

RAGADAWN (AN T-EILEAN SGITHEANACH, 57.5° T)

PROJECT REPORT



ATLAS

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SUMMARY

Conversations between ATLAS Arts and Caroline Bergvall began in 2016, investigating her evolving project Ragadawn and how we could bring it to Skye. Ragadawn is a sunrise vocal performance to be performed outdoors from the last hours of night until the very early morning. Language and languages, song and speech, sites and sounds, breadth patterns, frequencies and passing noises are all integral to the work. Bergvall has been working with languages from communities across Europe since 2016 – specifically languages that are endangered or at risk and those that are emerging from more recent local settlements. This will continue beyond 2018.

Drawing on ancient and contemporary sunrise traditions, the piece is loosely inspired by structures and rules of seasonal chants, such as Indian ragas, sunrise mantras or early medieval European morning songs, as well as the surrounding elements of sounds. The central song, Canso, finds its roots in the ‘alba’ (dawn) tradition of troubadour love poetry, which started in early Arabic poetry and voyaged and changed through the continent and northern regions. Gavin Bryars’ long-standing interest in early vocal music and ancient European languages has helped endure the presence of a cross-historical vocal strand in all the sung sequences. Ragadawn as a whole explores both the celebratory and wondrous rise of day as well as the hidden anxieties it can provoke and the collective attention it demands.

To celebrate sharing the performance and meeting the day together with friends and strangers a communal breakfast is served. This is integral to the performance.

Artists involved:

Caroline Bergvall devised a powerful and moving performance combining music, text and voices. The vocal composition at the heart of the work is composed by the British Composer **Gavin Bryars** and performed by soprano **Peyee Chen**. Live electronic musician **Verity Susman** has created the Dawn Chorus of languages: a multilingual layering of voices as well as conversational snippets and outbursts that inhabit the performance. Live sound engineer **Sam Grant** has devised the site-specific listening set-up.

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

103 audience (including dress rehearsal)

296 additional audience viewers via Facebook Live

Social media –

Twitter impressions – 55599

Instagram reach – 6532

Facebook reach - 14327

Press (estimated reach not including online features) – 47,869

Press breakdown

Regional newspapers – 3 articles (1 reviewed live performance)

National newspapers – 2 articles

Online features – 5 features

TV – 1 feature (covered performance live)

Radio – 1 interview

OUTCOMES

Dress Rehearsal Performance

On Friday 24 August at 6.00pm we held a special dress rehearsal performance for students and staff of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to attend alongside invited guests from Lorayne McLucas Dance Academy in Broadford. This was followed by a Q&A for the audience to ask performers about the work and their careers.

Performance with communal breakfast

At dawn on Saturday 25 August Ragadawn was performed to a live audience on the roof of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. The performance lasted 55 minutes and was followed by a communal breakfast. The event was Facebook live streamed to an international audience.

Brochure

A special Ragadawn (An t-Eilean Sgitheanach 57.5° T) was designed by An Endless Supply and ATLAS. This featured a poster on one side and on the other, details of the project in Skye alongside its international trajectory and the Canso for solo soprano and drone by Caroline Bergvall and Gavin Bryars. The poster was in Gaelic and English.

Collaboration with local suppliers

We worked with local suppliers where possible to deliver a menu reflective of our location - porridge with summer fruit compote, Mallaig kipper kedgeree and shony seaweed mix, dark rye sourdough nori bread, dulse loaf, spirulina brioche, lemon heather honey and dulse madeleines, sea buckthorn juice, Cuillin Coffee special dawn blend and Er ya Tea.

We also continued our engagement with a CLIMAVORE diet (2017 project with Cooking Sections) – featuring seaweed.

Collaboration with mental health charities

We engaged directly with Viewfield Garden Collective (is a therapeutic gardening project created principally for the benefit of adults recovering from mental health problems) to supply us with seasonal ingredients for the breakfast and invited participants in the garden project to attend. We made connections to Skye and Lochalsh Mental Health Organisation (Am Fasagdh) to encourage service users to attend due to the themes of the project. We removed barriers to such groups attending by providing free bus transport to and from Portree to the event.

Engagement with Gaelic

A key element of the research work has been an investigation of the Gaelic language in Skye as a minority language that is growing. In 2017 ATLAS Arts invited the Bergvall to host a Language Station at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig with invited guests who have a connection with the

language - Rhona Coogan, Decker Forrest, Rody Gorman and Morag Henriksen to participate. We chose to collaborate with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig a national Gaelic college in Skye and held the performance on the roof. We employed a Gaelic speaker to help with translation and engagement with the project via social media. Gaelic features on the website project page and on the poster as well as in the performance itself.

Responses

Of respondents to our feedback survey following the event:

- 71%** thought the performance was excellent or very good
- 96%** thought the venue was excellent or very good
- 96%** thought the breakfast was excellent or very good
- 100%** thought the overall organisation was excellent or very good

“When Peyee Chen’s glorious voice soared above the verbal confetti I felt the event reached its high spots. (We could have done with more of that music). The whole experience as extraordinary, taking us out of our beds and our comfort zones into a fresh awareness of time, language and ourselves. the venue was special; the weather could have been worse; the cloudscapes were memorable as dawn broke and the breakfast was superb. (I really appreciated how carefully you made it cater for people like me with different dietary needs).

I am so glad I was there. For me it complemented that other outstanding that ATLAS has given us – Hanna Tuulikki’s ‘Women of the Hill’ at High Pasture Cave; sunset and sunrise; language and landscape and the power of the naked human voice. Caroline’s anatomical exploration of language by dissection and comparison is strangely uncomfortable and exciting. I would be very interesting to see where she goes with it from here on.

Well done ATLAS for organising such an excellent so very well. Thank you for including me in the making of it. Thank you ATLAS, SMO and Caroline Bergvall for your vision.’ Morag Henricksen.

“A phenomenal way to start a day; watching the sun rise, sitting amongst a local and engaged audience, with the back drop of the mountains and clouds was a rare and exciting opportunity. The combination of music and spoken word was both humbling and well executed, touching on culture and immigration as well as being a beautiful sound. The communal breakfast was a great way to further connect with and learn about the local area from my fellow audience, and 'come down' from the quite spiritual experience of watching the sun come up.”

“The soprano voice sounded amazing with the spectacular view of Knoydart behind her but I wasn't too keen on the spoken words, some of them spoiled the performance.”

94% engage with Gaelic in some way, whether through speaking the language, reading or writing or being actively interested in Gaelic culture.

Age breakdown

16-24	4%
25-44	28%
45 – 65	44%
65+	20%

Artist's feedback

“The isle of Skye performance will always have a very special place for me and in the work's trajectory: The remoteness, the weather, the extraordinary landscape and changing skies, the physical demands setting up the work in these conditions, the audience who made it for 5am, the bond I felt between the work and the landscape, and the strong connection with ATLAS Arts throughout our two years' work to make this happen. It was a strong experience. On the day the weather cleared for the first and only time of that entire week, which made for a very precious sunrise! We had full house, as the audience took the risk that it would last and came out to hear us and share it with us. The communal breakfast sealed it.

This is so far the first performance of Ragadawn where so many minoritarian or at-risk languages were featured, and where Gaelic speakers could be heard prominently throughout the work. ATLAS Arts' commitment as producers enabled a wonderful and genuine connection to take place with Gaelic speakers and poets who were recorded into Ragadawn, and they also secured the magnificent roof terrace of the Gaelic college where we performed. It was very moving to be in a place where Gaelic is actively spoken and where that aspect was accessible to a number of its audience members. It seemed to make all the other languages of Ragadawn also more alive, as though more connected across space and time. Both ancient and newer languages as well as Peyee's crystal pure singing voice could be heard side by side, mingling with passing bird songs. They seemed to lift across the air and the sea into the rising day and this lifted us all with them.

It made it again so clear to me why I put so much of my heart, sweat and soul into this piece of work. More than with any other performance I've done, each utterance of Ragadawn is totally unique, and the compositional form of the work is so open that it becomes immediately enriched or imbued with some of the histories and memories anchored in the environment chosen for it.” Caroline Bergvall

Funding

Creative Scotland, Norwegian Embassy, Language Acts and Worldmaking, Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Support

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Er Ya Tea, Mara Seaweed, Viewfield Garden Collective, Skye and Lochalsh Mental Health Association.

Images









