

a steady stream

The amount of opera being streamed online is on the increase, and viewers around the world are lapping it up. Richard Fawkes reports on the latest developments in digital streaming.



If you haven't managed to get a ticket for Glyndebourne this summer (and the Festival has been running at 97 per cent capacity for some years), don't despair. Beginning with *Ariadne auf Naxos* on 4 June, you can watch all six of this year's productions live at home on your computer, thanks to a partnership between Glyndebourne and the *Guardian* newspaper.

The online streaming of opera and classical music is one of the most exciting of digital developments at the moment, despite those who dismiss it as a fad that will never catch on – just as they did with live cinema screenings from opera houses. ('Who wants to go to the cinema to watch opera?' I was once asked. Well, it seems that an awful lot of people do!)

'The key thing,' says Glyndebourne's head of communications, Gillian Brierley, 'is that we create all this wonderful opera which is sold out on an annual basis, and yet we are absolutely passionate about getting our work seen outside the confines of Glyndebourne. This is nothing new. We tour and have done for a long time. In 1936 we were the first British opera house from which the BBC did a radio broadcast of an opera. In 1946 we were the first to be filmed. In 2007 we were the first UK opera house to show our work in UK cinemas, while in 2011 we started our online collaboration with the *Guardian*, a UK first in terms of newspaper collaboration.'

What the *Guardian* deal offers Glyndebourne is a much bigger audience than they would have had through the Glyndebourne website alone, and this reach is the main attraction of streaming performances. Anyone with a computer anywhere in the world can watch. When the Vienna-based Sonostream showed Edita Gruberova's concert from the Musikverein celebrating her 45 years as a singer, it received hits from more than ninety countries.

Television is constantly changing, continues Brierley. 'The days of broadcast companies coming in and paying a fee to film our work have gone. A big part of Glyndebourne's policy has been to invest in its own intellectual properties. So we do work with partners, but we hold the rights to the broadcasts and streaming of our own work in the same way as the Met and the Royal Opera House do with their productions.'

The days of people getting big royalties and fat buy-out fees for filming have long gone. 'What is fantastic is that artists now recognise that streaming is a wonderful way for people to access their work,' says Brierley. 'We have all realised that if we want our performances to be seen, which is why we do them in the first place, there has to be a new way.'

Take-up of the Glyndebourne streams has resulted in an excess of 100,000 views.

That's approximately the same number of people as the number attending the Festival as a whole in any single year. Online audiences have also been international, with people sending in pictures of the picnic they were having in their front rooms in Canada and New Zealand. Meanwhile, the Paris-based company Medici.tv, one of the earliest to commence streaming, has been getting 60,000 hits a month in more than 150 countries.

The dilemma facing the industry at the moment is whether or not to charge. Most streams at the moment are free, but will that last? Will viewers be prepared to pay a subscription for something they've always received for free? Medici.tv has come up with a compromise solution that seems to work: performances are free for the first three months and are then available on demand to subscribers.

Sonostream, a company founded last year by Samantha Farber, an artists' agent in Vienna, began streaming with coverage of the finals of the Belvedere Singing Competition held last summer in Vienna. 'Because the technical costs have come down so much in recent years,' she says, 'we were able to do it on a pretty low budget. I was very interested in the idea of streaming giving people the possibility to connect with performances all over the place.'

The first opera she streamed was Rossini's *La cambiale di matrimonio* from

Vienna's Kammeroper, followed by the world premiere in the Austrian Parliament of *Spiegelgrund* by Peter Androsch, a harrowing piece about the Nazi regime's extermination of children with disabilities, staged as part of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Future plans include a concert performance this July of *Lucia di Lammermoor* from Munich with Diana Damrau and Joseph Calleja.

'Obviously you need money for these projects,' says Farber, 'but it seems the theatres are beginning to catch on that streaming productions is important. More and more are doing it. At the moment people don't have to pay, but in the future there's going to have to be a paying model.'

The number of companies involved in the streaming market has been fairly limited so far, but it is on the increase. Videoerre, an Italian distributor, has just announced its intention to launch StreamOpera, a portal for productions made during the past 50 years. It's a move prompted by the growing number of music-lovers interested in watching performances from opera houses and concert halls around the world. The idea of being able to make these performances available to people who would never normally have the opportunity of seeing them, is, says Farber, 'really exciting'.

Who knows what the next digital advances will be? That's something we're going to have to wait and see. But one thing is quite clear: the number of classical music fans on the internet is increasing day by day, and, thanks to streaming, opera-lovers have some exciting viewing ahead of them.

Right and far right: Glyndebourne goes digital.
Le nozze di Figaro will be among six productions
 streamed live from the Festival this year.
 Photos by Charlotte Boulton and Alastair Muir



OPERA ONLINE

Bavarian State Opera

Seven operas from Munich have been streamed online for free during 2012/13. *Il trovatore* (5 July) and *Boris Godunov* (26 July) will bring the season to a close.

www.bayerische.staatsoper.de

Glyndebourne

Log on to the *Guardian* website to watch all six of this year's Festival productions, beginning with *Ariadne auf Naxos* on 4 June.

<http://glyndebourne.com/festival-2013-cinemas-and-online>

La Monnaie/De Munt

La Monnaie has been streaming opera online since 2011, providing free access to every production for three weeks. *Così fan tutte* is next on the agenda, available from 26 June.

www.lamonnaie.be/en/402/Free-Online-Streaming

Medici

Launched in 2008, this Paris-based subscription company offers a catalogue of over fifty operas, available on demand or to rent, with new titles added regularly.

www.medici.tv

Metropolitan Opera

Free audio streams of Met performances take place every week throughout the season (September to May). On-demand video is also available for subscribers.

www.metoperafamily.org/stream.aspx

Sonostream

Free video streams of concert and opera performances from Vienna.

Sign up for the mailing list to receive updates of forthcoming events.

www.sonostream.tv