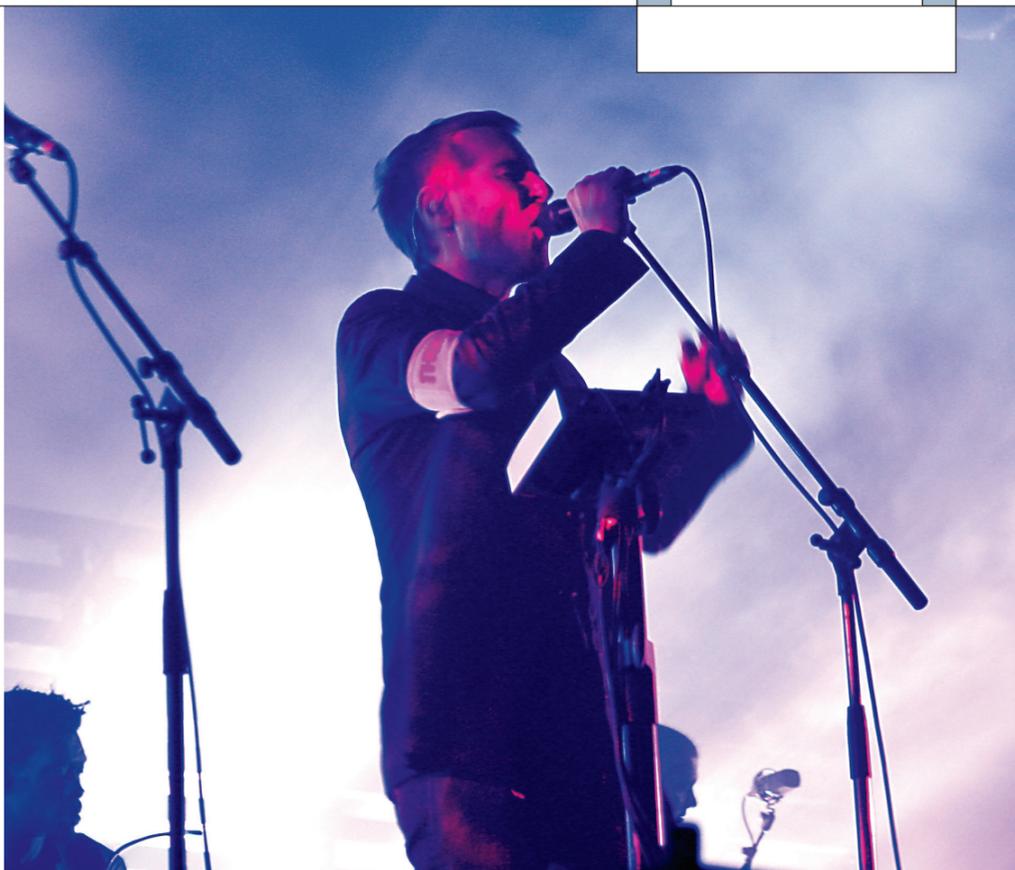


# Hip hops...

Launched with an event in Trafalgar Square last year, Beck's Fusions is a mix of art, music and beer. Nic Howden enjoyed all three at the final day of the sequel, headlined by a Massive Attack/United Visual Artists (UVA) collaboration at the Castlefield Arena, Manchester.



**P**roduction company Sevens7 is a young business with an exciting approach to the event market that has already caught the eye of an impressive breadth of clients, Nissan, MTV, Festival Republic and Jack Morton Worldwide among them. And it won the Beck's Fusions contract in January, teaming up with Nine Yards and Star Events to deliver its promises.

Since 2002 a part of Interbrew, Beck's wears its art on its sleeve. The Fusions idea was developed with the ICA, manifesting itself via design pods and a Chemical Brothers headline set in Trafalgar Square last year, produced by events agency Slice. Second time out though, it was already time for a new approach.

The original pitch for the contract had the event indoors over a longer period, "But even though we won on that basis, it was clear [Beck's was] actually after a one or two day outdoor music event for in the region of 30,000 people, in Trafalgar Square again," one of three directors at Sevens7, Dan Howson, explains.

"We were almost told what to do and given a budget, so it was at that point that we got the likes of Tony Wheeler and Roger Barrett involved."

It quickly became apparent though that the GLA was focused on the Olympic torch relay, and Howson and company were squeezed out of the West End mix, the scale of the show growing at the same time. "And that's when we started looking elsewhere."

The contrasts between Trafalgar Square and Castlefield Arena couldn't be greater. It's like comparing a cold bottle of lager

to a piece of portraiture. For event producer and fellow Sevens7 director, Luke Carr, while the former is iconic, the latter is more street, "more down with the kids," he tells Access on site in Manchester.

"This sort of space does a job very differently. It's clearly Manchester, it's got that post industrial revolution feel to it, and it makes it easier to do edgy stuff," he explains. "We've got more room here, and we've had more time with the Contemporary Arts Society to organise the fusions. A whole load of audio visual stuff and some live art pieces that happen before or after band sets."

Built in 1982, Castlefield Arena was Britain's first Urban Heritage site. Since then it has played host to a variety of outdoor events, including Dpercussion, for 10 years a mix of well-known and up and coming Manchester bands. With concrete bleachers at the top, the site slopes gently down to a canal, which sits in front of a less than arty gymnasium. A Victorian railway bridge runs at right angles to the canal.

## Blue lines

Massive Attack brought their full touring rig to Castlefield. A 15m wide stage footprint, which Sevens7 accommodated with a 25m Star Orbit stage in a low slung 'wide screen' format.

"The arena's almost facing the wrong direction," Carr explains. "It's broad and not very deep. It only runs 35 metres or so from the stage to the bleachers. We mirrored what Massive Attack are doing with our overall aesthetic for the stage, which helps with the sightlines, and we've still got enough room to run all the bands ahead of them."

With a UVA black and white film/art collage soundtracked by the band ahead of their set, the wings of the stage were stretched, each accommodating one half of the sliding screen, 13m by 7m truss supports either side.

"While we wanted the stage width, we wanted to keep it low, so we've only got an eight metre trim height," Carr continues. "We put additional bays on outside of PA and video, so we're looking at about 62m wide

in total. It blocks out the leisure centre and it gives it a nice focus. Everything Massive Attack have got is on the deck in their standard set up, they only reach three metres height. Standing out in the crowd last night, it feels really right. We've actually gone over a canal arm with the stage and so we had numerous meetings with Star about getting that right," he adds.

"Sevens7 were after a dramatic statement, but not something too overpowering," Barrett tells Access, fusions complete. "The normal roof height on the Orbit is 13m but that looked too dominating. We talked to the lighting people and to UVA and they were happy for us to come down to 8.3m, which is much lower than usual. It was unconventional but worked really well in the context of the event."

Had the roof been much higher, the lights could have been deemed a hazard to the railway line too. As it was though, special permission was not necessary. "Sevens7 put a really good team together, they're a company to watch, I think they will go a long way," Barrett adds.

Fusions is much more than just a brand exercise. While it's true punters were by and large obliged to drink Beck's or go thirsty, otherwise it was credibility by deft association. Sevens7 reached their objective, providing three sought after nights of original entertainment, and leaving everyone hungry for more.

"It's been a real collaborative effort," Carr says. "We brought in the people we felt were right for an

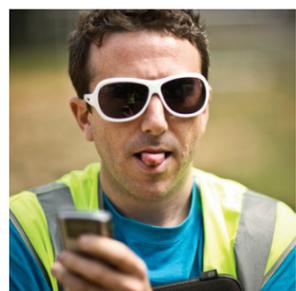
"Massive Attack are immediately in the top two or three you want off the shortlist," event director Luke Carr says. "They don't care what other people think about what they do, they've got a really strong creative side to them, and they've had a long working relationship with United Visual Artists. It just seemed like a really good fit."

event of this kind, like Nine Yards, like Star, like MRL from a delivery angle, then we had [third Sevens7 director] George Smart talking to the right people at EMI to get the bands in, the Contemporary Arts Society and Beck's.

"All credit to the council and the events team involved, they've been 100 per cent supportive," he continues. "Right across the building control, the environmental health, the police. Everybody's been really easy to work with. Challenges have been presented to us and we've all sat around a table over the last few months and dealt with those."

"The key to making it work has been enabling individual agencies and companies to deliver specific tasks that they're good at," Howson agrees. "We have to allow creativity to flow and be creative ourselves without stifling anybody and I think that's worked really well." And 30,000 will drink to that.

## Speaking in tongues: Luke Carr



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