

Pandora's box

The Musician's Union once had a bumper sticker that said 'Keep Music Live', and I feel much the same way about interpretation. I'm old-fashioned enough to believe that many people spend too much time in front of a flickering screen; nor do they go to museums or exhibitions to watch TV or play computer games. However, putting my scepticism aside, high tech media can be very effective tools for delivering a message.

This edition contains a Pandora's box of high-tech interpretive goodies. The pioneering work of the Scottish Seabird Centre is a prime example. Using remote video cameras on islands in the Forth of Firth they are able to show visitors daily events within seabird and seal colonies. As well as being totally absorbing, this demonstrates a very responsible attitude towards wildlife, allowing close-viewing without disturbance. Of course, the whole experience is made more rewarding when live interpreters interact with the visitors who are watching action on screen.

Stirling Castle is a good example of a visitor attraction using the latest digital audio-guides. While audio-tour hardware has become increasingly versatile and sophisticated, it is arguably the software that provides the greatest opportunity for creativity. Adding sound effects, dialogue and historical characters can really stimulate the imagination.

Certain themes keep recurring throughout this edition – these will quickly become evident, and demonstrate the real advantages and disadvantages of high-tech interpretation. Other new media we feature include animated films, interactive DVD and a virtual archaeological dig. However, for me the most exciting innovation is the 'virtual conductor' at the House of Music museum in Vienna. Haven't you always wanted to get up on a podium and conduct an orchestra? Play is a great medium for learning, and what could be more fun than bringing the Vienna Philharmonic to a terrific crescendo - and then cutting them dead!

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