



In tune and *on air*

The ground-breaking technology used to broadcast the concerts during the Other Voices festival was developed by the Irish firm Intune Networks, and represents an exciting future for internet users

Technology and the Church don't usually make for happy bedfellows. Think of the kind of technology generally employed by your local parish priest – and you'll recall the piercing electronic whine of a badly connected microphone, or the clank and echo as the latest Prayers of the Faithful reader accidentally whacks the mic instead of talking into it.

But, for nearly a week in December, a 200-year-old church in Dingle became a beacon of cutting edge technology, when the Other Voices festival streamed gigs in high definition from the tiny St James's Church directly to seven pubs around Dingle.

Artists including Richard Hawley, Jarvis Cocker, Marina and the Diamonds, Ellie Goulding and The National gave wonderful performances to an audience of about 70 people inside the church, but to many multiples of that in places such as Benzers Hotel, Foxy John's, McCarthy's and Geaney's, where fans watched the shows unfold on HD TVs and on phones and laptops via wi-fi. The quality of the visuals was impeccable.

"We watched Ellie Goulding from the pub and I watched a couple of guys who were playing before us," says Rory Friers, guitarist with And So I Watch You From Afar, a highly acclaimed Belfast band who were so loud that – in an Other Voices first – punters were handed earplugs on their way into the church.

"When we watched Ellie Goulding on TV, I was like: 'This is brilliant, when did she play?' And they were like: 'She's playing right now.' It was incredible."

The technology that made such a high-definition broadcasting service possible came from Intune Networks, a major sponsor of the festival, which became involved with Other Voices in order to showcase its next generation developments in networking.

Founded in 1999 by two UCD graduates, John Dunne and Tom Farrell, Intune Net-

Other Voices:

from 2002-2011

Other Voices is the brainchild of Philip King, a producer and radio presenter who grew up in Cork city, but found himself drawn to Dingle year after year, until eventually he decided to combine his passion for the arts with his love of the fishing village. "I had a relationship with West Kerry that was a cultural one," King says. "I thought, wouldn't it be interesting to do something here."

The first Other Voices in 2002 featured musicians such as Glen Hansard, Damien Dempsey, Maria Doyle Kennedy and Damien Rice. Over the course of a week, they recorded from the tiny, 80-capacity church of St James's for what would become the first Other Voices, a 13-part series that was broadcast on RTE 2.

In 2011, the series has shrunk somewhat – it's now a six-parter – but the depth of feeling for the show, and the original concept, the idea of broadcasting songs from a tiny church in Dingle, remains.

"There's something warm and intimate and very personal about the church because it's so small," King says. "People have said: 'Wouldn't you move this?' But what happens in the church happens in a very sort of personal way. It's intimate and warm, but the technology enables it to be broadcast and sent to the world. There's tradition, translation and transmission. People would say you're a dreamer, but there's something real here."

works presents itself as a game-changer in the world of networking – the company has developed advanced networking products that will make broadband faster and more efficient for users.

With the explosion in video and music

content online, the improvements can't come quickly enough for arts junkies – or for the existing networks, which are massively overburdened.

One of the best ways to explain Intune's invention is to compare it to the postal system. Currently, e-mails are sent to a central zone where they're rerouted – and often this can be like a letter sent from Skibbereen to Cork being routed through Dublin. Intune Networks changes this, using fast, tuneable lasers to allow those e-mails go straight to their destination.

"It transfers content in the most effective way possible," says Jayne Brady, head of Intune Networks Belfast.

"I've been a telecoms engineer for 20 years. I've worked in China and in Germany. And I've never been near something which is so ground-breaking. It's a real privilege to be involved in it."

If that sounds like a rather unlikely boast, rest assured, the company, which has bases in Belfast and Dublin, has serious muscle behind it. The Irish government has invested €10 million in funding the building of the Exemplar Network using Intune technology. More than 30 companies have registered an interest in becoming Exemplar partners; four are signed up, including BT and Openet.

A European trial led by Telefónica is also under way: Intune will provide its unique technology to the programme to design a future telecoms network able to absorb increased traffic demands at a minimum cost.

Have a look on Intune's website, and you'll find a photograph of Brady and the heads of Intune Networks greeting the Queen, while the Wall Street Journal recently carried a piece eulogising the technology.

"You think it's from Ireland, so it can't be that great," says Brady. "Sure, it's only us. But that's something we need to get over. This technology has the opportunity to make a real global impact. The Irish government is important to us, but actually our market is global, as long term the market



that Ireland would offer would be too small to be meaningful.”

Intune Networks’ involvement with Other Voices has provided a massive, and desperately needed, boost to the festival.

Other Voices is financed by partners including Intune Networks, the Irish Music Rights Organisation (Imro), RTE and Fáilte Ireland, but attracting funding isn’t always easy for the Other Voices production company, Southwind Blows. As much as anything, it’s a labour of love for the organisers – and a leap of faith from the bands who come to perform in Dingle and believe that it’s an extraordinary environment.

“Sometimes TV can be intimidating and sterile,” says Marina Diamandis of Marina and the Diamonds, who played in Dingle on the fourth night of the festival. “But Dingle is a very special show. I’d never been there

before, but I’d been highly encouraged by my team to go and do it. And I was thrilled with it.

“I really liked performing the songs in a pure acoustic way. Those types of performances are where people see what I am as a songwriter, because I think pop production can really cloud your voice sometimes. It took 11 hours to get to Dingle, but it was worth it. There’s not really anything else like it out there.”

In future series, Philip King, the founder of Other Voices, would love to roll out the technology offered by Intune further, to have Other Voices broadcast live from the church to Other Voices-friendly pubs around Ireland. Asked if that would represent a threat to the yearly RTE broadcast of Other Voices, King says he believes it’s possible for both to co-exist.

“I wouldn’t think it would affect it,” King says. “You can watch the likes of *Mad Men* online or on television. People live in a ‘pull’ world, where they pull down what they want. What we do is create content and it finds its way out into the world through different means.

“The traditional way was television, but with new technology, the genie is out of the bottle. Rufus Wainwright came here some years back and sang a song that he wrote for Jeff Buckley. If you look on YouTube, 8.2 million people have looked at that. Everything is available.”

King believes that Intune Networks and Other Voices share a similar creative ambition.

“Imagination is the great resource we have,” he says. “The imagination informs the music, but also the technological development. It’s like an artistic pursuit.

“Irish music has always collided with

technology, and that collision has affected the artistic process. When Irish music went to America first, it met technology. Records were made and sent home, and we listened to them and copied them. Technology changed our oral transmission of music. That indelible print of the technology is there. It’s about trying to find that balance between culture and technology that enables it to be transmitted to the world.”

That technology has already changed how the festival is received in Dingle. Previously, the Other Voices festival – while well received – was something of a closed shop to gig-goers for space reasons. Wonderful as it is to spot Jarvis Cocker going for coffee or The National checking in their luggage at Benners Hotel, the real treats are the performances themselves.

It must have been frustrating for gig-lovers in years past to realise that artists, including Amy Winehouse, Ryan Adams and Elbow, were performing nearby, but they had little or no hope of gaining access to the performances. With Intune’s technology, gig-goers now have a chance to appreciate the festival.

“What it did in the town was brilliant,” says Rory Friers of *And So I Watch You From Afar*. “It made the whole town feel connected to the festival.”

For Friers and the other artists playing at the festival, the chance that Other Voices might one day be broadcast simultaneously to dedicated Other Voices venues in Ireland – or even around the world – is a hugely welcome idea.

“We’re part of the first generation to benefit from the changes that are happening,” says Friers. “It’s exciting.”

Other Voices: Series 9 will air from Wednesday, February 16, at 11.25pm on RTE Two for six weeks

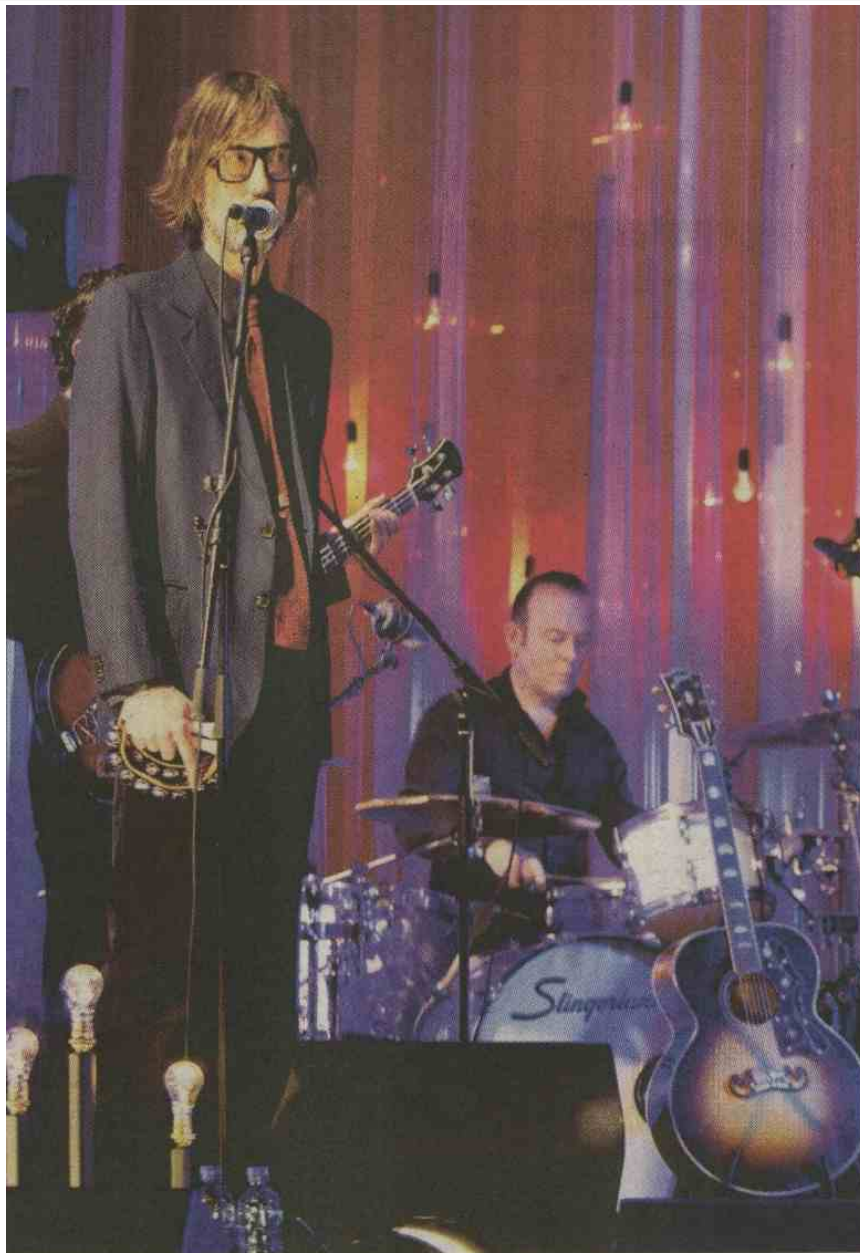
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Jarvis Cocker, Richard Hawley and Lisa Hannigan on stage at the festival

From left: And So I Watch You From Afar; Philip King and Jayne Brady; Marina and the Diamonds

