedures and costly equipment. We have been led to believe that live is the thing the audience wants. In our case at least, this is mistaken.

At the last edition of DigiTraining, I finally got the information I had been looking for, for more than a year. Opera -who's selling it. Who makes it happen. Who do we contact to get it. The information, if you only have the idea of what you need to find and not anything specific, is very hard to find. Thank goodness for Media Salles -they in my case succeeded in bringing together the salesmen and the customer eager to buy. It then took a year to get the equipment and get ready for live. Then the look for content!

After sending numerous emails to every content provider I could now find, two replied with offers. One of those was definitely the better offer, but alas, they had very little live events, but plenty of recorded ones. Faced with the decision, we decided to try out recordings first, made a deal with Opus Arte (www.opusarte.com) who distribute titles of opera, ballet and theater from the Royal Opera House in London, and started planning.

Now we are half a season through, the new one starting next autumn. We have played five recorded titles (opera and ballet) with two or three shows per title, and attempted one live feed this June, that did not go as planned. The equipment and procedures involved are new, we know next to nothing about them and the world of satellite broadcasts is apparently very fickle. We learn as we go, and try to keep the audience happy as we do. This is why the very good people at Opus Arte did, when asked, provide us with a hard drive of a recorded opera in case the live feed did not get through, so we would not have to send our audience home without an experience.

To conclude, we at Studio 123 take our opera nights seriously. We lay out the red carpet, on opening and closing dates we serve bubbly drinks, (non-alcoholic of course, such is legislation in Finland) lay out flower arrangements and during every intermission there is coffee, tea and baked goods to be had, all included in the ticket price, all laid out as individual servings, like they would in the Finnish national opera. This way we give the audience the sense that they are not buying the screening of an opera title, but the whole experience that goes with it, something special that they don't need to pay for separately. To this day we have had one negative comment concerning the translation of a program leaflet and libretto we hand out at every event, and hundreds of happy customers who keep coming back and praise us every time. This makes me think we have succeeded in offering the kind of experience we were after. Not only intellectual success, the whole venture has been a great financial success as well.

If you have any comments, suggestions or questions, I can be reached at elise.brandt@elevenproductions.org