Policy Brief

Collaborative Solutions for the Performing Arts: A Telepresence Stage

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KEY INFO

Research question: How can remote actors and dancers coexist and perform together online in telepresence stage environments.

Policy area or themes

- Creative Industries
- Skills and Training

Methods: Action research, reflective practice, qualitative observations and case study tool kits.

Geographical area UK-wide

Research stage In progress

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Summary of the research

This project aims to identify new and creative ways for actors, dancers and other performing arts professionals to rehearse and interact together in shared online spaces and to produce collaborative live performances from remote sites. In a dramatic shift from the paradigm of the web-conference grid, the Telepresence Stage seeks to identify conceptual and technical solutions to break free of these isolating constraints and provide an altogether new platform, where our experience of online connection is heightened and re-envisioned through the superimposition of our bodies in virtual spaces. Eight UK performing arts companies will undertake residencies to test, explore, and perform online techniques, between their participating members in remote locations. Each residency will explore and develop a live-streamed public performance demonstrating a unique range of telepresence solutions, made available via case study documents and videos, providing help guides, tutorial support and open-source resources.

Policy recommendations

People: Working practices in the performing arts sector, training needs and preparedness to innovate. Theatre production, of all scales involves technical personnel. Production teams and training in set design, lighting, audio mixing, video and special effects are all familiar requirements. But following the pandemic it is also necessary to include the provision and training in Internet videoconference, video streaming and Telepresence Stage solutions for the sustainability of theatre and innovation in the sector. The Telepresence Stage project outcomes recommend the need to implement network video resources, training and personnel alongside the existing skills in theatre production.

Environment: Opportunities arising from the project include reducing the need for travel, national and international for the sake of auditions, script read-throughs, rehearsals and developing/ discussing scenography audio/visuals. We are developing full body immersive telepresence that not only offers new online show possibilities, but also for the development of traditional staged theatre productions, making it possible to do the work that occurs in the rehearsal room online, and in a much more appropriate way to

traditional video chat applications, such as Zoom. A truly fit for purpose system that allows actors to rehearse with full body interaction, with sets designs, effects and audio etc

Key findings

Outcomes and findings from this project are experiential and qualitive in nature. Working with 8 performing arts companies though our residency programme we have received direct feedback from participants on the opportunities and barriers to implementing Telepresence Stage solutions. These findings include:

- Most performers were unfamiliar with green-screen video technology – the first time they had used it.
- Participants preferred to focus on the performance aspects and leave the telepresence technology to the research team and follow up on this knowledge through our case studies and guidance documents.
- Technical personnel were less involved in the residency programmes than the performers – although interested they were unfamiliar with the technical and conceptual solutions being developed.
- All participants agreed how effective the solutions were, but would need technical support to implement.
- Participants often spoke about the possibilities of new hybrid/mixed forms of online/offline productions.
- Many companies wanted to explore new modes of online audience participation and also considered the opportunities to reach new international audiences.
- Participants discussed the opportunity to reduce budgets by using Telepresence Stage solutions for auditions, script read-throughs and rehearsal for planning and development of staged productions.

Further information

Visit project website: https://www.telepresencestage.org

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