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# Opera Audiences and Cultural Value: A Study of Audience Experience

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# Executive Summary

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This project aims to better describe the cultural value of opera through a study of its most devoted audience members.

Highly engaged opera-goers attend the opera very frequently (more than 4 times per year; sometimes as often as once a week) and form a core group within the opera-going public. Their high levels of engagement make them a useful case study for the potential value the arts can have for audiences. The value that highly engaged audience members for opera ascribe to their experiences is richer and more nuanced than can be accounted for by measuring economic, social, health and wellbeing, or educative effects, although these may also be relevant.

To study this group, we conducted a number of qualitative surveys (177 respondents) and open-ended interviews (18 individuals) with audience members for three London-based companies. We did this in collaboration with the companies involved, who added their own questions relevant to their marketing needs.

Briefly, we found that this audience—which was relatively homogeneous in demographic background, frequency of attendance and fit within Arts Council of England audience segmentation categories—had an extraordinary diversity of personal responses to opera. They did not share a common experience of opera-going, nor did they share a taste. Five other conclusions were striking:

- 1) Highly-engaged audiences were very price-sensitive, discussing affordability of tickets at length and often making trade-offs on location of seat or which performances to attend on the basis of cost.
- 2) Most reported discovering opera as a child, through the agency of friends or family.
- 3) Some reported discovering opera in one seminal, formative moment, occurring either as a child or as an adult.
- 4) Opera-going appears as social activity, not a private one. Even those opera-goers who went on their own and who had quite individual aesthetic responses to opera were very aware of the audience around them, and this co-presence was highly significant for the value of opera to them, even when there is no overt audience interaction.

- 5) The power of opera was frequently described in emotional terms. To some extent, there was a division between those opera-goers who responded most strongly to the 'fictional' aspect of opera (its narrative, characters, and sense of truth) and those who responded to its 'formal' aspect (the beauty of the voice, its combination of art forms). The two were potent but distinct. For opera-goers in both groups, however, it was the emotional effect of opera that was of key value, even if that derived from a different aspect.

Our theoretical basis was drawn largely from the work of Dutch art theorist Hans Van Maanen who, building on the work of Kant and Gadamer, proposes a tripartite division between different functions for art. He describes *intrinsic functions*, which revolve around the Kantian notion of disinterested aesthetic contemplation, and include the development of new understandings; joy at a beautiful play of forms; allowing a group to imagine new ways that things could be, reflect on them and test them against the observed reality around them; and making these perceptions available for communication. He also describes *semi-intrinsic functions*, which are similar but relate to a personal interest in the art form or the skills and charisma of the performers. He finally describes *extrinsic functions*, where arts serve the personal and social needs and desires of the audience. These include socializing, entertainment, the building of social cohesion, and so on. Much of what are currently measured as benefits the arts bring to society are extrinsic functions: these are things which the arts can accomplish, but can also be achieved in other ways (for example, through participation in sports or religion). We are primarily interested in exploring what Van Maanen calls the intrinsic or semi-intrinsic functions; that is, those functions that he claims as exclusive to the arts.

A statistical factor analysis of our survey revealed eight clusters of responses about the value of opera for its attendees. In order of strength, and with Van Maanen's category attached, they were:

- 1) Societal Perception (*intrinsic*): opera-goers were challenged and encouraged to think differently about the world.
- 2) Positive Response (*all three*): this factor linked respondents' enjoyment with their appreciation of the beauty and skill of the performances.
- 3) Narrative and Emotion (*semi-intrinsic*): this factor linked respondents' strong emotional

responses with the narratives presented in opera.

- 4) Singing (*intrinsic*) : this factor indicated appreciation for the 'beautiful play of forms.'
- 5) Practical Issues (*extrinsic*): for these respondents, opera is distinguished from other art forms by extrinsic issues such as price, venue, and so on.
- 6) Audience Priorities (*linking intrinsic and extrinsic*) : this factor indicated that affordability was an important issue for some respondents, and that these same respondents considered opera to have a strong impact on the audience.
- 7) Socialising (*extrinsic*) : this factor indicated that some respondents were likely to attend in order to socialise.
- 8) Charismatic Performers (*semi-intrinsic*) : this factor links charismatic performers with a strong emotional experience for the audience.

We used these eight factors as a starting framework from which to analyse the interviews. We asked respondents open-ended questions about their opera-going experiences, encouraging them to talk, in particular, about high points or strong experiences they had. Our analysis of the interviews revealed a set of concerns that resembled, but was not identical to, the statistical factor analysis of the survey. We consider these eight areas of concern to our interviewees as a refinement of the statistical categories above. In order of frequency of occurrence in the interviews, they are:

- A. **Others:** interviewees talked more about other people than about anything else, encompassing people who first brought them to opera; people they themselves have introduced to it; people they habitually attend with; and other people in the audience. While these were both positive and negative factors, it was striking how social the opera-going experience was to them.
- B. **Emotion:** emotion was something we specifically asked about, usually asking interviewees to talk about high points in their opera-going lives, or about a strong emotional response they have had to opera. Some were better than others at describing these experiences; some would simply reply that it was 'wonderful', while others could describe the sensations they had.
- C. **Character, Narrative and Truth:** this category encompasses responses about stories and their importance to respondents, and commentary on how well performers embody their characters. It includes comments to do with opera helping respondents

to reflect on life.

- D. **Performer Charisma:** this category refers to things like ‘presence’, ‘personality’, and the ‘cult of the singer’, and it represents interest in aspects of performers’ skills other than the beauty of the voice.
- E. **Beautiful Singing:** this category refers specifically to beautiful singing, excluding other responses to music or performers. The beauty of the singing voice was of some significance to many respondents, and indeed was sometimes identified as the key to their strong emotional response to opera.
- F. **Affordability:** this category includes any mention of ticket prices or affordability, including ideas of value for money. All but one respondent brought up affordability as a concern.
- G. **The New:** this category includes both new operas and operas that are new to that respondent, encompassing ideas of challenge. Most of the respondents actively seek out new and challenging works.
- H. **Combination of Art Forms:** in many cases, respondents identify this feature as a defining feature of opera, and the reason why they are drawn to it.

These eight themes and the ways they relate to one another, together with the eight factors from the survey results, are the key findings of our study. These are areas of key concern for highly engaged opera-goers, and represent their own understanding of the value they get from attending opera.

This work represents a far more detailed portrait of the experience of devoted opera-going than currently exists in the literature. While most audience research would represent the entirety of the sample discussed here in a single category, this study demonstrates the diversity and complexity of responses of an audience segment that often is—but ought not be—taken for granted. The richer understanding will be of use both for producers of opera and other art forms, and for those with responsibility for arts funding and cultural policy.

# Chapter 1: Background

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This study was conceived and conducted by the Audiences Research Strand of Creativeworks London. As such, it has grown out of a particular nexus of intellectual interests, government policy, business concerns, research goals, personal expertise and current academic trends. Creativeworks London (CWL) is one of four Knowledge Exchange Hubs funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The purpose of the Hubs is to encourage, support and conduct collaborative research between the university and creative sectors, with a view to benefitting small businesses in the cultural industries. Accordingly, one of the main goals of the Audiences Strand of CWL is to conduct research into London's audiences that will both be achieved in collaboration with small businesses and that will benefit those businesses, as well as being of importance as academic research. The Audiences Strand is led by the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, which has a particular interest in opera and opera audiences, because a key part of its activity is preparing artists for a professional life in opera performance. Opera is one of the most aesthetically complex of art forms, and it is seen as cultivating an 'élite' audience (one with high cultural capital and socioeconomic status) to a degree that few other art forms do. These perceptions make the question of the actual audience relationship to opera more interesting. Thus, it was decided that a research project into opera could act as an initial case study for developing an innovative approach to researching the value audiences ascribe to live performance. This project would offer value to the many small performing arts companies operating in London, as well as filling a significant gap in academic literature on audiences and cultural value.

For readers with a specific interest in opera, our research sits alongside two other on-going research projects into opera audiences, each slightly differently inflected. Each of these has been developed in close collaboration with opera-producing companies to explore questions that are of interest to them, as well as of academic relevance. The Audience Agency is currently collating demographic information for audiences of the Royal Opera House, English National Opera and Welsh National Opera in order to gain insight into the habits and demographic make-up of opera audiences. The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, in collaboration with English Touring Opera, is conducting research into what audiences value in their experiences of opera, and how these values are mediated or transformed in opera relays at the cinema. Reports from both of these



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projects, as well as from the current study, were presented and discussed with industry specialists at a symposium entitled 'Opera and its Contemporary Audiences', hosted by the Guildhall School, on 27 May 2014. Feedback from this event will be an important part of the development of this research.

Apart from the specific interest of opera providers, our 'Opera Audiences' research is part of a wider interest in audiences and value. Arts organisations and scholars of the audience experience of art are increasingly concerned with the ways in which audience members make sense of their experiences of the arts. The audience experience, including the value audiences place on their experience, is one of the most significant outputs of an arts organisation. Despite this primacy, it is an extremely difficult output to measure and assess, and has often been reported by using box office data as proxy indices. Both academia and industry are currently engaged in the development and testing of research tools to explore the question of audiences and value, in part as a means to engage with the increasing need for arts and cultural organizations to demonstrate their value to stakeholders, including government. The AHRC Cultural Value Project, launched in 2013, aims 'to make a major contribution to how we think about the value of arts and culture to individuals and to society'.<sup>1</sup> Nesta (formerly the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) has indicated that cultural value is a key area of importance for current research in the cultural sector, citing the Warwick Commission on Cultural Value, the AHRC Cultural Value Project, and the promotion of cultural value and wellbeing research by the European Commission.<sup>2</sup> Arts Council England has recently published an overview of evidence into cultural value which identifies significant gaps in our knowledge.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, academic researchers in the field of audiences are increasingly interested in how to conceptualise, identify and, measure those aspects of their experience that audiences themselves value.

Radbourne, Glow and Johanson (2013) have drawn together several different qualitative approaches to audience research in *The Audience Experience: A Critical Analysis of Audiences in*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Funded-themes-and-programmes/Cultural-Value->

<sup>2</sup> Bakhski, Hasan, *Five principles for measuring the value of culture*, <http://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/five-principles-measuring-value-culture-0> [accessed 3 April 2014].

<sup>3</sup> Mowlah, A., Niblett, V., Blackburn, J., and Harris, M. (2014) *The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society: an Evidence Review*, <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/The-value-of-arts-and-culture-to-people-and-society-An-evidence-review-Mar-2014.pdf> [accessed 16 April 2014].

*the Performing Arts* (2013). Many of the studies discussed in the volume identify particular indices or categories of the audience experience. In most cases, the categories are devised as a result of interviews or focus groups with audience members, and represent key concerns apparent in audience members' accounts of their own experiences. These categories or indices are then proposed as a framework with which to describe and measure the audience experience.

In our study, we draw on the principles exemplified in this volume; namely, that the researcher can gain insight into what audience members value about their experiences by using qualitative research methods such as open-ended interviews. The studies in Radbourne et al., like our own, ask people to retrospectively reflect on their experiences. Reason notes that 'it is through conscious reflection that individuals make sense and invest meaning in their experiences' (Reason 2010, 21); thus, post-performance reflection can allow us to examine the perceived meaning of the experience for the individual. Reason argues that the experience of a performance is at least partly made real as a coherent experience by the process of reflecting on it as such (ibid, 24). This approach means that the process of reflecting (by participating in audience research) might allow participants to 'obtain a deeper response to a performance they have seen and a greater sense of their own experience.' We should 'conceive reflective activity not as an attempt to uncover this lost originary experience but instead as an experiential moment in its own right.' (Ibid, 32). According to Kahneman and Riis, remembered experience is where meaning (as opposed to sensation) is constituted, so an exploration of the meaning audience members attach to an artwork must engage with remembered experience: '(e)valuation and memory are important on their own, because they play a significant role in decisions, and because people care deeply about the narrative of their life.' (Kahneman and Riis 2005, 289). We note that research into the behaviour, sensations and reactions of audiences during the performance itself is also a fruitful and interesting endeavour (see, for example, the research of McAdams and others on collecting real-time judgements from audience members during live performances);<sup>4</sup> however, for the purposes of this study we focus on 'remembered experience'. Future research will undoubtedly synthesize the two approaches, and may even start to unpick the nature of the relationship between the lived and remembered experiences: for example, how do audience

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<sup>4</sup> Such work has been particularly useful for those who are interested in a cognitive science approach. See, for example, Reason, M., Reynolds, D., Grosbras, M., and Pollick, F. (2013), 'Researching Dance Across Disciplinary Paradigms: A Reflective Discussion of the Watching Dance Project,' in *Affective Performance and Cognitive Science*, ed. N. Shaughnessy (London: Bloomsbury).

members construct stories to explain their visceral reactions? How does the process of reflection modify initial responses? To what extent does the remembered experience of a performance correspond with the lived experience?<sup>5</sup>

If we accept that asking the audience about the remembered experience of a performance can yield insight into questions of artistic meaning and value, we must then decide on a framework within which to conduct the discussion: what should we ask about? Bakhshi (2013) notes that there are no standardised units of value for measuring arts output, and that different stakeholders have different value needs. He argues that, because value in culture is uncertain, an iterative approach is necessary to determine which metrics are appropriate. For this study, we combined two approaches to devise a set of indices with which to measure audience experience of live performance (in this case, of opera). Firstly, we drew on existing research exploring what is important to audiences, as exemplified in Radbourne et al. Secondly, we were informed by Hans Van Maanen and the Project on European Theatre Systems (STEP), in which indices for measuring the audience experience are derived from the theory and philosophy of art. Our theoretical approach is outlined in more detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>5</sup> Levitin, D. & Cuddy, L. (2004): Editorial Introduction to the “Angel of Death Project”, *Music Perception*, 22.2, 167-70.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

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Our research was conducted in two stages: (i) surveys and (ii) interviews. This chapter explains the theoretical framework we used for each.

Our surveys, which are reproduced below in Appendices 1, 2 and 3, were developed from two sources, which we attempted to integrate. The first was the audience development and marketing needs of the opera companies with whom we worked. From this source, we drew questions that are typically used by marketing departments to understand their audience: demographic information, questions about price, frequency of attendance, comfort and ease of access to the venue, and so on. From an academic perspective, the answers to these questions are generally less interesting, and we have not included them in this paper, although they were undoubtedly significant in our reports to our collaborating companies (see Appendices 5, 6 and 7). The differences in the particular needs of each company largely account for the differences between the three surveys. The other source was a line of philosophical thinking about the perception of artistic phenomena and the role of the arts in social life that has developed in Western thought since Kant. For this source, we have drawn primarily on the work of Dutch arts sociologist Hans Van Maanen, and in particular, his intellectual history of this line of thinking in his 2009 book *How to Study Art Worlds* (Amsterdam University Press).

Van Maanen leads an academic working group of theatre sociologists from smaller European countries called the Project on European Theatre Systems (STEP), which is attempting to take these theories of how the arts function for people in society and to test them out by means of a large-scale survey of theatre audiences in seven smaller cities around Europe. (One co-author is a member of the group, currently carrying out STEP-based research on theatre in Tyneside.) While there has of course been much philosophical work on the arts' relationship to the rest of society, there is remarkably little data on it that would be recognized as significant and valid in a social scientific sense. To address this lack, STEP plans to use similar surveys in each of these cities in order to develop data that is reliable and comparable across geographic and genre divisions. While our survey does not precisely follow the STEP model, it has been strongly influenced by it.

Van Maanen and STEP's approach can be traced back to a dispute between George Dickie's institutionalist definition of the arts and Monroe Beardsley's competing functionalist definition. Briefly, Dickie defines a work of art on the basis of the position it occupies within a cultural practice, not because of any intrinsic properties it may hold.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Beardsley argues that works of arts fulfill an essential function for human culture, or at least attempt to. There is a particular aesthetic experience which works of art alone can facilitate. Dickie responded that such a theory might define what works of art do, but not necessarily what they are. While Van Maanen and STEP are happy to agree with Dickie that institutional context is key in defining something as a work of art, in the end they think Beardsley's question is the more interesting one; in order to make sense of the relationship between art and society, it is more useful to discover the *function* of art for social life than to discover the *nature* of art, and that has been Van Maanen's project in his career.

Though debate about the role of the arts in society goes back (at least) to Plato, Van Maanen begins his discussion with Kant, and in particular, the first section of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), the Analytic of the Beautiful. At its core, the Kantian ideal is that, because we approach objects of aesthetic perception in a disinterested manner— that is, with no aim at possessing or understanding them—they can 'stimulate the formative activity of the imagination'<sup>7</sup> and thereby offer up new models of perceiving the world. This possibility of understanding the world in a new way is, for Van Maanen, the most singular function that the arts can serve, one that non-artistic social activities struggle to replicate. Survey questions that ask about the respondent's 'new understanding' or 'seeing the world differently' aim to measure this function (Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis explains the relationship between our survey questions and Van Maanen's categories).

But this definition also implies that there are other, less singular functions that the arts can serve when their audience does *not* approach them in a disinterested manner. Van Maanen refers to these as 'extrinsic, as opposed to 'intrinsic', functions. As a rule, they describe those functions

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<sup>6</sup> The key text is Dickie, G. (1969) 'Defining Art,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6, no. 3, pp. 253ff. and the key example, of course, is Duchamp's *Fountain*.

<sup>7</sup> Van Maanen, H. (2009) *How to Study Art Worlds: On The Societal Function of Aesthetic Values*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, p.154, quoting F. van der Veire, *Als in een donkere Spiegel*. Nymegen: SEN, p336.

that the arts may serve but that other activities (such as politics, sport, religion or the exploration of nature) might serve as well. Generally speaking, these are 'interested,' in Kantian terms: they appeal to the audience's need or desire, whether individual or social. There are, of course, quite a few of these interests. Our survey questions that asked about a 'good night out' or the opera as an opportunity to socialize with colleagues, friends, or family try to capture these extrinsic functions.

There is another extrinsic interest which is of particular importance in the contemporary political climate. In both Van Maanen's Netherlands and in Britain, arts funding is increasingly being justified on the basis of the arts' ability to build social cohesion, to help overcome ethnic, generational, or other social divides or to build a sense of national identity. Our survey questions that asked about political insights or social problems attempted to get at this function. Whether or not the arts can, in fact, serve these functions is one question. Whether or not the arts *ought* to serve such functions is quite a different one. Our survey, like STEP's, tries to answer only the first. Van Maanen's response to the second is not to say that such social functions are absent or illegitimate, but rather that they do not cohere with most of the ways that philosophers have understood the arts to function, and that there are many other functions that the arts do demonstrably serve. These other functions might also be social, and the suggestion is that it might be more useful for funders to focus on them when trying to make decisions on which works to fund, and to what extent.

There are, also, a few functions that Van Maanen labels as 'semi-intrinsic'. These are functions that can also be found from non-artistic activities, but that involve the audience's direct aesthetic encounter with the artwork.<sup>8</sup> For example, our survey questions which ask about the 'fun' or 'excitement' of opera, would fit into this category. The same is true of questions that ask about the skills or charisma of the performers (or composers). Other theatrical audience research (especially that of Wilmar Sauter, Henri Shoemakers and their Scandinavian colleagues) have shown that assessments of the performers' skills and charisma are very important to audiences, and our survey demonstrated this importance. Nevertheless, Van Maanen maintains that appreciation of skill is a form of interest and is thus not a fully intrinsic function for the arts.

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<sup>8</sup> Van Maanen describes the semi-intrinsic values thus: 'Like extrinsic values, these, too, can be realised in situations that are completely different from aesthetic events, but if they *are* actualised in aesthetic events, then, just as with an intrinsic value, this is the direct effect of the mental contact with the artistic expression in question.' (2009: 150).

In trying to dig deeper into the intrinsic function of the arts, Van Maanen makes use of Gadamer, and in particular, his essay 'The Relevance of the Beautiful'.<sup>9</sup> Gadamer defines art as a play with forms. These forms need to be forms *of* something, however: Van Maanen describes this in terms of matter and material and the playful ways in which matter can be given material form. This play of form and substance was what we attempted to get at with our survey question about the combination of forms that characterizes opera. Questions about the *material* of the opera – its characters and plot, for instance – hint at this function, but may not address it as directly as questions that specifically discuss the relationship between material and form.

The final theorist whom Van Maanen uses in describing the nature of artistic function is German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, and in particular his 1995 masterwork *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft* (translated in 2000 as *Art as a Social System*).<sup>10</sup> Luhmann's sociology is complex, but briefly, he treats social systems not as networks of persons or institutions, but rather, as networks of communication. People may participate in such systems, but they are not really part of them: counterintuitively, he argues that social systems are better thought of as communications addressing one another rather than relationships between people, even if people are, necessarily, involved. The arts, he argues, are an example of such a system, and they develop autonomy as a subsystem when artistic communications begin to address one another more than they do any other sort of social communication. This position is a refinement of Dickie's institutionalism: rather than just the setting of art works within a particular social institution, it is the place these works hold in a system of artistic communication that allows them to function as art works. Duchamp's *Fountain*, then, is an artwork not (just) because it sits in a gallery, but because it establishes a dialogue with other artworks through artistic forms of communication (form, line, material, shape, and so on).<sup>11</sup>

Luhmann goes on to define three primary tasks the arts perform within their system of

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<sup>9</sup> Gadamer, H. (1986). *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.

<sup>10</sup> Luhmann, N. (2000) *Art as a Social System*. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press.

<sup>11</sup> Of course this is not a perfectly clean distinction. Part of the reason that *Fountain* draws our attention to its form, line, material and so on is that it sits in a gallery. Should it sit on the wall of a toilet (where it would be equally at home, of course), we may not notice that it affords this form of communication. Still, there is an important and consequential theoretical difference between Luhmann's interest in the forms of communication and the dialogue between artworks and Dickie's interest in the institutional context in which artworks are placed.

communication. First, art splits the world into a 'real' world and an 'imaginary' world. This division is essential, and parallels the Kantian concept of disinterest. As we live in the real world, we cannot have an interest in that which exists wholly in the imaginary world. Second, artworks enable us to give our perceptions material form. This task fills in Gadamer's concept of what it is that the arts give form *to* (what we described as 'matter' above). And it leads to the third task: that, because they now have material form, art makes perceptions *available* for communication. This third task helps define what makes the arts a social system, and the particular role they play: without some vehicle to give them material form, perceptions would otherwise be incommunicable.

Van Maanen attempts to summarise and integrate this philosophical framework by describing a trio of social values and functions that the arts can serve in addressing them. For the value of the arts' ability to duplicate reality in the imaginative realm, Van Maanen sees the artistic function as offering a community the possibility of imagining reality and reflecting on it. For the value of making that other world potentially different from ours – which, Van Maanen says, comes through a play with forms – he notes the function of testing that imagined reality against what is possible and being open to the unknown. Our survey questions that ask about opera's ability to create a 'new world' or 'different ways of seeing' attempt to get at these functions. And finally, the making of perceptions available for communications can serve to make the exchange (and thus adjustment) of perceptions possible within a community. Survey questions which ask about the way that opera helps audiences to see things from another point of view would fall under this category.

In summary, Van Maanen sees the arts, when they are serving their intrinsic values, as offering up perceptions in material form, which serve as communications which duplicate?? the real world in an imagined one. The arts do so through a playful engagement with material and form. What those perceptions are *of* – the 'aboutness' of the artwork – varies with each art form and example, but those material forms are, for opera, a combination of music, stage design, acting, dance, costume, and so on. The values then, are the development of *new* perceptions, the *challenging* of existing perceptions and perceptive schema, and the *delight* in this imaginative work. Questions that ask about novelty, about challenge to ideas, and about the audience's excitement or joy are attempts to capture these values.



Theatre, Van Maanen argues, is largely about the interaction of human beings. So for theatre, these are perceptions about human behaviour, and the form that these perceptions come in have to do with the human form. (Note that while plot is a standard method of addressing this 'aboutness,' it is not the same as it. In Van Maanen's sense, theatre is not 'about' its plot – it uses its plot to exemplify and describe human interaction.) But opera's 'aboutness' may not be as clear as theatre's. Is opera always concerned with the interactions between people as theatre is, or is it also 'about' voice, music and emotion? The forms which opera uses also may be decidedly more varied than those of theatre, and (as our survey found) they combine in important and effective ways. Some audience members are more concerned than others with the different forms that constitute opera (voice, musical structures, and so on), and our interviews drew out these distinctions between individuals. These questions demand further exploration.

We drew up our audience surveys in collaboration with our business partners (three opera companies: see below), and the surveys were informed in large part by our own and our partners' instincts regarding what makes opera distinct from other art forms. We were then able to situate the survey results within the framework of the two approaches outlined above in order to come up with the eight categories or themes which are a key finding of this study (See Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis).

In developing a theoretical framework for our interviews, we drew on the studies featured in Radbourne et al. (2013). The eleven chapters in this collected volume each report on methods for conducting qualitative audience research. Many of the studies develop indices or categories that can be used to measure qualitative responses. To a great extent, the different indices proposed throughout the course of the volume can be arranged according to overarching principles, and we have used Van Maanen's framework to help make sense of the many possible indices that can be used.

In Chapter 1 of Radbourne et al, 'Knowing and measuring the audience experience', Radbourne, Glow and Johanson conducted focus groups and audience surveys of a group of small-to-medium sized Australian performing arts organisations. The authors found that four key attributes of the audience experience emerged: Knowledge, Risk, Authenticity, and Collective Engagement. In Chapter 5, 'In the context of their lives: how audience members make sense of performing arts experiences', Foreman-Wernet and Dervin conducted self-reflective, in-depth

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interviews with students at two universities in the Midwestern United States, using Dervin's 'Sense-Making Methodology' (SMM). The long-term project 'Sense-Making the Arts', conducted by the same authors over the 12 years to 2013, identified eight themes common in participants' experience of the arts: Truth/Beauty; Captivation; Self-expression; Self-awareness; Cognitive/intellectual growth; Community/connection; Well-being; Social Judgement.

Already, from the two chapters mentioned above, it can be seen that the indices used to measure audience response are appropriate to Van Maanen's categories of the functions of the arts. The same is true of the other indices described in Radbourne et al., as well as of those used by Brown and Novak (2007), Bakshki and Throsby (2010), and the New Economics Foundation (2005). Reason (2004) conducted discourse analysis of audience focus groups after live performance events, and identified a scale from believable to unbelievable – true to false – as a significant marker of quality for participants. Audience interaction was also considered to be significant; participants watched other audience members and speculated about their responses. We can summarise these two key criteria as (i) truth and (ii) liveness, and both will be seen to be relevant to our interviewees.

The studies mentioned above give us a framework for the development of indices according to the concerns that arose in the interviews, while Van Maanen's model, which we used for the surveys, allows for the design of questions around pre-existing, philosophically determined categories. By adopting both approaches, we ground our research in two camps: (i) the philosophy of art; (ii) the relatively new field, led by Reason, Radbourne and others, of discovering audience concerns by asking audience members. Apart from using the framework of the specific indices developed by different authors, we also draw on the studies mentioned above as practical models for our approach of asking audience members about their experiences, and using categories of concern as a tool to measure and compare their responses.

The next chapter offers an outline of the practical steps we took in carrying out our research.

## Chapter 3: Conducting the Research

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Having decided to conduct research into the value audiences ascribe to their experiences of performing arts, using opera as a case study, we took the following steps: (i) created a database of opera companies of all sizes and forms operating in London (forty-six companies in total); (ii) contacted all the companies for whom contact details could be found and who had performances within the next year (eighteen companies); (iii) conducted email and telephone correspondence with interested companies (seven); (iv) agreed to proceed with five, of whom two later dropped away; (v) met with three of the companies and drew up and conducted surveys in collaboration with them; (vi) conducted interviews with audience members for one of the companies; (vii) reported to each company on the survey results.

Each of these steps brought with it particular points of interest and particular challenges, as follows:

### **Database of opera companies (included as Appendix 4)**

We populated this database using personal knowledge, internet searches, and Companies House and Charity Commission information. Even at this early stage, it was interesting to discover that there are so many (often very small) opera-producing companies operating, or attempting to operate, in the London area. Twenty of these companies are in receipt of public funding; twenty-six are not. Of those whose income figures are in the public domain, the smallest annual income was £1,403, and the largest (Royal Opera House) was £112m.<sup>12</sup> A secondary aim in this research project was to demonstrate that the field of opera production is more diverse than is often acknowledged, and future reports could use this database to present a detailed picture of London's opera providers.

In conducting our research, we wanted to profile opera providers that were not the large-scale producing companies most discussed in both the media and research. In practice, as explained below, we worked with the only three companies who fully responded to the

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<sup>12</sup> Figures are for the last recorded annual income published on the Charity Commission website, <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk> [accessed April 2014].

collaborative partnership we offered. While three companies did represent a diversity of work, we cannot (and do not) claim them as a representative sample of all of London's opera producers.

Company A is a producing company that currently works mostly in spoken theatre and dance but wishes to increase the amount of opera it produces. The particular production we examined was a promenade experience for a single audience member listening to an audio recording and walking through a town, following audio instructions to guide them to the scenes of the performance. The performance was not an opera but attracted opera audience members because it took place as part of a festival featuring a major production of a twentieth-century opera, with which it shared a storyline. The company was interested in attracting opera-goers to their work and thus were interested in the responses of this audience to questions about opera.

Company B creates productions with a mixed performing company made up of professional opera singers and vulnerable adults, as part of a larger programme to use music to help the participants make positive changes in their lives. The performance we researched was a screening of a film made by the performing company, with live performance and audience participation accompanying the screening. We surveyed the audience for a short tour comprising three performances.

Company C is a music conservatoire with a training course for opera singers, and we surveyed the audience for an in-house opera production, in this case a double-bill of two rarely-performed operas.

### **Contacting and corresponding with the companies**

Initial contact was by email. We received only two replies to the twelve 'cold' emails we sent (i.e., where we had no previous acquaintance with the company). One of those was a polite refusal, and the other was one of the companies with whom we went on to collaborate. For the remaining six companies we contacted, one of the researchers was acquainted with someone at the company. Even in those cases, it was often only after repeated calls and emails that we were able to initiate a conversation. All those we spoke to professed high levels of interest in researching the experience of their audience; however, they were mostly overstretched, under-resourced, and unable to devote staff time to fully considering the project. Two of the five companies with whom we had serious discussions about devising an audience survey later dropped away, in both cases by simply failing to answer calls and emails. We surmise that this attrition was due to

overstretched personnel and lack of time and resources, despite the fact that both companies had shown great interest in the research.

### **Designing the surveys**

In designing the surveys, we worked with our collaborators to combine their interest in their audiences with our interest in broader questions of the audiences' opera-going experiences. On the one hand, we wanted to avoid designing a survey dealing with the sort of logistical matters that are typical of marketing surveys, such as respondents' opinions of the catering or sanitary facilities; on the other hand, these matters were often of primary concern to our collaborators, so we asked some logistical questions as well as value-focused questions from our research agenda. To varying degrees, the biggest challenge we faced in designing the surveys was a lack of time and resources on the part of our collaborators. In order to meet this challenge, we used the opera-production expertise within our team and our knowledge of each company to infer what the company might wish to know about the audience's experience, drew up an initial survey and encouraged the company to give us feedback. This process worked well, but the surveys could have benefitted from a more integrated development of questions; however, in the circumstances, the approach we took proved satisfactory to both the companies and the research team (see the concluding chapter for a fuller account of our reports to the companies, and their feedback. It is a significant finding of our project that all but the very largest opera companies lack the resources to participate in anything beyond their core activities, even when they have the interest and will, and even if they believe the activity will be of benefit to them, as was the case with all five of the companies with whom we conducted serious discussions).

### **Conducting the surveys**

The three surveys are included as Appendices 1, 2 and 3. We conducted the surveys through a commercial web-based system; audience members received an email with a link to the survey and an invitation to participate. The main challenge to conducting the surveys was that none of our collaborating partners held their own box office data. As a result, an additional burden of administration was placed on our collaborative partners, who were obliged to negotiate the distribution of the survey with their box office provider (usually the performance venue). We therefore had a lack of control over when the survey could be distributed, and in some cases it was distributed later than we would have liked after the date of the performances had passed

(Company A: one week after the festival finished; Company B; within days of each of the performances; Company C; within days of the end of the performance run). It is likely from the attrition that took place between the people who received the email invitation and the people who completed the surveys (see Chapter 4: Surveying the Audience) that the respondents were among those audience members most engaged (either positively or negatively) by the performances.

### **Conducting interviews**

We supplemented the surveys with open-ended interviews in order to delve more deeply into respondents' experiences of opera. Appendix 8 gives a list of the questions we asked. These questions asked the interviewees to remember and reflect on their experience, as discussed in the introduction. The interviewer (Sinéad O'Neill) encouraged interviewees to talk at length about their opera-going lives, and in particular any emotional high points they had experienced. The transcript material then enabled us to conduct an analysis of interviewees' main concerns, exploring what they value about opera in more depth than the survey allowed.

We invited survey respondents from Companies B and C to be interviewed about their opera-going experiences. In practice, time constraints limited us to interviewing Company C respondents only. 28 respondents indicated that they were willing to be interviewed. We contacted all of them, and received positive responses from 19, all of whom we interviewed (one of these interviews could not be transcribed). A full report of the interviews follows in Chapter 6: Interviewing the Audience.

### **Reporting on the survey results**

We created full reports for each company of their survey results and presented each in a seminar with interested staff members (reports of our meetings with each company are included as Appendices 5, 6 and 7). Each company responded positively and with interest to the findings. As is typical for many producing companies, we discovered that all three have informal channels for capturing audience responses to their work. Our research was considered a useful, formal addition to those channels, in particular as regards reporting to stakeholders such as funders. We asked each company whether the research findings would influence the work of the company, and received different answers in each case, which will be fully explored in our concluding chapter. Apart from influencing the artistic work of the company, the research findings were considered

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useful guides to communicating with the audience, and in particular to attracting opera fans to the company's work.

## Chapter 4: Surveying the Audience

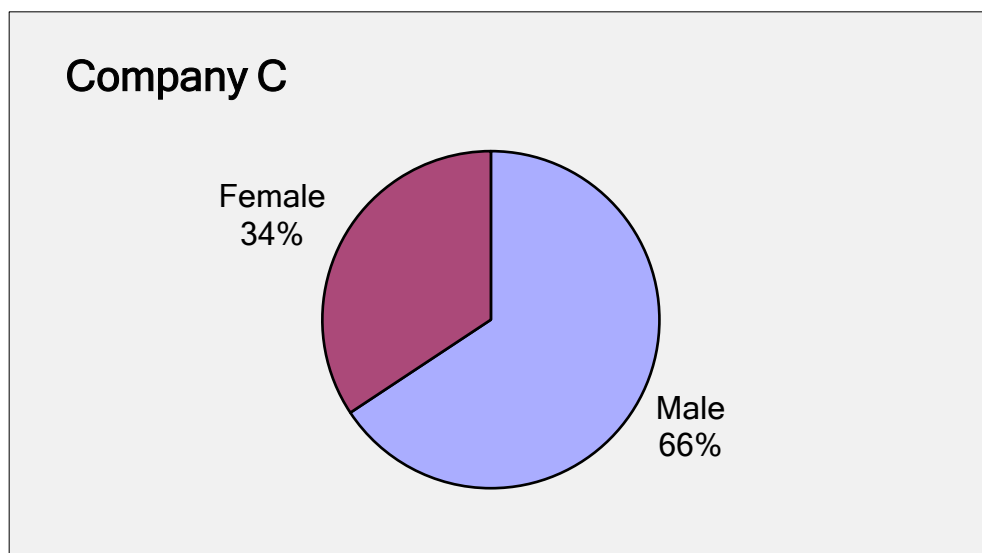
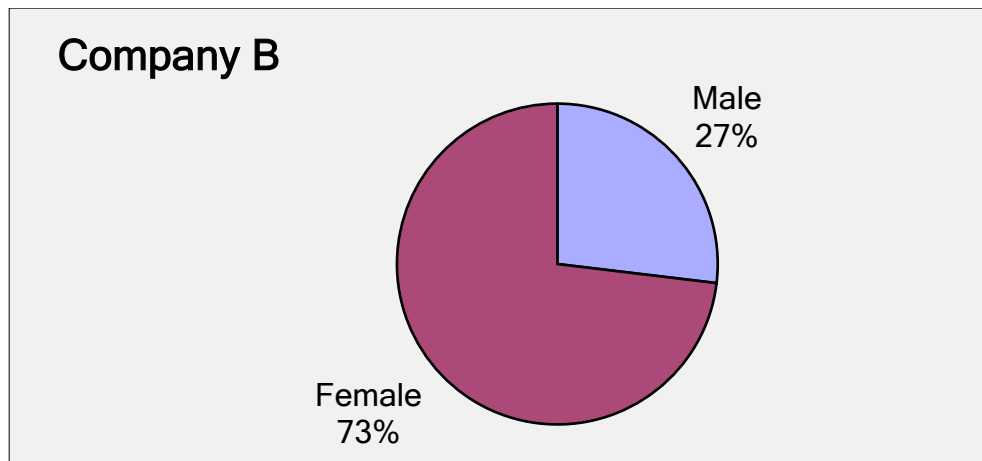
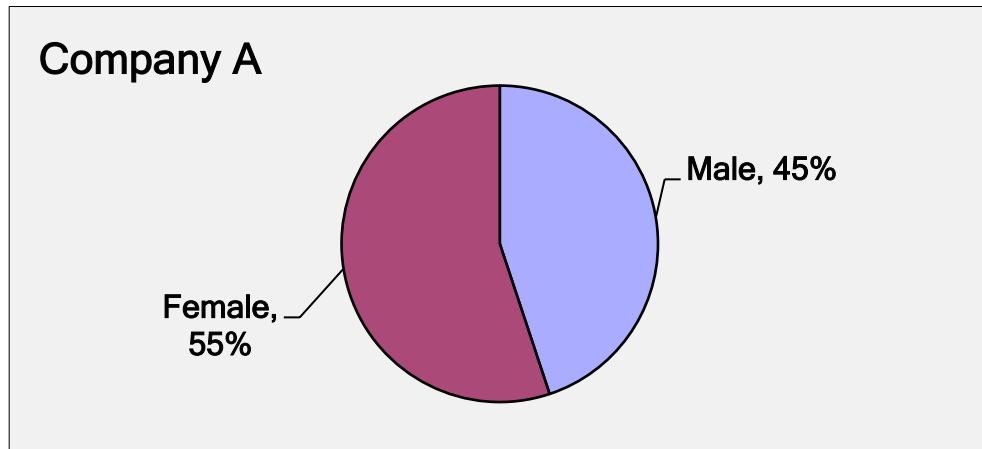
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As mentioned above, we invited audience members to our survey by email. The surveys took about 10 minutes to complete (tested by team members who had not drawn up the surveys and by members of our partner companies) and were not incentivised. Since none of our collaborating partners held their own box office data, not all audience members received the invitation. For Company A, the invitation was sent in a general marketing email going to the mailing list of the box office provider. We can only estimate how many of the audience members for Company A's performance are part of this list. There were 600 audience members, we estimate that between 300 and 400 received the invitation, and there were 71 respondents, for a response rate of approximately 20%. For Company B, we sent invitations to the audience from three different venues (90-100 people in each venue); again, not everyone in the audience received an invitation to the survey. 15 from the first venue, 7 from the second and 3 from the third completed the survey, a response rate of approximately 10%. For Company C, 172 people were invited out of a total paying audience of 824 (an additional 400 audience members were invited guests of the company), and 75 completed the survey, a response rate of 43%. As noted in the previous chapter, it is likely that the people who completed the surveys were among those audience members most engaged by the performances. The three surveys (lightly anonymised, and with company-specific customer-experience questions omitted) are included as Appendices 1, 2 and 3. Some of the questions were the same for each company, and some were different. The following is a summary and comparison of the results of questions that were asked to all more than one company. They were asked in different orders on each survey, and the following list does not attempt to recreate any of those orders.

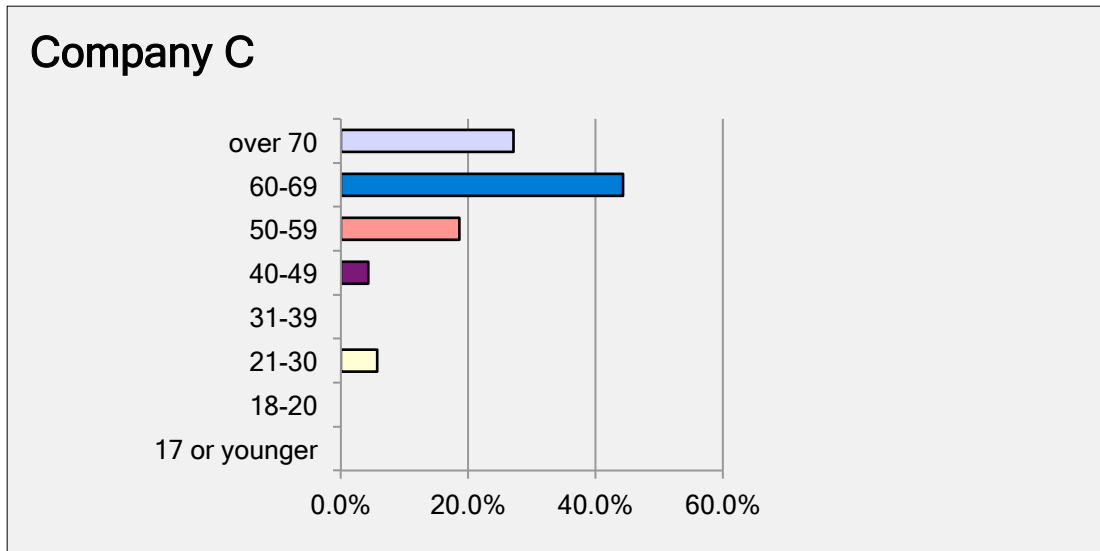
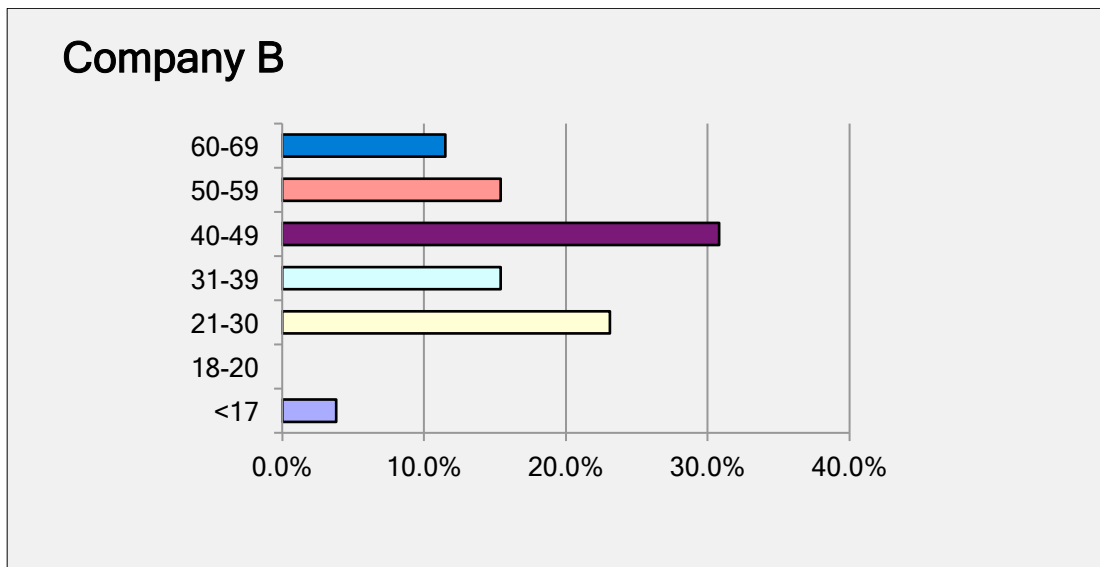
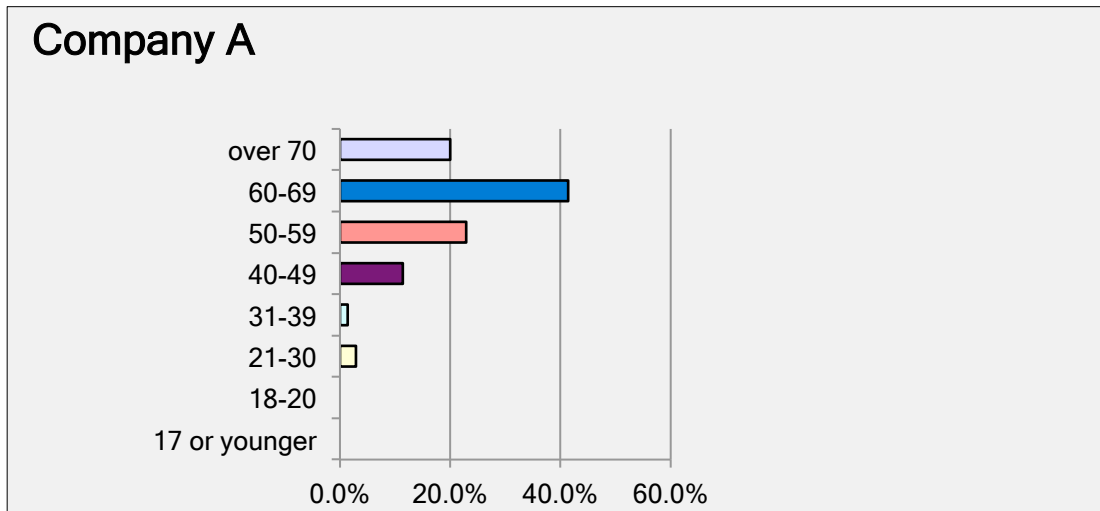


## 4.1: Demographic Grouping and Opera-Going Habits

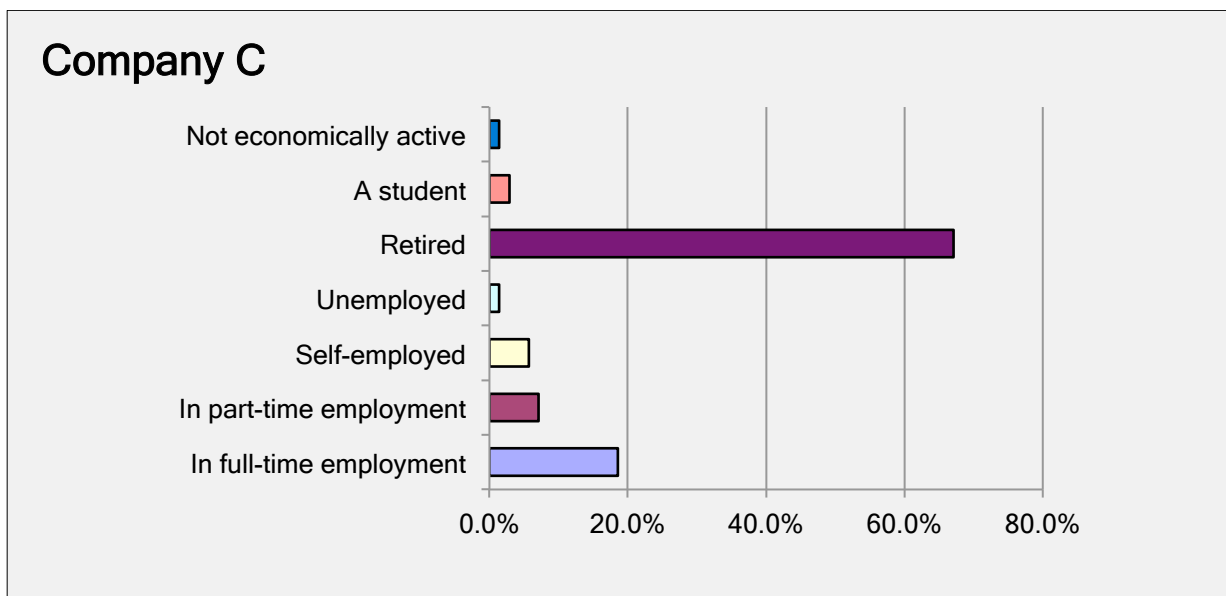
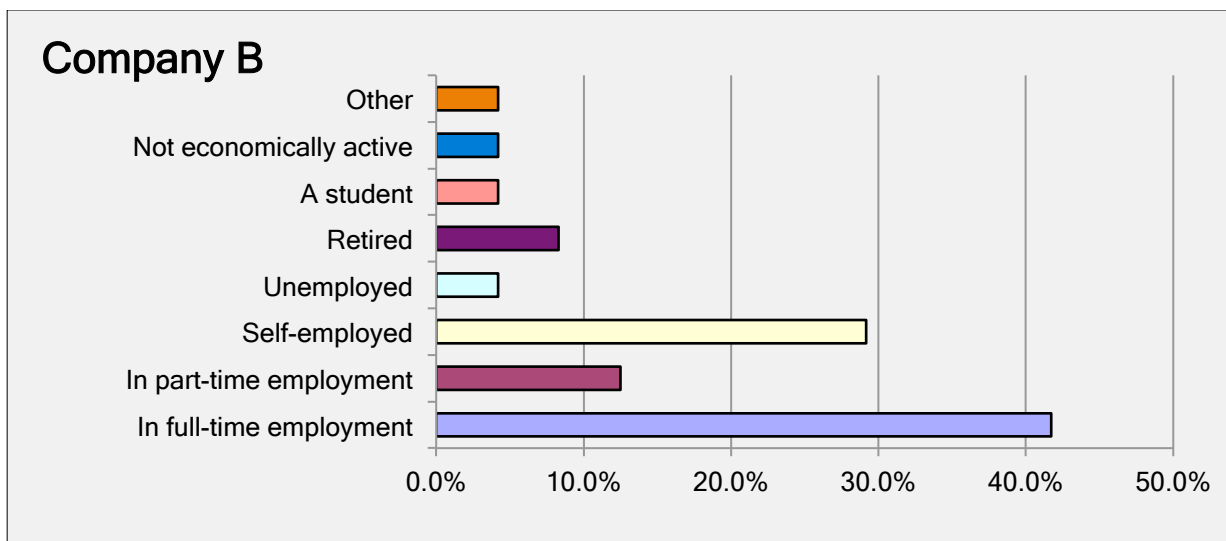
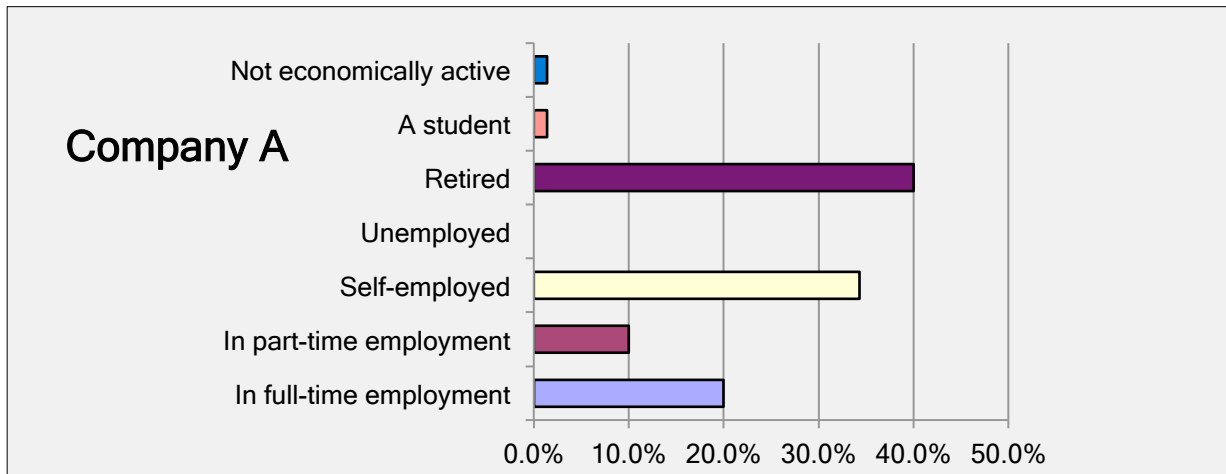
Are you male or female?



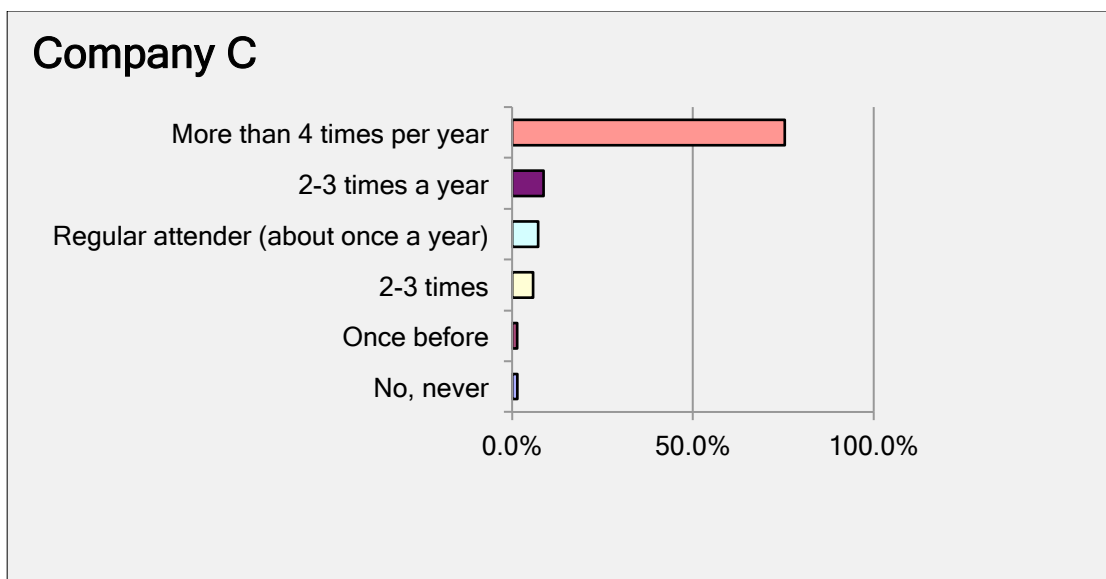
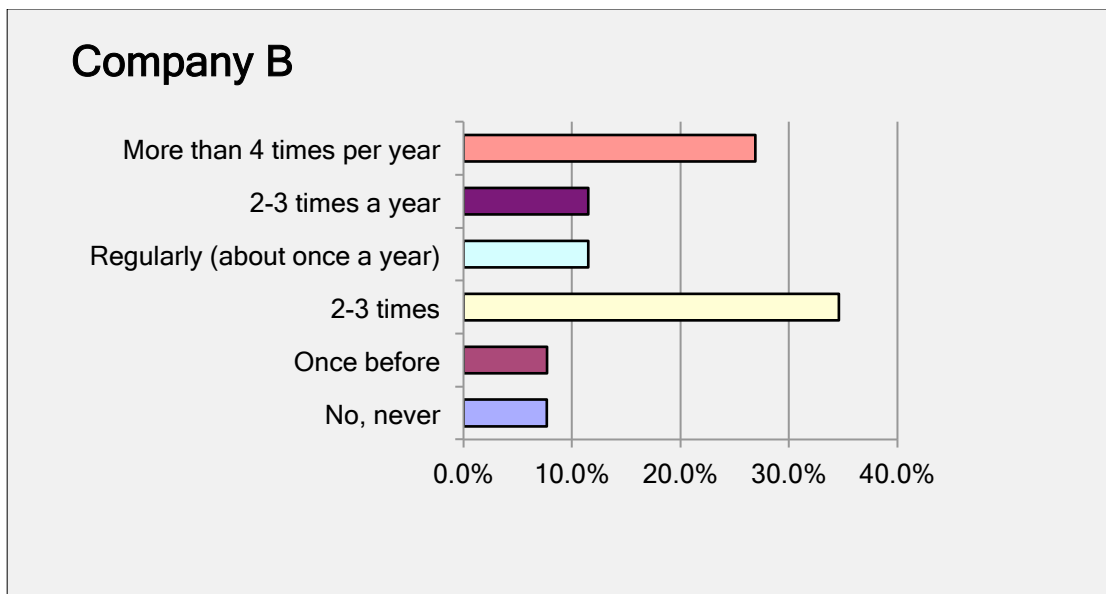
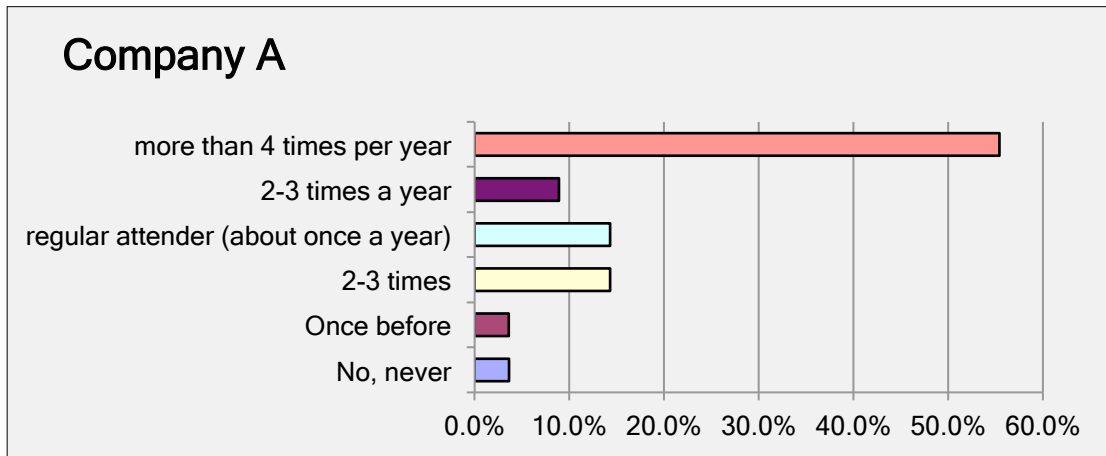
Which category includes your age?



**What is your employment status?**



Have you previously been to an opera?



## Commentary

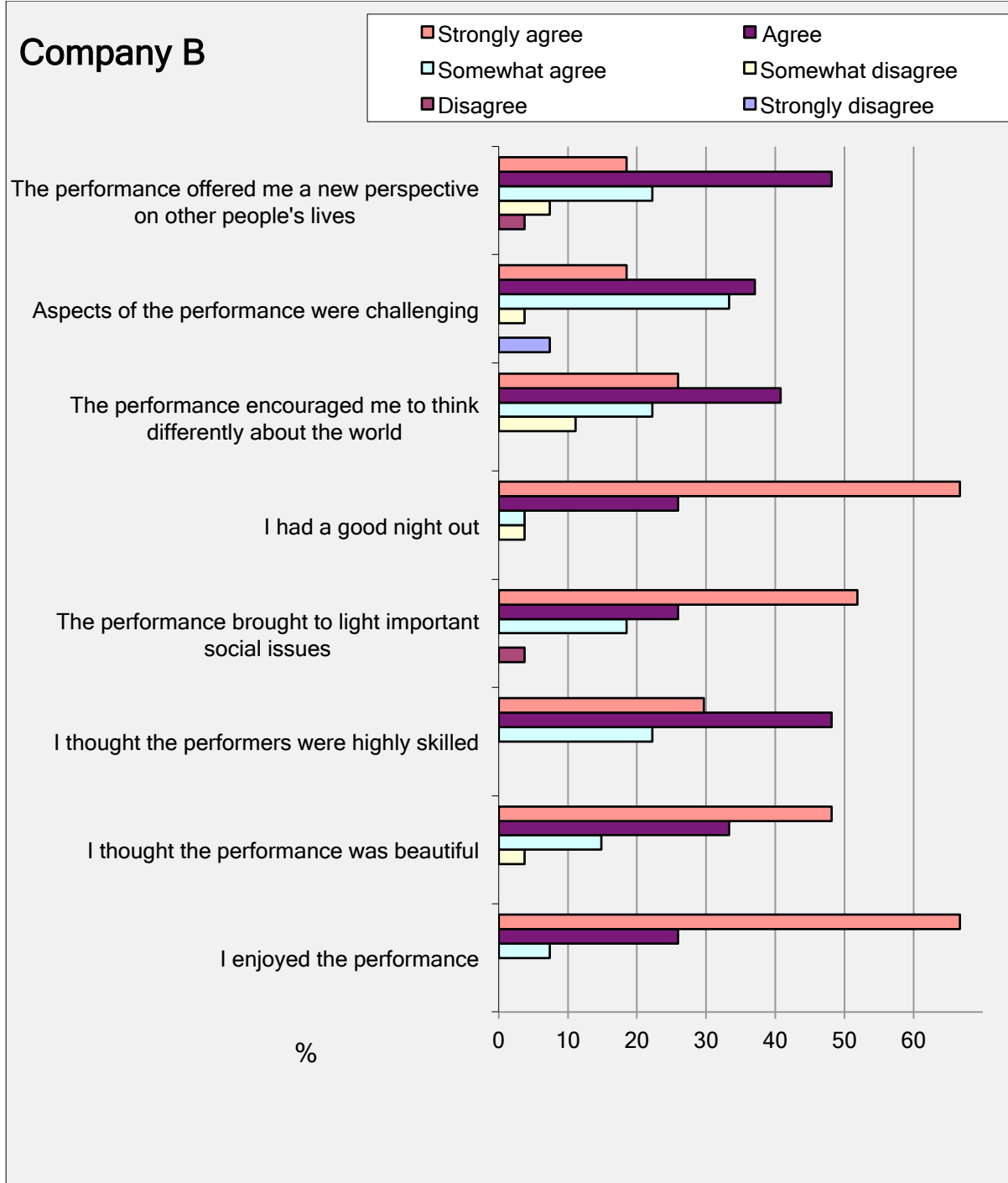
Many more women than men responded to the surveys for Company A and Company B, while many more men than women responded for Company C, though we are not clear why (we know from The Audience Agency that audiences for the performing arts generally contain more women than men, but it would be useful to know the figures for opera attendance). For Companies A and C, the largest proportion of respondents were aged between 60 and 69, and were retired, while for Company B, the biggest proportions of respondents were aged between 40 and 49, and 21 and 30, and were either in full-time employment or were self-employed. Our impression is that the age sample for Companies A and C is most representative of the general opera audience, but again, we would need confirmation of this from The Audience Agency. For all three companies, most respondents were regular or frequent attenders at the opera, but Companies A and C attracted the highest proportion of highly-engaged attenders (more than four times per year).

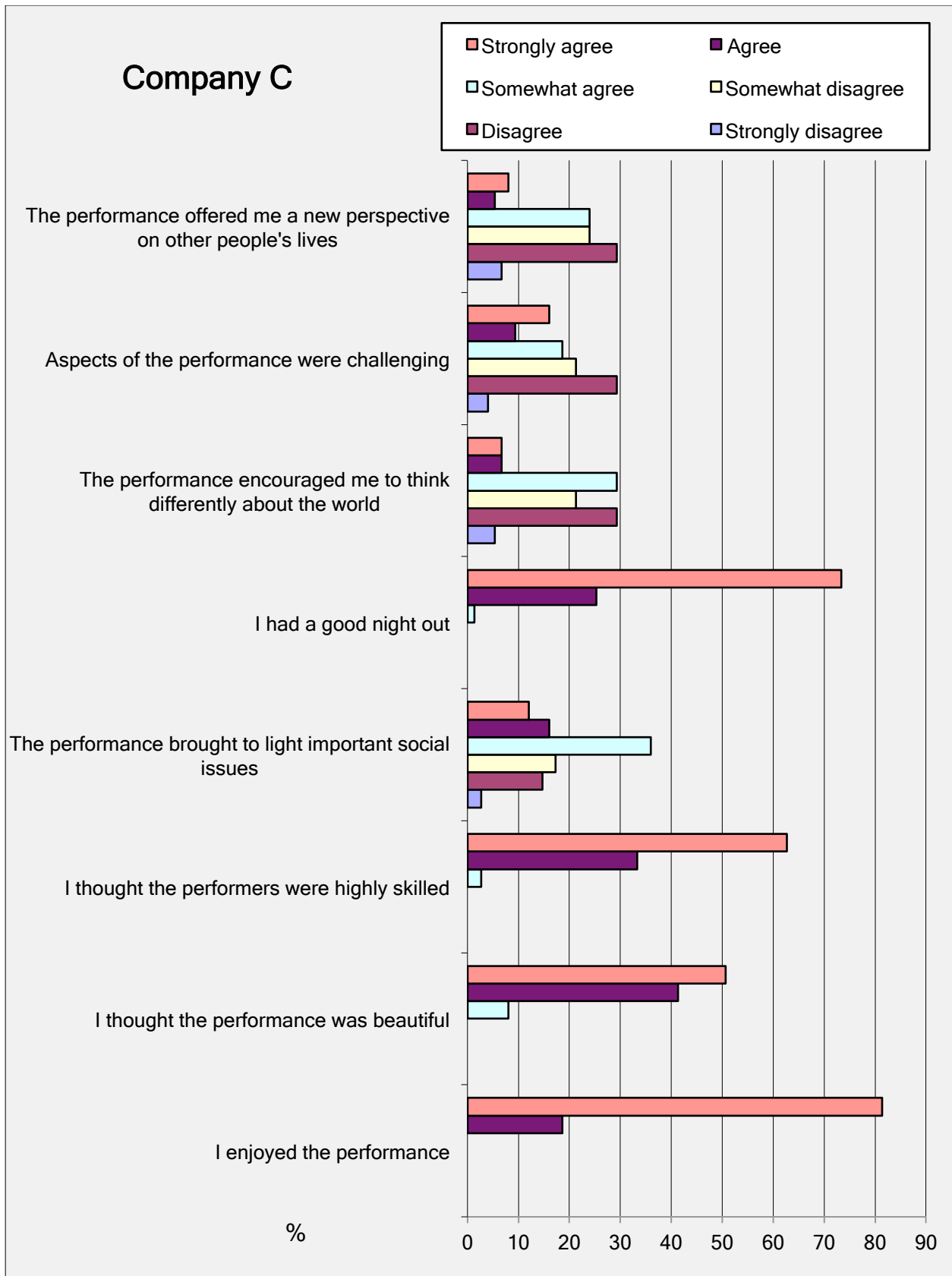
Company B obviously has a quite different demographic makeup than the others in terms of age, employment status, and frequency of opera attendance. We would hypothesise that this is due to the nature of the work that company does, and that it attracts an audience more interested in its social mission than in the operatic form. We would further hypothesise that companies A and C attract an audience which is more typical of London opera-goers than company B, but we lack data to back this up.

## 4.2: Qualitative questions

(Companies B and C only – this question was not asked of company A.)

Rate the following statements:





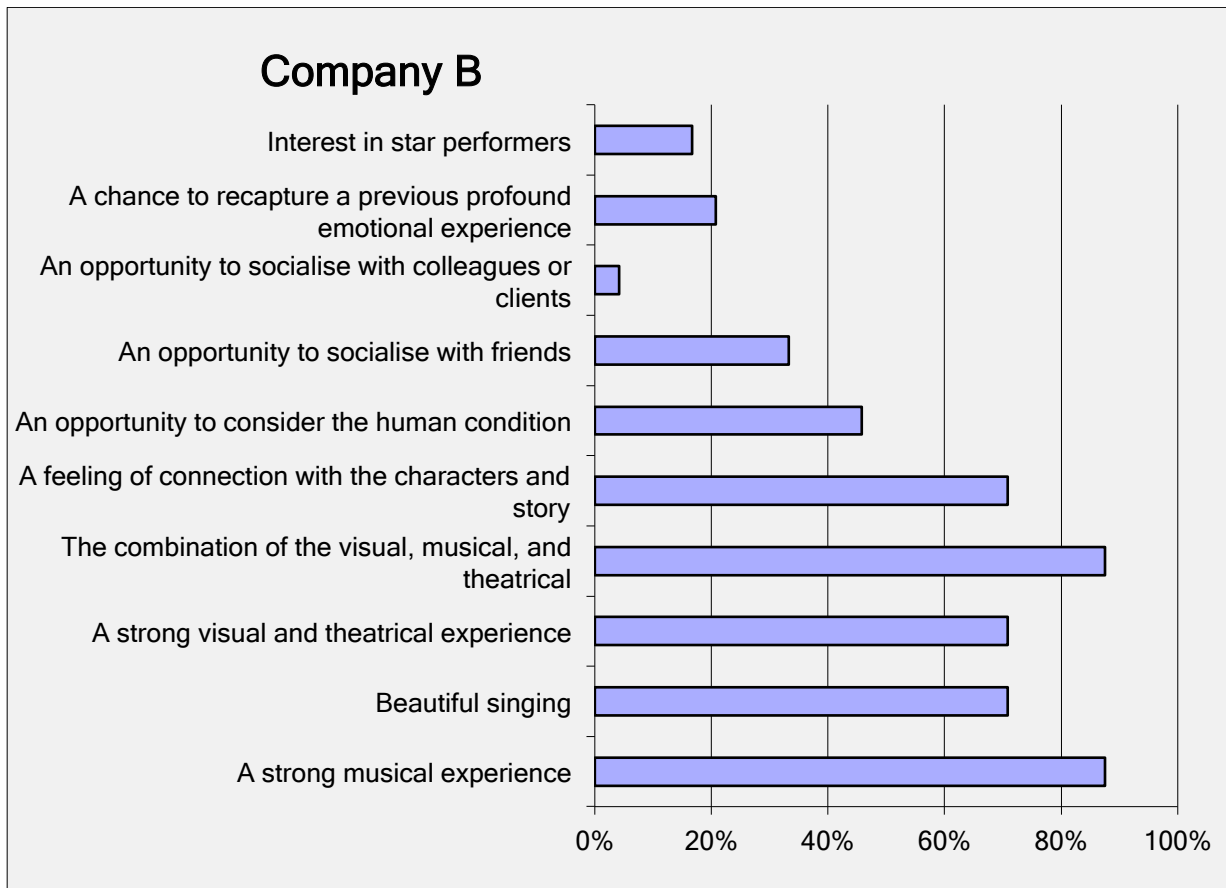
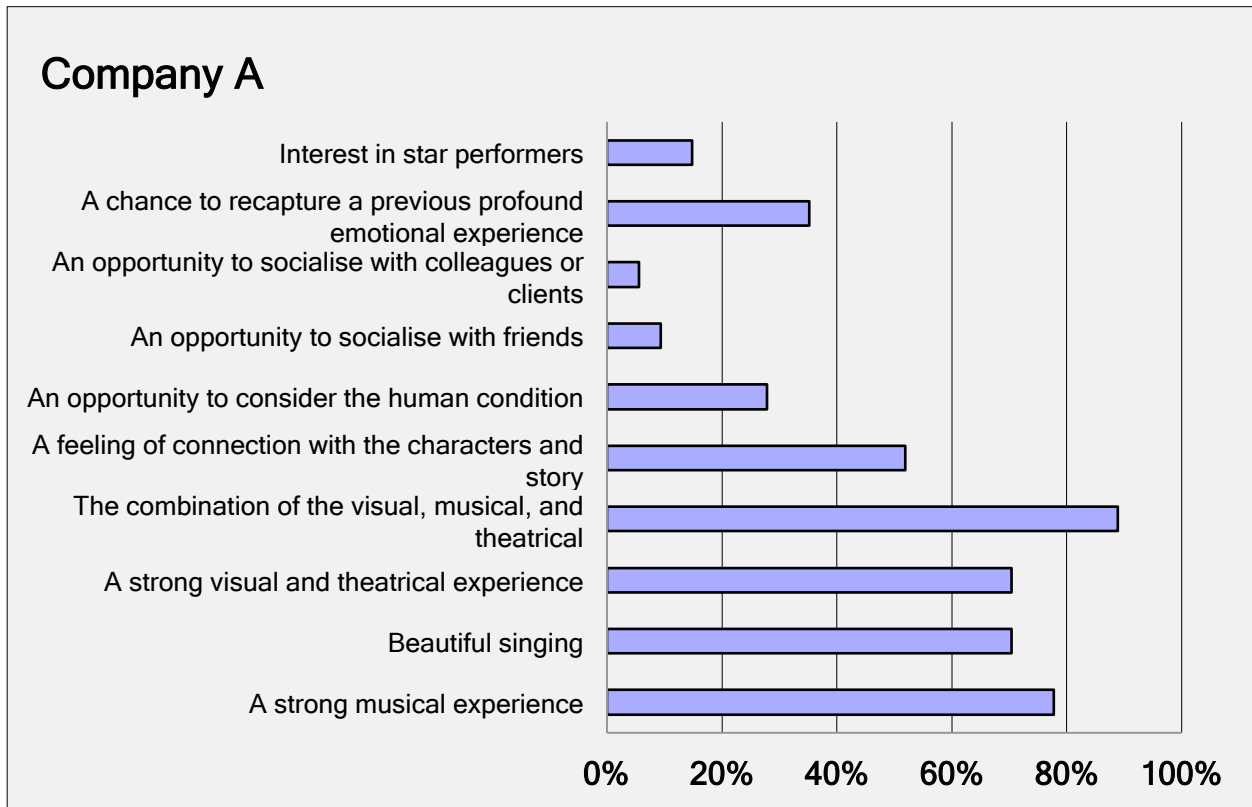
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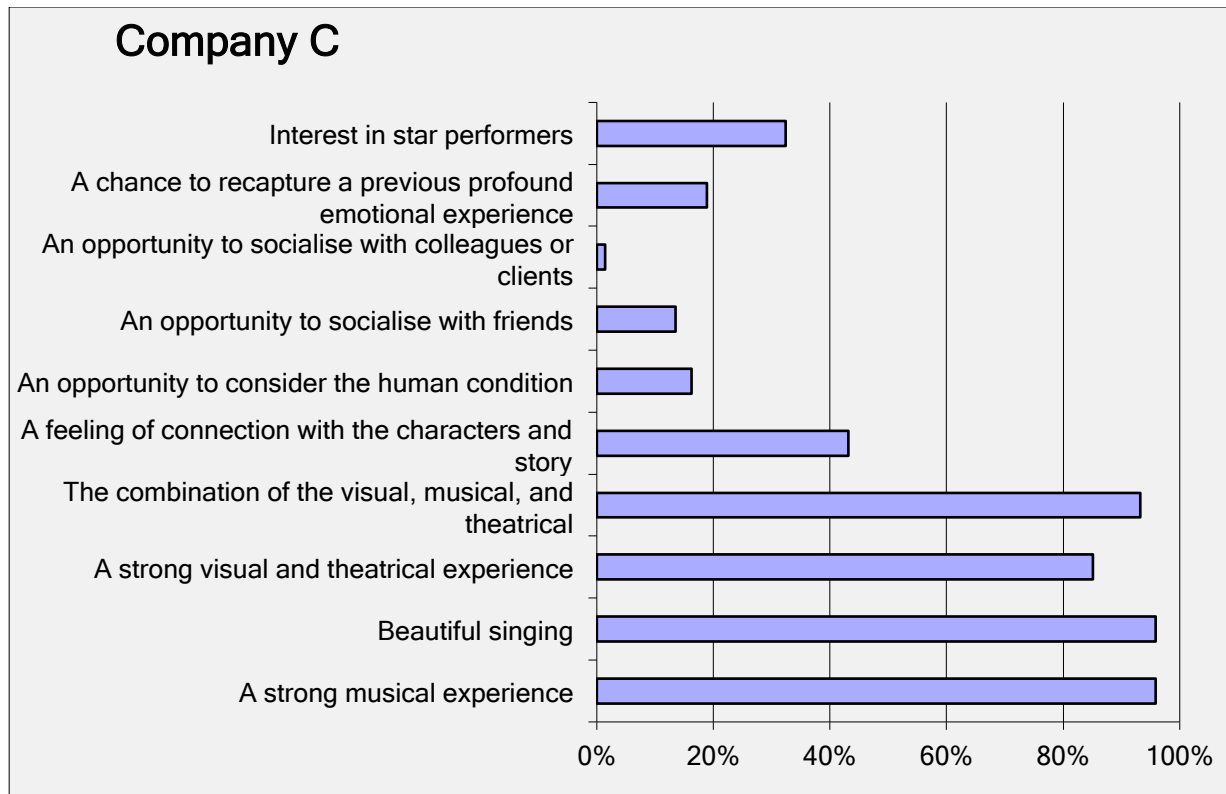
## Commentary

Respondents had to choose one rating for each statement. Both companies attracted positive overall responses, with high scores for the responses 'I enjoyed the performance' and 'I had a good night out'. Company B was more likely to score highly on responses to do with the performance offering a perspective on the world (the first three, and the fifth statements fall into this category), which is not surprising, considering the focus of company B's work. The importance of opera as a means to learn about and reflect on society will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis. Company C scored more highly in terms of the beauty of the performance and its skill; this, too, is not surprising, reflecting the conservatoire nature of its work.



**If you are already an opera-goer, what do you look for in an opera experience?**





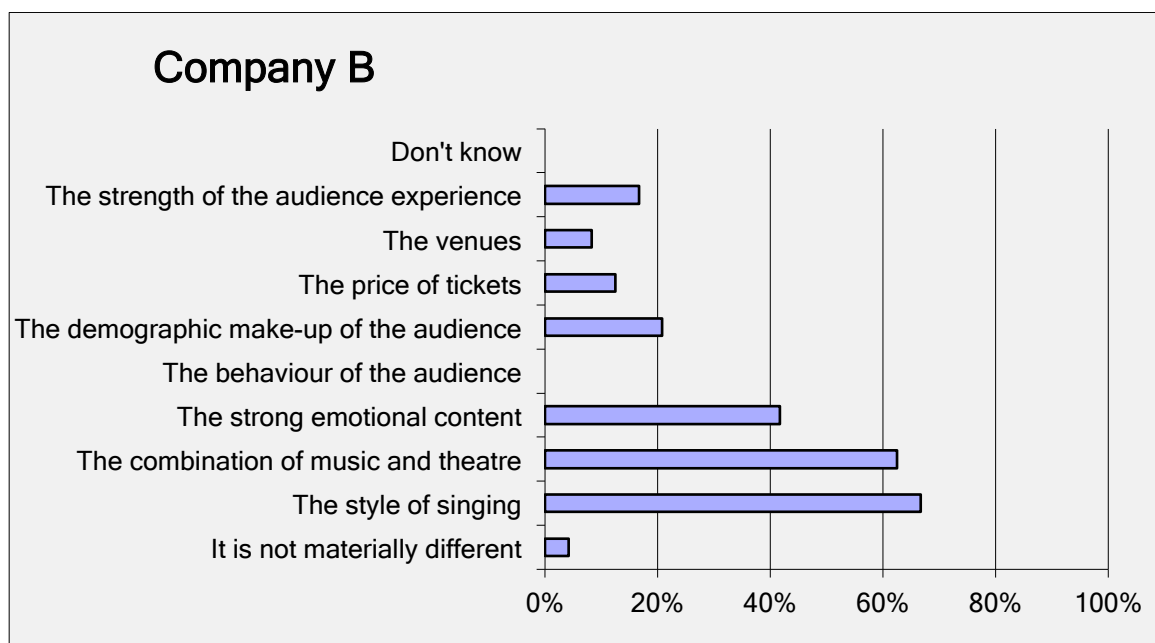
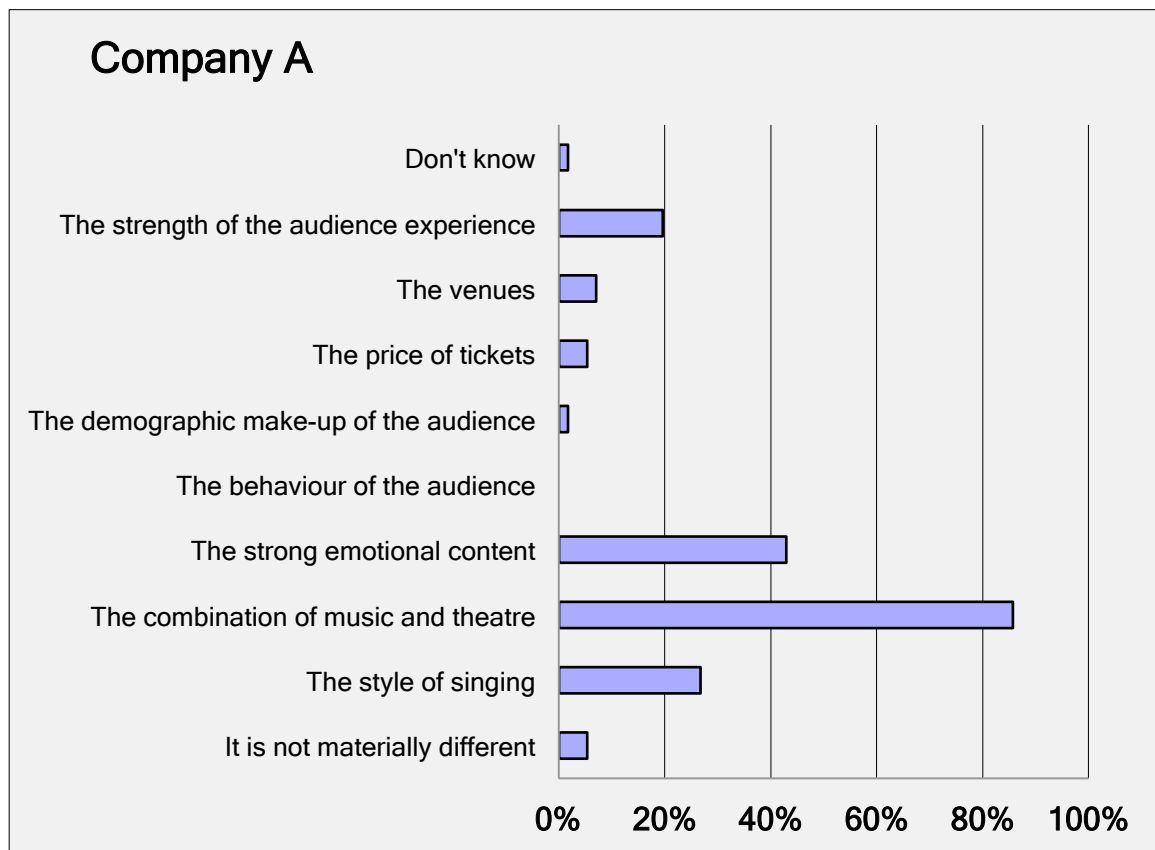
### Commentary

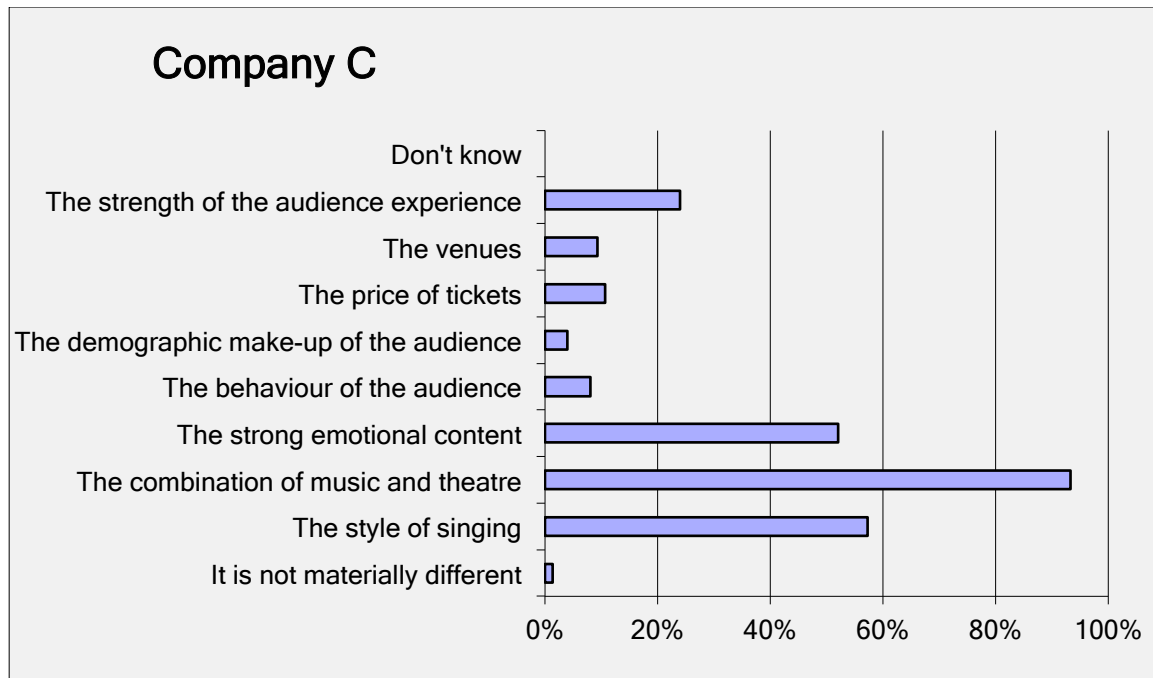
Respondents could tick as many statements as they wished. For all three companies, ‘combination of the visual, musical and theatrical’ was of key importance, coming highest or joint highest in answer to the question ‘What do you look for in an opera performance?’ But what is striking is how consistent the answers are across all three companies. For all, the visual, theatrical and especially musical experience were central to what audience members (say they) want from the opera. Socialisation, fame, larger artistic concerns and (to a lesser extent) the characters and narrative pale in importance in comparison to these more traditionally aesthetic concerns. While this difference is magnified for Company C, it is the case for all three. One noticeable difference is that, for Company B, the ‘feeling of connection with the characters and story’ is nearly as important as other aspects of aesthetic experience. We would hypothesise that, because of the social mission of company B, plot was a more important aspect of their work than that of Company A or C. Equally striking is how different these survey responses are from those collected in our interviews (in Chapter 6, below). While, when explicitly asked, few survey respondents mentioned the social aspects of opera as what they look for in an opera experience, it was a dominant theme of the interviews. There may be a degree to which the direct question elicits the more socially expected response, while a fuller and freer conversation can elicit responses that do

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not so clearly conform to expectations. We will return to the significance of the combination of art forms in Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis and Chapter 6: Interviewing the Audience.

**In your opinion, what makes opera different from other art forms?**





### Commentary

Respondents could tick as many statements as they wished. As in the previous question, 'Combination of music and theatre' is clearly an important part of what distinguishes opera from other art forms for survey respondents. In all three cases, 'Emotion', 'Style of Singing' and 'Combination of Music and Theatre' are the three most important distinguishing features. Again, while Company B's audience was somewhat less interested in the aesthetic specificity of opera, it is the music of opera that dominates. We note, however, that 'strong emotional content,' which is not an aesthetic property of opera in the same way that music is, makes an impressive showing. These issues will be dealt with in some detail in Chapter 4: Thematic Analysis and Chapter 5: Interviewing the Audience.

While we asked those who had not attended opera before why they had not done so, this led to too small a sample size to meaningfully analyse. The vast majority of attendees at each opera were regular opera-goers.

# Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis

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## 5.1: The Functions of Art

This chapter offers a thematic analysis of the findings from our three surveys. As discussed in chapter 2, Van Maanen describes three categories of artistic functioning, which he sees as interlinked.<sup>13</sup> They do, however, represent three different ways in which the arts can serve their audiences and society. The three categories can be summarized as follows:

**A: Intrinsic functions.** These are the functions that are specific to the arts: they are particular to the mode of engagement that characterizes the arts, and cannot be achieved by non-artistic practices. These include:

- New understandings; that is the proposing of new models through which to understand the world
- Seeing the world differently because of disinterested aesthetic contemplation
- A beautiful play of forms (questions about the material of the opera – its characters and plot, for instance – hint at this function, but may not address it as directly as questions that specifically discuss the relationship between material and form.)
- A trio of explicitly social functions:
  - (i) allowing a group to imagine reality and reflect on it;
  - (ii) testing that imagined reality against actual reality (trying out a new way of thinking about things);
  - (iii) making these perceptions available for communication.

**B: Semi-intrinsic functions.** These are functions that do involve an interest on the part of the audience and thus do not have the specifically artistic engagement that characterizes fully intrinsic functions. Since they also involve a direct engagement with the art as such, it would be hard to imagine how they could in fact be properly achieved through anything but an artistic practice. These include:

- Interest in the art form as such (its history, development, forms, variations, etc.)

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<sup>13</sup> See Van Maanen (2009).

- Skills and charisma of the performers

**C: Extrinsic functions.** These are functions that the arts may serve, but other activities may serve as well. These functions serve the particular interests, needs and desires of the audience. While there is nothing particularly artistic about these functions, the arts may serve them more effectively or powerfully than other practices (especially for certain audiences). These include:

- Socialising with others; seeing and being seen
- Having fun
- Enjoying one's self
- Building social cohesion between audience members or within a society as a whole.

We report these three categories here as one possible way to view the functions and value of art. Our survey and interviews (as well as the other qualitative audience research cited in our Introduction) provide data against which Van Maanen's categories can be tested. We did not, as a rule, find that the three existed independently of one another.

## 5.2: Factor Analysis

In order to explore the extent to which the survey responses clustered in ways analogous to Van Maanen's categories, a factor analysis was conducted on those questions which were asked in more than one of the three surveys, and which did not mention specific production, companies, or venue-specific issues (e.g. catering). Factor analysis identifies questions whose answers co-vary together (i.e. if a respondent gives a positive response to one, he or she is also likely to give a positive response to the others). There were 33 such questions (shown in Table 1), and a factor analysis was conducted using principal components method with varimax rotation. It is, of course, up to the analyst to interpret these results and to label the factors that are identified. We considered the following questions in our analysis:

<b>Respond to the statements</b>
I enjoyed [the performance].
I thought the performances were beautiful.
I thought the performers were highly skilled.
The performances brought to light important social issues.
I had a good night out.

The performances encouraged me to think differently about the world.
Aspects of the performances were challenging.
The performances offered me a new perspective on other people's lives.
<b>If you are already an opera-goer, what do you look for in an opera performance? (tick all that apply)</b>
A strong musical experience.
Beautiful singing.
A strong visual and theatrical experience.
The combination of the visual, musical, and theatrical.
A feeling of connection with the characters and story.
An opportunity to consider the human condition.
An opportunity to socialise with friends.
An opportunity to socialise with colleagues or clients.
A chance to recapture a previous profound emotional experience.
Interest in star performers.
<b>In your opinion, what makes opera different from other art forms? (tick all that apply)</b>
It is not materially different.
The style of singing.
The combination of music and theatre.
The strong emotional content.
The behaviour of the audience.
The demographic make-up of the audience.
The price of tickets.
The venues.
The strength of the audience experience.
Don't know.
<b>Why did you decide to come to the performance? (tick all that apply)</b>
Interest in the particular company
Interest in a particular performer
Convenience of the location.
Affordability of tickets.
To hear the work of a particular composer.



Table 1: Questions submitted to factor analysis

Factor Analysis yielded an 11-factor solution, of which the first eight factors were interpretable, accounting for 51% of the variance. The questions which loaded at more than 0.5 on each factor are given below under each factor, together with the factor label which we assigned to them. The left-hand column shows which Van Maanen category can be assigned to each question.

<b>Van Maanen</b>	<b>Factor 1 (Societal Perception):</b>
Extrinsic	The performance brought to light important social issues
Intrinsic	The performance encouraged me to think differently about the world
Intrinsic	Aspects of the performance were challenging
Intrinsic	The performance offered me a new perspective on other people's lives
	<b>Factor 2 (Positive Response):</b>
Any	I enjoyed the performance
Intrinsic	I thought the performance was beautiful
Semi-intrinsic	I thought the performers were highly skilled
Extrinsic	I had a good night out
	<b>Factor 3 (Narrative and Emotion):</b>
	[What you look for in an opera performance:]
Semi-intrinsic	A feeling of connection with the characters and story
Intrinsic	An opportunity to consider the human condition
Semi-intrinsic	A chance to recapture a previous profound emotional experience
	<b>Factor 4 (Singing):</b>
	[What you look for in an opera performance]
Semi-intrinsic	A strong musical experience
Semi-intrinsic	Beautiful singing
	<b>Factor 5 (Practical Issues):</b>

	[What makes opera different from other art forms?]
Extrinsic	The demographic make-up of the audience
Extrinsic	The price of the tickets
Extrinsic	The venues
	<b>Factor 6 (Audience Priorities):</b>
	[What makes opera different from other art forms:]
Extrinsic	The behaviour of the audience
Intrinsic	The strength of the audience experience
	[Why did you decide to come to this performance?]
Extrinsic	Affordability
	<b>Factor 7 (Socialising):</b>
	[What do you look for in an opera performance?]
Extrinsic	Opportunity to socialise with friends
Extrinsic	Opportunity to socialise with clients/colleagues
	<b>Factor 8 (Charismatic Performers):</b>
	[What you look for in an opera performance:]
Semi-intrinsic	Interest in star performers
	[What makes opera different from other art forms:]
Semi-intrinsic	The strong emotional content
Intrinsic	The strength of the audience experience

**Table 2: Factor Analysis and Van Maanen categories**

From Table 2, we can see that, while some clearly extrinsic factors cluster with one another, the clusters of functions that we might identify as the intended functions of the arts consist of a mix of intrinsic and semi-intrinsic functions. This result can be interpreted in two ways. First, it may be very difficult for audience members to separate out their Kantian disinterested viewing of the arts with their (inherently interested) affection for it. Second, it may be an artefact of our survey method. It is simply very difficult, if not downright impossible to ask spectators about the meaning

and experience of opera for them in the disinterested language of much aesthetic philosophy. Obviously extrinsic interests, however, seem to be more broadly separable, though our survey and interviews found that almost all opera fans take a mix of intrinsic, semi-intrinsic and extrinsic values from opera, and that they functioned in consort with each other.

### 5.3: Categories for Coding the Interviews

We used both Van Maanen's schema and the eight factors as a framework from which to develop a system for coding the interview transcripts. The interviews yielded material that was inevitably much more nuanced and detailed than the surveys, which meant that our coding, if it were to capture that detail, would itself have to be more nuanced than the eight factors could easily allow. We also allowed ourselves to be guided by recurrent themes in the interviews that we had neither asked about nor foreseen, and that had therefore not arisen in the surveys. The presence of these recurrent issues that were of importance to respondents demonstrates the usefulness of open-ended interviews, where the concerns of respondents can come to the fore. From the starting point of the eight factors, we proceeded as follows:

#### **Factor 1: Societal Perception:**

This factor translates into two of our categories: (i) 'The New' and (ii) 'Character, Narrative and Truth'. 'The New' is relevant to two of the questions that cluster in factor 1: 'Aspects of the performance were challenging' and 'The performance offered me a new perspective on people's lives.' Both of these sit comfortably in Van Maanen's schema as 'intrinsic' functions; indeed, the category of 'The New' was the best parallel we found to Van Maanen's intrinsic artistic function. In part, 'Character, Narrative and Truth' refers to how respondents talked about opera as a tool to develop their understanding of the human condition, also an 'intrinsic' function. Rather than standing on its own, as it does in the factor analysis, we linked the idea of understanding with that of character and narrative because respondents talked about these features of opera as underpinning a way to explore their own stories, and the stories they encountered in their daily lives. This linkage makes this category ('Character, Narrative and Truth') semi-intrinsic, in Van Maanen's sense. It is notable that Factor 3 (Narrative and Emotion) would also fit in our category

of 'Character, Narrative and Truth.' However, emotion was such a dominant subject in our interviews that we made it a category in its own right (see below)..

**Factor 2: Positive Response:**

Since we were not seeking information about a particular performance in the interviews, we did not make use of this factor as a category. Rather, we use the category 'Emotion' to distinguish the emotional responses of respondents. Emotion could sit in any of Van Maanen's three functions, depending on its strength and type (contrast an overwhelming emotional experience with the idea of having a 'good night out'). In our analysis of the interview transcripts, we focus on the strength of emotional experiences.

**Factor 3: Narrative and Emotion:**

The factor analysis links narrative and emotion, suggesting that audience members' emotional responses may often be triggered by the stories of operas. Since we were interested in exploring what caused or inspired emotional responses, we used two categories to investigate this factor: 'Character, Narrative and Truth' and 'Emotion' (as discussed above). Separating the two parts of this factor in this way allowed us to test their association, and indeed, we found that 'Character, Narrative and Truth' associated strongly with 'Emotion.' (See Chapter 6: Interviewing the Audience.)

**Factor 4: Singing:**

The factor analysis linked 'A strong musical experience' with 'Beautiful singing'. In our coding of the interviews, we focused exclusively on the latter. Many respondents talked about singing in strong terms that did not seem closely related to their overall musical tastes or their musical experiences. We were interested in investigating the phenomenon of a strong emotional response to the operatic voice, and therefore we used 'Beautiful Singing' as a category in its own right. 'Beautiful Singing' could be categorised as 'semi-intrinsic' in Van Maanen's schema, because it has to do with the skill of performers; however, the way our respondents talked about beautiful singing seemed much more in tune with 'intrinsic' functions of the beautiful play of forms, and their own heightened experiences resulting from aesthetic contemplation. (This discrepancy also

demonstrates the difficulty of maintaining a distinction between intrinsic and semi-intrinsic experiences—that is, between disinterested and interested attention to a work of art—in open-ended discussions about the experience of the arts with audience members. This is not a criticism of the qualitative method of open-ended interviews, but rather, a criticism of the philosophical distinction between interested and disinterested attention, which can be traced back to Kant.)

**Factor 5: Practical Issues:**

Since our research was primarily interested in audience members' responses to opera, we did not use this factor in our coding of the interview transcripts. It did, however, play a role in our reports to the various opera companies (reported in Appendices 5, 6 and 7).

**Factor 6: Audience Priorities:**

Factor 6 contains what seem to be quite diverse responses: behaviour of the audience, strength of audience experience and affordability. Questions of the power of the audience experience were accounted for by our categories of 'Emotion', 'Character, Narrative and Truth,' and 'Beautiful Singing', as discussed above. The question of affordability, however, came to the fore in many of the interviews as something that respondents were concerned with. We therefore made it a category in its own right. While 'affordability,' is not a function of the arts at all—that is, it is not something the arts do—as a value, it is certainly an extrinsic one.

**Factor 7: Others:**

This factor translates approximately to our category 'Socialising,' although the category goes beyond the questions asked in the survey about socialising with friends or socialising with colleagues and clients. All mentions of other audience members, their behaviour, and their relation to the respondent are included in this category. This factor comes under 'extrinsic functions' in Van Maanen's system.

**Factor 8: Charismatic Performers:**

This factor translates to our category 'Performer Charisma'. The factor analysis suggests that interest in star performers is linked to strong emotional response. Our coding of the interview

transcripts allows this suggestion to be tested by seeing when ‘Emotion’ appears linked to ‘Charismatic Performers.’ ‘Performer Charisma’, in contrast to ‘Beautiful Singing’, would be a ‘semi-intrinsic’ function for Van Maanen.

We used one additional category not derived from the factor analysis but coming in part from Van Maanen’s three functions of art and in part from the concerns that arose in the interviews: ‘Combination of Art Forms.’ This category sits within Van Maanen’s ‘intrinsic’ functions, since it refers to the play of forms that constitutes opera as an art form. All the categories are fully explained below. Table 3 shows the connections between Van Maanen’s schema, our factor analysis, and the categories we used to analyse the interview transcripts.

<b>Interview categories:</b>	<b>Van Maanen schema:</b>	<b>Factor Analysis:</b>
Beautiful Singing	Intrinsic	Factor 4 (Beautiful Singing)
Performer Charisma	Semi-intrinsic	Factor 8 (Charismatic Performers)
Character, Narrative, Truth	Intrinsic	Factors 1 (Societal Perception) and 3 (Narrative and Emotion)
Affordability	Extrinsic	Factor 6 (Audience Priorities)
Emotion	Semi-Intrinsic	Factor 3 (Narrative and Emotion)
The New	Intrinsic	Factor 1 (Societal Perception)
Others	Extrinsic	Factor 7 (Socialising)
Combination of Art Forms	Intrinsic	No corresponding factor

**Table 3: Relationship between interview categories, Van Maanen functions and factor analysis**

## 5.4: Interview Categories

These categories are presented in order from intrinsic to extrinsic, rather than in order of frequency. While they are described here, they are more fully fleshed out in the case studies in Chapter 6.

### (i) Beautiful Singing

This category refers specifically to beautiful singing, excluding other responses to music or performers, because the beauty of the singing voice was of some significance to many respondents, and indeed was sometimes identified as the key to their strong emotional response to opera. As one interviewee remarked, 'you could almost have somebody singing scales and it would do something to me, not to everybody, I know' (R 16, l.484). Another said: 'It's a pure, animal reaction when I hear a bass, a really great bass.' (R 14, l.339).

Beautiful singing was the fifth most mentioned of the eight categories. It was mentioned by all except two respondents.

### (ii) Character, Narrative and Truth:

This category relates to the portrayal of opera storylines. It encompasses responses about the stories themselves and their importance to respondents, and commentary on how well performers embody their characters. This category includes comments to do with opera helping respondents to reflect on life and on the human condition: 'It tells you things, just as theatre does about sacrifice, about love, about politics, about the way people interact.' (R 2, l. 214, 215). With Respondent 2, as with others, remarks about truth and humanity were most often tied up with the story and characters of operas. In some cases, being physically close to the performers is important; 'it's that real detail that you can see, the detail of the set, the detail of performers, just feeling 'oh gosh', you can almost eyeball them... you don't... but you can really feel the communication. It's so immediate.' (R 4, l. 279-281).

Other respondents preferred to be farther away: 'I find them too close [in 'pub opera']. To me I can't suspend my disbelief anymore, it starts to become too real, it's them singing it. I need a little bit of a chasm'. (R 14, l. 318-320). Some responses in this category are to do with the director: 'I don't like it if I feel the producer's not taking the opera seriously. For me there's a centre to the drama, and if they've missed that then they're saying, that's not important. That bothers me.' (R.

3, l. 366-369). In other cases it is very much to do with the singers, and in these cases this category sits quite close to 'Performer charisma': 'But the bass there is an example [of a very moving singer], the dad... her dad's peering through the window and he's singing he's lost his daughter. That aria [...] – Daddy singing of lost daughter – that was just stunning. The man, the Russian who does it, I've never seen him in anything else – I'd take him [on a desert island]!' (R 7, l. 358-361).

Character, Narrative and Truth was the third most mentioned category. For five of the eighteen respondents, it was the most mentioned category.

### **(iii) The New**

This category includes both new operas and operas that are new to that respondent. It also encompasses ideas of challenge to existing patterns of thought. Many of the respondents actively seek out new and challenging works: 'How do I choose things? I go for new productions usually. And again, anything I've never seen, I'm generally keen to see.' (R. 3, l. 182, 183.) In some instances, the idea of the new is linked with strong experiences: [in response to the question 'What did you like about it?'] 'Just the whole thing. I'd never seen it before. I'd never heard it. And I loved the singing.' (R. 12, l. 218.) Some respondents noted that they would try to prepare in some way before seeing a new opera, but many said that they preferred to go along without any preparation.

Overall, the score for this category was low (second lowest), but again, it was not something that was referred to or asked about in the questions. Every respondent mentioned it at some stage, though it was less prominent within each respondent's answers.

### **(iv) Combination of Art Forms**

This category refers to respondents discussing the ways in which opera combines a number of different art forms. In many cases, respondents identify this feature as a defining feature of opera, and the reason why they are drawn to it. Some respondents trace their strong response to opera to the combination of art forms: 'I think again it's the musical element of it that makes the big difference [to my emotional response]. And you're melding together the sort of operatic drama, this drama of character and plot and event with the music' (R. 3, l. 276-279). In this instance as in many others, the 'combination of art forms' is closely linked to other categories, in



this case, Character, Narrative and Truth. It can also be linked to Emotion, as here: 'It's just that I respond to that particular combination of music and words very intensely.' (R. 2, l, 177)

Although this category was lowest overall, all but one respondent mentioned it. It was never brought up or asked about in the interview questions. As it is a purely formal property of opera, this represents an intrinsic artistic value in Van Maanen's terms. Its frequent link to other values shows the difficulty of maintaining the separation of intrinsic and extrinsic artistic functions.

#### **(v) Performer Charisma**

This category refers to things like 'presence', 'personality', and the 'cult of the singer'. It is specifically about singers, rather than conductors. We use it to categorise the things people say about singers that are not about the beauty of the voice but about charisma, presence, and so on. The category is not limited to famous or even named singers; some respondents mention an experience of seeing a performer whose name is unknown to them. For instance, 'I can't think who played the lead but he was gorgeous. He was how a good Italian basso should be. He just knew how to do it.' (R 9, l. 166). Many of the responses in this category are similarly lacking in specificity, which is why we have used the broad term 'charisma'. Not everything respondents said in this category is positive; sometimes they might remark that a singer was singularly unsuitable for the role, or did something to disturb their enjoyment.

Three respondents did not mention anything that fell into this category, and this was the fourth most mentioned of the eight categories. For one respondent, however, it was the strongest? category, and for three others it was second or third strongest.

#### **(vi) Emotion**

This category includes any mention of emotion in connection with opera. It includes observing performers' emotions, although most mentions of emotion refer to the respondent themselves. Some instances of this category concern the audience as a whole, and they are often linked to another category. For instance, this example concerns Character, Narrative and Truth: 'the entire audience was silent, it was listening, it was engaging with the drama. And that was one of the two or three really great experiences I've been to' (R. 2, l. 77, 78). The category includes responses that do not specifically mention emotion, but where it is implied: 'It was absolutely magical. I've never experienced anything like it before.' (R.14, l. 308). Other descriptions are very specific: 'I

wanted to rend my hair and wail and fall over the seat in front. And of course you can't...' (R. 1, l. 121,122).

Emotion was the second most mentioned category. It was one of the three categories that every respondent mentioned, and was the most mentioned category for two respondents. The interviewer specifically asked about emotion, usually asking respondents to talk about high points in their opera-going lives, or about a strong emotional response they have had to opera. Some respondents were better than others at describing these experiences, which may account for the large discrepancy in scoring; some would simply reply that it was 'wonderful', while others could describe their sensations and impressions.

#### **(vii) Affordability**

This category includes any mention of ticket prices or overall affordability of going to the opera. It includes ideas of value for money: 'I might have wasted my money a bit' (R 8, l. 393); 'I always said I didn't want to travel down to Glyndebourne and pay those prices and travel down for a one-and-a-half-hour opera, you know if I'm going to do it I want four hours!' (R. 7, l. 198-200); 'For that [amount of money], I want to be entertained, challenged okay, but I don't want to be insulted, or come out upset.' (R. 4, l. 283, 284). For many respondents, ticket price was important in determining where to sit: 'When I had more money I was used to the stalls and the royal circle [at ROH]. Whereas when I was young I would go up into the balcony and the amphitheatre.' (R. 13 l. 64-66) Some respondents are excited by the idea of a bargain and keen to share their successes in this regard: 'You shouldn't tell too many people, but you know about the pricing there [...] it's only a string of 3 seats each side, but they're quite good value, and if you can get those you get good sound.' (R. 16, l. 243-246)

Affordability was only the sixth most mentioned scoring of the categories. However, it is significant that all but one respondent mentioned affordability, given that it was never asked about or mentioned by the interviewer.

#### **(viii) Others**

This category encompasses the respondents' relationship to other people: those who first brought the respondents to opera; people they themselves introduced to it; people they habitually attend with; other people in the audience. As such, this category spans peoples' opera-going lives, from their earliest memories of first being brought by a friend or family member, to their most recent

experiences of being irritated by people fidgeting: 'But I get very absorbed when I'm watching and listening. I am quite irritated by people who are fidgeting. I give them the looks.' (R. 17, l. 62, 62) It sometimes refers to everyday socialising: 'Well, a couple of mates of mine... we're all about the same age and we meet for beers before the opera house or whatever. We talk about the best operas we've ever seen.' (R. 10, l. 93, 94) For other respondents, this category is closely linked with a strong emotional response: 'The entire audience was silent, it was listening, it was engaging with the drama. And that was one of the two or three really great experiences I've been to' (R. 2, l. 77, 78).

Others is by far the most frequently-occurring category, with many interviews dominated by this subject; in 8 out of 18 interviews it is the highest-scoring category. It is not something the interviewer explicitly asked very much about, except for asking respondents if they usually attended with the same person, and whether they liked discussing their experiences with other audience members.

## Chapter 6: Interviewing the Audience

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One author (O'Neill) interviewed 19 audience members who attended Company C's Double Bill (one of these could not be transcribed and is discounted).<sup>14</sup> The respondents were self-selecting; they filled in our Company C survey and indicated that they were willing to be interviewed about their opera-going experiences. Thus, the sample is drawn from those who (a) are highly engaged by opera and (b) have the time and interest to meet a researcher and talk about it. There were four female and fourteen male interviewees. Five (all male) were over 70 years old. Eight (two women and six men) were between 60 and 69 years of age. Six (two women and four men) were between 50 and 59 years of age. (It is worth noting the relatively high average age of this group.) Four (two women and two men) were in full-time employment. Two men were in part-time employment. The remaining twelve were retired. The postcodes represented were as follows: TN33 (x2), WD 23, N1, SW 13, SW 17, HA5, BN14, GU7, W2, W8, N3, NW6, SE10, BN7, SW15, TN13, IG8, unknown(x1). It should be noted that this was a more male-dominated audience than is typical for opera, although the age range seems quite typical (note: it would be useful to compare our sample with the demographic information from The Audience Agency's study). It is not quite clear whether or not this group is representative of the most committed, lifelong opera aficionados whom this research seeks to study. Certainly, we make no claims that this study is representative of a wider, opera-going public; rather, we present this group as a snapshot of the most highly-engaged opera-lovers.

The interviewer allowed the concerns of the respondents to shape the conversations, using open-ended questions about respondents' opera-going lives to encourage them to talk, in particular, about high points or strong experiences they had (see Appendix 8 for a list of questions).

### 6.1: Categories

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<sup>14</sup> The complete, anonymised interview transcripts are archived and are available to scholars on request. Please contact Jana Riedel, Creativeworks London Hub Manager, at [j.riedel@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:j.riedel@qmul.ac.uk).

We coded the interview transcripts according to the eight categories described in the previous chapter (Thematic Analysis): beautiful singing; performer charisma; character, narrative and truth; affordability; emotion; the new; other people; combination of art forms. An initial, basic analysis of the transcripts was conducted by counting the number of lines coded for each category. Table 4 shows the incidence of each category for each respondent.

R	Beautiful Singing	Performer charisma	Character, Narrative, Truth	Affordability	Emotion	New	Others	Combination of Art Forms
1	0	<b>54</b>	23	7	35	9	24	11
2	7	12	<b>49</b>	0	26	1	33	2
3	9	10	<b>44</b>	3	24	27	21	16
4	4	0	9	22	18	21	<b>41</b>	9
5	3	0	26	5	53	10	<b>59</b>	2
6	11	4	1	7	<b>39</b>	9	36	2
7	12	5	5	11	72	4	<b>80</b>	12
8	7	6	<b>64</b>	12	36	20	23	2
9	1	26	11	18	29	14	36	0
10	0	2	40	11	18	13	<b>44</b>	4
11	55	9	<b>63</b>	11	25	12	35	6
12	1	27	<b>30</b>	16	21	5	24	1
13	53	12	0	46	<b>73</b>	7	32	2
14	5	17	14	3	43	15	<b>59</b>	11
15	3	0	25	15	20	4	<b>45</b>	1
16	<b>40</b>	9	39	5	36	8	34	2
17	9	13	3	10	61	5	<b>64</b>	4
18	10	33	8	15	34	22	<b>48</b>	4
<b>SUM</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>663</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>738</b>	<b>91</b>
Order	5	4	3	6	2	7	1	8

Table 4: the incidence of each category for each respondent (R)

Grey boxes indicate that the respondent did not mention the category at all. Figures in red and bold indicate the category that was highest for that particular respondent. The penultimate row shows the total scoring for each category across all respondents. The last row shows the order of scoring for each category. It should be noted that respondents varied in their volubility, so that a high score may simply indicate a respondent who found it easier to talk about these relatively abstract concepts than some others. In 6.2: *Associations*, we go into these matters in some detail and try to tease out the differences between respondents. The category 'scores' are thus a somewhat blunt instrument; however, they are a useful tool to begin discussion of the material.

Several interesting overall patterns emerge from the interviews, which represent the initial findings of this research. We have grouped the findings under four headings: (i) Diversity of response; (ii) Affordability; (iii) Origins of Opera Enthusiasm; (iv) Others.

### **(i) Diversity of Response**

The most evident finding is the diversity of response, showing the importance of qualitative research in the area of audience experience. Our study suggests that audience segmentation strategies are overly blunt tools and may not adequately capture what audiences value about their experiences. For example, all our respondents clearly fall into the Arts Council England category of the *Highly Engaged*, because they are all extremely frequent attenders.<sup>15</sup> However, they demonstrate the fallibility of segmentation by being hard to place in either of the ACE *Highly Engaged* sub-groups, *Urban Arts Eclectic* or *Traditional Culture Vultures*. All the interviewees mentioned 'The New' as a significant part of what they are looking for in opera. They want to be challenged, and they actively seek out new works, or (at the least) works that are new to them, and therefore do not fit the pattern for *Traditional Culture Vultures*. At the same time, for the most part, they are predominantly interested in opera over and above other arts activities, and therefore do not fit the model for *Urban Arts Eclectic*. Even within our small sample of 18 interviewees, all of whom are nominally in the same or broadly the same audience segment, there was considerable diversity of taste, with some respondents valuing Performer Charisma, for example, very highly, while others did not mention it at all. The same goes for the categories of Beautiful Singing, Character, Narrative and Truth, and Combination of Art Forms. Almost every single respondent demonstrated a different profile of tastes with respect to these categories.

### **(ii) Affordability**

All but one interviewee mentioned affordability as an important aspect of their attendance at opera. They are all frequent attenders, and wish to go as often as they can afford, which means

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<sup>15</sup> ACE has segmented all English adults into groups according to their reported arts attendance and attitudes to the arts. There are 13 distinct consumer segments, divided into three large-scale groups: 'highly engaged', 'some engagement', and 'not currently engaged'. The ACE *Insight* reports are based on DCMS *Taking Part* survey data, in which members of the public answer questions about their arts attendance. The 2011 *Insight* report is available here: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/arts-audiences-insight-2011> [accessed 21 March 2014].

they make a constant trade-off between ticket price and frequency of attendance, and go to great lengths to find inexpensive tickets. The respondents were highly sensitive to ticket price and it was a significant factor in their decision-making. Many displayed great pride in having discovered the optimum seats at the lowest price in a particular auditorium. At the same time, however, it was evident that the high frequency of respondents' attendance meant that they were spending a high proportion of their disposable income on opera tickets. Many respondents mentioned that they have had to purchase less expensive tickets since retiring, while one or two reported that they go less frequently, but still choose the more expensive seats. This decision was influenced by the respondents' tastes; some preferred to sit in seats where the sound quality was excellent but they were too far away to see performers' faces, while others wanted to be able to see facial expressions and were willing to go less frequently but pay more for the tickets in order to do so.

A discussion of affordability is not a central part of our goal, and the low occurrence of it in the transcripts would not merit in-depth discussion, but it is something we mention as a point of interest, and it will be of interest for opera companies.

### **(iii) Origins of Opera Enthusiasm**

All the interviewees were asked about their earliest memories of opera (listening or attending). These responses are summarised in Appendix 9 (to which all quotations in this section refer). All but two had childhood memories (i.e. from the age of 13 or under), although childhood experiences did not necessarily equate to parental interest. One respondent discovered opera as a child, via radio broadcasts from La Scala during the Second World War. Another was given tickets to go with a school friend by the school friend's parents. Of the sixteen respondents who had experienced opera or classical music as a child, only six explicitly mentioned parental interest. The remaining ten either did not mention it (4) or specifically noted that their parents had little or no interest in music (6). Respondents who mentioned that their parents had no interest in music, however, often mentioned ways their parents supported their enthusiasm, for example by buying them a gramophone (see respondent 9) or by taking them to the opera as part of their general education (see respondent 18).

Some respondents remember a specific moment from which they date their opera enthusiasm, while for others, it developed gradually over years of attendance and listening. Both respondents who reported no childhood experiences of opera are in the first category, and found

themselves in an opera performance through the intervention of friends in early adulthood, and had an instant conversion to the form: 'I was just hooked. I just find opera a complete experience.' (respondent 6; see also respondent 10). Some of the 'childhood experiences' respondents also report a moment of sudden conversion to opera, taking place much earlier in life than the two aforementioned. For example, this respondent was taken to *Pirates of Penzance* at the age of 7 or 8: 'and I've never forgotten it. It was sort of a door, a key... it was lovely.' (respondent 13) A similar experience was reported by another respondent, attending *HMS Pinafore* with his parents at the age of about 5: 'it was the most wonderful thing I had ever been to in my life. And I can still remember it and I was hooked.' (respondent 2). Future research could examine this 'Eureka moment' in more detail, but in the context of this study we simply mention it as a noticeable finding of the interviews.

Both respondents whose enthusiasm built up gradually and those who experienced a sudden conversion were usually, though not exclusively, brought to the opera by other people. While none of the interviewees reported that their enthusiasm for the opera was due to another person, the significance of other people in introducing them to opera was evident.

#### **(iv) Others**

Apart from Emotion, Others was the category most frequently mentioned in the interviews. Respondents were more motivated to attend by their own preferences of opera, performer, conductor and so on than by other peoples' choices or attendance, but nevertheless other people featured very strongly in our conversations. Respondents told the interviewer about who had first brought them to the opera, who they go with now, friends they have brought, speaking to strangers in the interval, and being disturbed by other people fidgeting or making noise during the performance. A number of respondents commented on whether or not other audience members were highly engaged by performances they attended. The high response rate for Others would seem to indicate the importance of opera-going as a social activity, not a private one, despite the fact that most respondents stated that they frequently attend on their own, do not mind doing so, and are not motivated to attend by the choices of their peers. Respondents were highly aware of the behaviour of other audience members, and often ascribed opinions and motivations to them, such as 'they're just not interested in opera' or 'the really serious opera-goers don't sit there' [paraphrase]. In respondents' reports of their strong emotional responses to opera, they often



mentioned the strong responses of other audience members, in phrases such as ‘everyone was just *listening*’ [paraphrase]. Equally, some respondents reported being disturbed by the behaviour of other audience members, such as fidgeting, blocking the respondents’ view, or flicking through the programme during a performance. These responses support an understanding of live performance as a profoundly social activity, in which the presence of other audience members is highly significant if not essential, even if there is no discernable direct interaction between them.

Since we were not specifically looking for responses on sociability, this finding is significant. Some of these responses were positive and some were negative, of course; our conclusion is not that the presence of others enhances or detracts, but more simply that the experience of opera-going is profoundly and fully social, even when it does not appear to be so. We are, however, unable to make many conclusions about what this sociability means for the audience experience of opera. Future analysis of the interview transcripts, and future audience studies, could interrogate what else respondents are talking about when they talk about other people.

## 6.2: Associations

In many instances, coded sections of the transcripts stand alone, and are not directly side-by-side with other coded sections. In other instances, two or more categories are closely intertwined. In the latter cases, we assessed associations by noting which categories appear together. According to the overall subject being discussed, we took one category to be dominant, and listed which other categories were linked to it. For example, within a discussion of a strong emotional response, if one line of the transcript dealt with performer charisma, we noted that as ‘Performer Charisma’ under the heading ‘Emotion’. Conversely, if a respondent said that a particular singer had a very strong stage presence, and that they had experienced a strong emotion while watching this singer, then the entry would read ‘Emotion’ under the heading ‘Performer Charisma’. Table 5 summarises the results.

R	Beautiful Singing (BS)	Performer charisma (PC)	Character, Narrative and Truth (CNT)	Affordability (A)	Emotion (E)	The New (N)	Others (O)	Combination of Art Forms (CAF)
	E: 23	E: 12	E: 16	E: 8	CNT: 23	E: 14	E: 27	E: 9
	PC: 7	BS: 4	PC: 7	O: 8	O: 17	O: 4	A: 11	CNT: 4
	CNT: 2	CNT: 3	O: 3	N: 3	PC: 17	BS: 2	CAF: 1	A: 1
	CAF: 1	O: 2	A: 1	CNT: 2	BS: 14	CNT: 2	CNT: 4	N: 1
	O: 1	PC: 2	BS: 1	BS: 1	CAF: 13	A: 2	N: 4	
			CAF: 1	PC: 1	A: 11		PC: 1	
			N: 1		N: 5			

**Table 5: Associations between categories**

Table 5 shows which categories were associated with each other. For example, under Beautiful Singing, we can see that Emotion was the most highly-occurring (appearing 23 times in discussions of beautiful singing), Performer Charisma was next (appearing 7 times), and so on. Under Emotion, the most highly-occurring category was Character, Narrative and Truth (appearing 23 times), supporting the finding of our original factor analysis, in which ‘Narrative’ and ‘Emotion’ clustered together.

The table shows that Emotion was the highest-associating category in each of the other categories, with the exception of Affordability, when it was joint highest, along with Others. However, the dominance of Emotion as a category may be an artefact of the interview technique, as respondents were asked to reflect on their strong emotional responses to opera. The category of Emotion nevertheless provides a strong source of insight into audience members’ responses, revealing what else they talked about when they talked about emotion.

The categories of Beautiful Singing; Performer Charisma; Character, Narrative and Truth; and Combination of Art forms all associate highly with Emotion; when we asked about strong emotional responses to opera, these were the subjects that arose. In varying degrees and combinations, these subjects seemed to trigger respondents’ strong emotional responses to operatic performances. In order of strength of association, these categories were associated with Emotion as follows:

- (i) Character, Narrative and Truth
- (ii) Performer Charisma
- (iii) Beautiful Singing
- (iv) Combination of Art Forms

These four categories also associated with each other. For example, Table 5 shows that Character, Narrative and Truth is the highest-occurring category (after Emotion) under Combination of Art Forms. Several respondents reported that the combination of music, drama, visual imagery, and other aspects of opera had the effect of deepening their engagement with the stories and emotions being portrayed. Combination of Art Forms was thus seen as a unique way of unlocking and deepening Character, Narrative and Truth. In our narrative of case studies below, we investigate the relationship between Character, Narrative and Truth and Combination of Art Forms.

Our first case study asks whether there is an opposing relationship between Beautiful Singing and Character, Narrative and Truth. Table 5 shows that these two categories do not correlate highly with each other. It might be that two distinct categories of response exist, one focusing on story and the other on beauty: we call these two the fictional response and the formal response. The fictional response is associated with characters, plots, and a sense of truth, as well as with Van Maanen's semi-intrinsic functions. The formal response, on the other hand, is associated with beauty, the combination of art forms, and Van Maanen's intrinsic artistic function. We tentatively propose that some opera-goers are primarily concerned with one or the other category.

### 6.3: Case studies

**In the following two case studies, we offer a more in-depth examination of the responses of some of our interviewees. We use the two case study questions ('Is *Character, Narrative and Truth* opposed to *Beautiful Singing*?' and 'What is the relationship between *Character, Narrative and Truth* and *Combination of Art Forms*?') as tools to probe individuals' reported experiences of opera. Table 5 shows us that when respondents talked about Beautiful Singing, there was a relatively low (though still present) association with Character, Narrative and Truth. Equally, when respondents talked about Character, Narrative and Truth, there was a very low association with Beautiful Singing. Accordingly, we investigate whether we can propose an opposition between these two categories for some respondents.**

Table 5 also shows that, when respondents talked about opera as a Combination of Art Forms, the category (after Emotion) that they talked about most in relation to this idea was

Character, Narrative and Truth. Interviewees reported that the use of music and singing as part of a dramatic, fictional narrative seemed to deepen their emotional response to the narrative, and helped them to believe in the situations portrayed (an apparent paradox, given that the very combination of art forms that makes up opera is sometimes criticised for being counter-naturalistic and unrealistic). Our second case study, therefore, examines how opera as a combination of art forms relates to audience members' perception of Character, Narrative and Truth.

### *Part 1: Is Character, Narrative and Truth opposed to Beautiful Singing?*

In order to develop our tentative proposal that audience responses to opera might be concerned with either fiction (the stories and characters) or form (the sounds and formal structures), we examined five individual transcripts for instances of one or the other response.

The following discussion looks at the relationship between Character, Narrative and Truth and Beautiful Singing for five individual respondents. For some respondents, these categories appear with opposing frequency, while for others, they appear with similar frequency. Closer inspection of the vocabulary each respondent uses sometimes indicates quite different reactions, within one interview, to these two categories. We selected respondents for this case study on the basis of their scores in Table 4 (the incidence of each category for each respondent). We chose respondents who seemed to occupy a particularly clear position in the table, with a strong response either to Beautiful Singing or to Character, Narrative and Truth. The case study allows us to investigate their responses in more detail, and to test whether the scores in the table were borne out by more in-depth examination of what they said.

#### **1: Andrew (over 70; retired. Respondent #13)<sup>16</sup>**

Andrew spoke more about beautiful singing than any other respondent, and ascribed the strength of his response to opera to the effect of the singing voice:

It's only been opera and singing that does it [gives me a strong emotional response]. For me it's been the voice that's touched the highs. (l. 256)

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<sup>16</sup> Names have been changed.

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When asked about other art forms that he liked, he mentioned jazz, spoken theatre, visual art and instrumental classical music, saying that the latter could elicit a strong response, but the former three, although he appreciated them and had preferences and tastes within each genre, did not elicit a strong response in the same way that opera could. For example, speaking about sculpture, he said:

It doesn't touch me. I mean, I admire it. It's beautiful. Look at that. But it doesn't affect me in the same way. (l. 299, 300).

Like many respondents, Andrew had a clear memory of the first moment, which he described as revelatory, when he discovered the effect singing had on him:

There was a sudden kind of awareness of the beauty of the singing and you wanted to hear more. And I've never forgotten it. It was a sort of a door, a key, it was lovely. [...] and I was suddenly aware of singing. (l. 313-315)

When asked to reflect on occasions on which he had a strong emotional response, Andrew again focused on singing:

I remember various magic singing performances where you leave the theatre... I mean, it only happens a few times in your life, when you really think, that was it. [...] It's really a very deep pleasure and, more than contentment, you just are moved. It's something you never forget. It just touches some chord. [...] It's very rare to get that emotional response where it somehow just really scores. (l. 167-177)

Andrew was the only respondent who did not mention Character, Narrative and Truth at all. His discussion of singing focuses on the idea of beauty, rather than communication or expressing an emotion or character. We chose to make Beautiful Singing a category in its own right in part because of responses like Andrew's, where the specific sound of the operatic singing voice seems to have great significance in his appreciation of opera.

## **2. David (Over 70, Retired. Respondent #12)**

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David contrasts with Andrew in that he lacked Andrew's facility for describing his emotional responses. Accordingly, David's response rate for many of the categories seems low; however, his low scores are in part due to his lack of volubility. He was anxious to tell the interviewer all the factual details of his opera-going life; for example, he knew that he had been to over a thousand operas, but when asked to reflect on particular high points, he identified particular experiences, but found it difficult to describe what he liked about them, saying for example

Just the whole thing. (l. 218)

Or

It was absolutely wonderful. (l. 216).

When discussing an opera he didn't like, he also struggled to articulate why:

I just thought it was stupid, I just didn't like... I just didn't enjoy it. [l. 382]

This terseness of expression is not indicative of a lack of emotional engagement; on the contrary, David displayed strong emotional responses in his interview, expressing his opinions in vehement terms, but he tended not to elaborate or reflect on his views. Some other respondents had a good command of the sort of critical, reflective language that can expand on aesthetic tastes and experiences, but did not display as much emotion in their interviews.

When David was asked to describe what he liked about his chosen 'desert island singer', he said:

Just her stage appearance and her voice and her range of voice, and the parts she takes. (l. 194-5)

When asked to elaborate, for example by explaining what she might have that other singers do not, he replied;

Well she's got a lot that other people have got. It's just that in her day, she was a singer I'd go and see.' (l. 200-201)

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David displayed much greater facility with words when it came to discussing the Character, Narrative and Truth. He was greatly concerned with verisimilitude, commenting on his experience of seeing *Turandot*:

And she was a princess in a mask the whole time. Well, how the hell did Calib fall in love with a mask? That was the only thing about that. (l. 315, 316)

Or again, on the subject of Calixto Bieito's *Fidelio* at ENO, he responded very negatively to perceived inconsistency in the production:

When Leonora goes down there, she [...] goes down into the prison with a holdall and a fresh suit, and he puts his fresh jacket and trousers on. And at the end of the opera the local governor comes in and says, 'oh, take his fetters off.' But what I wonder is, how the hell did he get a clean suit on if he had fetters on? (l. 156-159).

In addition to matters of consistency and verisimilitude, David had a strong interest in the portrayal of human relationships in opera. He informed me that *Otello*, *Don Carlos* and *Simon Boccanegra* were his favourite three Verdi operas, because of 'the recognition that goes on' (l. 102/3). We took this phrase to refer to the characters' recognition of each others' true (but previously concealed) identities, and to demonstrate David's affection for key moments of the plot. He chose *Così fan Tutte* as his favourite opera, because of the beauty of the music, saying 'Oh it's a stupid story like all opera'; however, later in the interview he remarked;

What I like about *Così*, in many productions, is at the end of *Così*, you never know what's happened. You've seen *Così* where the partners will come together again. I saw Jonathan Miller's *Così*, where they haven't the faintest idea what they're going to do. They really go off stage separately. And I've seen others where they've parted, not with original partner but with the new partner, so you really don't know what's happening. (l. 113-118)

Thus, although David stated that 'story' is not important in opera, story was nevertheless the subject he talked most about, and with great absorption. Indeed, Character, Narrative and Truth was the dominant category in this transcript; once again, this is a contrasting feature with the previous case study, Andrew, who did not mention Character, Narrative and Truth at all. Equally,

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David mentioned Beautiful Singing only once; he and Andrew are thus almost exactly opposed in these two categories.

### **3. Geoffrey (60-69, Retired. Respondent #11)**

Four other respondents, in addition to David, spoke more about Character, Narrative and Truth than any other category. Three of these, like David, showed relatively little interest in Beautiful Singing. Geoffrey, however, scored very highly for Beautiful Singing as well. Like Andrew, Geoffrey ascribes his love of opera to his love for the singing voice:

How do you try and explain something like that? It obviously derives from liking the sung voice and I think it's because it added drama as well. (l. 44,45).

Geoffrey was quite articulate in describing the effect the voice has on him:

I was in the stalls and I felt enveloped by her voice in a most wonderful way. And I think that's the most... for a performance, I think that's the most... that I've responded to emotionally. [...] I just felt it was ethereal in a way. Her voice [...] just seems to emerge from her, which... it appeared effortless as if somehow she was the vehicle through which this wonderful sound was being transmitted. I think it was... I'm not going to use the word religious because that begs all sorts of questions. But if I say ethereal it did make me think of... spiritual... which isn't necessarily other-worldly; it can be spiritual within this world as well. But as if it was cutting a layer that was beyond what you can see or hear. (l. 185-192)

Unlike Andrew, but like David, Geoffrey apparently set great store by Character, Narrative and Truth. Similarly to David, questions of human relationships came to the fore. He enjoyed a particular production of Handel's *Rodelinda* because:

It illuminated the drama, handling the relationship between the characters very well. (l. 343, 344)

Geoffrey repeated the phrase 'illuminating the drama' or 'illuminating the human drama' (or a similar phrase) four times in the course of the interview (l. 146, 326, 335, 343), but it was notable that his way of speaking about this factor was less emotive than David's; he did not display extreme annoyance, for example, with inconsistencies in a production, or a strong emotional



response remembering positive experiences. Instead, his vocabulary was one of assessment and praise:

The standard is much higher than it used to be (l. 328).

It was done graphically and I thought very well (l. 395,6).

I thought that was a particular act of genius. (l. 146,7)

Thus, it is apparent that while Geoffrey uses very emotional language to talk about his response to singing (*wonderful; I felt enveloped; ethereal; other-worldly; spiritual; etc*), he employs a more distanced language of criticism to discuss Character, Narrative and Truth. Therefore, although his scores for both Beautiful Singing and Character, Narrative and Truth were high, his emotional response to Beautiful Singing seems to be higher than that for Character, Narrative and Truth, on which he takes a more distanced viewpoint. This distinction is interesting in terms of Van Maanen's schema, as it seems to indicate that even when opera is functioning both intrinsically and semi-intrinsically for the same person, the emotional valence of the two might be distinct.

#### **4: Sam (60-69, Retired. Respondent #16)**

Sam was the only person for whom Beautiful Singing was the dominant category emerging from the interview. It was immediately followed by Character, Narrative and Truth, putting Sam close to Geoffrey in terms of apparent taste. Like Andrew and Geoffrey, Sam mentions an early experience of hearing beautiful singing as a pivotal moment in his opera-going life:

It was just the most beautiful sound I've ever heard. There was one moment at the end of the first recital that just got me. The sound just floated up to the back of the gallery, which is where I was, and it felt as if it was going on forever. It was just so wonderful. And that got me. (l. 71-74)

Sam mentions several other strong moments when the singing voice had an overwhelming effect on him, to which he ascribes the development of an interest in 'how different singers do things' (l. 165) and in the historical changes in singing technique. Like Geoffrey and Andrew, Sam focused on the sound itself when he talked about singing.

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Sam displays many similarities with David in his discussion of opera plots. Like David, he singled out *Così fan Tutte*, *Don Carlos*, and *Simon Boccanegra*, and for the same reasons.

Regarding *Così fan Tutte*, he said;

It's got an incredible amount of just pure musical beauty. But it's also got a story. It's about people and relationships and you can relate to that. And that's an opera, it's always interesting to see how it's going to end. If you look at the score it's all happily ever after, but these days most directors will go away from that. And you can have some absolutely shattering productions where you have 4, maybe even 6 characters whose lives are wrecked by what they've gone through.' (l. 325-330)

Regarding *Simon Boccanegra*, Sam also mentions recognition:

It's the recognition of Simon Boccanegra and Amelia, when he realises that this is his daughter and she realises that he's her father that just wells up. (l. 356-359)

Sam, unlike Geoffrey, seems to have a strong emotional response to both Beautiful Singing and Character, Narrative and Truth: indeed, he himself reflects on the close connection between music and narrative:

It's the human themes [that I find affecting in *Simon Boccanegra*]. But it's also the music. It wouldn't just be the human themes. If the music wasn't so wonderful then it would be a different effect and it wouldn't feel like that. (l. 361-363)

We have now discussed the three respondents who scored markedly higher than the others for Beautiful Singing (Andrew, Geoffrey and Sam). Andrew and Geoffrey exemplify the distinction between the formal and the fictional, with both of them seeming to be more effected by the formal, and specifically by beautiful singing. For Sam, in contrast, the two were closely interlinked. David, in contrast to the three aforementioned, scored very lowly for Beautiful Singing, and very highly for Character, Narrative and Truth, and a more in-depth examination of his transcript bore out the initial indication that he is more emotionally moved by the fictional than by the formal.

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In addition to David and Geoffrey, three other respondents scored more highly for Character, Narrative and Truth than for anything else. All three scored relatively lowly for Beautiful Singing. John, our next example, was one of them.

### **5. John (60-69, Retired. Respondent #3)**

John was very concerned with characters and their development. When he praised a production of *Don Giovanni*, for example, it was because of the production's focus on character development:

And what I liked about this production was, he concentrated very much on the characters [...] and he concentrated on the drama, the interrelationships of the characters, the plot, the way it unfolded. (l. 111-115).

Later in the interview, he compared *La Bohème* unfavourably with *La Traviata*, remarking that he found the latter more interesting because:

Violetta develops as a character. She goes through challenges. It's much more interesting. (l. 180, 181)

Talking about *Der Rosenkavalier*, which he chose as his 'desert island opera', he again focused on character:

But it's this wonderful character of the Marschallin that sums it up, and her relationship with Octavian and how that develops through the opera. (l. 219-220)

Like many other respondents, John talked a lot about 'truth', in particular in relation to character. The idea of truth is related to the possibility of believing what is portrayed on stage. This sense of truth, of course, is the effect of a fictional narrative. It has nothing to do with any relationship that narrative has with real events. It is interesting that so many opera-goers describe this potency of opera as linked to character and narrative as 'truth.' This is evidence for some for the theories of the truth effect of narrative put forward by Searle and Foucault. In reflecting on what makes an excellent singer, for example, John remarked:

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You believe in them. There's a truth in what they're doing. (l. 203)

He developed the thought thus:

You believe the situations that they're in, even if physically they don't look right for it. (l. 205)

The singers' voices seem to have a special means to enable this belief, opposed perhaps to their appearance:

It's quality in the voice, and quality of expression. (l. 202)

Again it's this truth thing. There is something in her voice. (l. 211)

We suggest that this association of the voice with ideas of truth and communication is distinct from the previous respondents' remarks about the beauty of the voice. In the latter cases, interviewees reported responding strongly to the sound of the voice, rather than to any feeling of communication or truth. Thus, although John mentions beautiful singing, in fact when he talks about beauty in the voice he is also talking about character, communication, emotion, and expressivity:

She had this plangent quality in the voice, very expressive. There was always... you didn't quite know whether it was smiles or tears. (l. 193-195)

Asked to choose a desert island singer, again, there is a conflation of voice and character:

For me she was a perfect Traviata [...] It was her voice. (l. 191)

Thus, for John, Beautiful Singing is closely related to Character, Narrative and Truth. For the previous four respondents we discussed, the two categories seem to be opposed. Future research could inquire as to whether there is a tendency for audiences to divide according to those who respond primarily to perceived beauty, in particular the beauty of the singing voice, and those more interested in expressivity and communication. It may be that many audience members share John's position that the two are closely intertwined.

Tables 4 and 5 suggest that most of our respondents are more concerned with Character, Narrative and Truth than with Beautiful Singing, while the reverse is true for a small, core group. Our in-depth exploration of five individuals, above, has established that for some individuals, the two categories seem to be opposed to each other. Further research, on a larger scale, is needed to determine whether this proposition would hold true over a representative sample of opera-goers.

### *Part 2: What is the relationship between Combination of Art Forms and Character, Narrative and Truth*

All but one of our respondents mentioned that opera was a combination of art forms, although none spoke about it at length. In this case study, we explore what else respondents talked about when they talked about this category. It is notable that it almost always appeared in combination with another category, only standing on its own as a subject of discussion in one or two isolated cases. The respondents who scored most highly on Combination of Art Forms were Gemma, John, and Sarah.

#### **6. John**

John (featured in the previous case study) scored higher than any other respondent for Combination of Art Forms. His interview was dominated by the category Character, Narrative and Truth, and he was particularly interested in the portrayal of 'truth', as discussed above. John reported that he had a more intense emotional response to opera than to other art forms, and he ascribed this difference to the combination of art forms:

There's text and there are characters and there's a plot and a drama, it all kind of came together.  
And that's what opera means to me. (l. 40-42)

He reflected that the strength of his reactions to opera (as opposed to spoken theatre) was because the music deepened his response to the other aspects of what was happening:

Because [music]'s like another language at a deeper level in your psyche. (l. 58)

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He made a similar point, about music and drama complementing each other, several times during his interview. As mentioned above, when John discussed singing, he focused on singers communicating the emotions and situations of the storylines. Thus, in this instance, the idea of opera as a combination of art forms seems to sit very close to the category of Character, Narrative and Truth. It is evident that the 'truth effect' of opera was greatly increased by its employment of a combination of art forms, rather than any one in particular. This is further evidence of the truth effect as an artistic construction, per Foucault. The greater artistic range of operatic construction gives it more possibilities for achieving that truth effect.

### **7. Gemma (50-59, Full-time Employment. Respondent #1)**

Like John, Gemma was deeply concerned with Character, Narrative and Truth. She was one of only two respondents who did not mention Beautiful Singing at all. She was very concerned with dramatic verisimilitude, remarking that her opinion of opera was changed for the better when she saw productions

where for the first time ever you saw people behaving like human beings, but just singing in order to communicate their message. (l. 42, 43)

Previous to having that experience, she felt that opera was a 'dead' art form (l. 44). The transformation in her opinion came about when she realised the potential alliance between music and drama:

Suddenly you could see the potential of music to amplify what you were seeing [...] and that was a real eye-opening moment. (l. 47, 48)

From that point onwards, she became more interested in opera and began to attend more frequently than before. Later in the interview, she commented on the importance of the orchestra:

I think that what I like about the orchestra is that it gives a reality to the performance. It's like a four-dimensional thing that you're getting because you have the quality of the sound as well as the linear nature of the sound. (l. 143-146)

In both quotations, Gemma relates the music to believability and ‘reality’, which may seem paradoxical because there is no musical sound track to ‘the real world’; however, this opinion ties in with our finding that the truth effect of fiction is important to opera-goers, and that it seems to be enhanced by the combination of music, visual art, language and drama that is unique to opera.

### **8. Sarah (50-59, Full-time Employment. Respondent #7)**

Like Gemma and John, Sarah mentioned the unique combination of art forms as the distinguishing feature of opera, and like them, she ascribes her love of opera to this feature. She first began to attend regularly as a break from a difficult personal situation:

And it was only the opera, which is such a multi... overwhelming experience that gave [me] a proper break. [...] Seeing something and being overwhelmed with something which was the sound, the production, the vision, everything, I actually had time out. (l. 61/2; 67/8)

Later in the interview, reflecting on what was the most important aspect of opera to her, she remarked;

It’s everything – I can’t separate... it’s everything. It’s the reason why I went in the first place, because it hits me in every sense. (l. 207/7)

In contrast to our previous two case studies, however, Sarah did not seem to link Combination of Art Forms with any other category, except perhaps through her own strong emotional response. She did not display particular interest in Character, Narrative and Truth, although she did mention instances of being moved by the fictional situations portrayed on stage. Instead, she was more concerned with Beautiful Singing, mentioning sound quality as well as dramatic expressivity, though not bringing the two together as John did. For example, she chose a bass singer as her desert island choice, saying;

I love the sound of his voice. [...] It makes my hair stand up! It’s a pure, animal reaction when I hear a bass, a really great bass. And it’s like, how can that sound come out of a human? When they’re

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perfect – you know when they're perfect and they go really low, and it's really projected, and you just sit there thinking, that's amazing. (l. 336-342)

In contrast, when talking about Maria Callas, she remarked;

I might take Callas, not because it's beautiful, but because [...] it's interesting. (l. 347)

It was the expressivity in Callas's voice that Sarah found interesting:

I might take Callas because of the drama. [...] I mean, her Norma, I mean you can hear every single thing that she's going through. You can hear all the conflict. (l. 344-346)

We propose that Sarah shows a bias towards the formal as against the fictional: although she shows some interest in the fictional as well, it seems to be formal features (Combination of Art Forms in its own right; Beautiful Singing as pure sound) that elicit the strongest response from her, a strong response that she describes as non-rational ('a pure, animal reaction'). For the previous two respondents, the fictional seemed stronger than the formal, and formal considerations (Combination of Art Forms; Beautiful Singing) were described as means to deepen the respondents' involvement in the fictional aspect of their opera experiences.

From our brief examination of the three respondents who spoke the most about opera as a combination of art forms, it seems that the use of music to portray fictional situations is experienced as a means to deepen the respondents' perception of the dramatic situation. The 'truth effect' of an opera seems to be enhanced by the combination of music, drama, and visual art. Table 5 shows that our respondents associated Combination of Art Forms with Emotion and with Character, Narrative and Truth, and our deeper exploration of the three respondents above bears out this association.

In this brief account of the experiences of some highly-engaged opera-goers, we have established eight key areas of interest to respondents, and demonstrated the diversity of response within even this very demographically-similar group. We have shown that, for some audience members, strong responses to the formal are inversely related to strong responses to the fictional,



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and demonstrated that other audience members can be situated on a spectrum between the formal and the fictional. Further conclusions and next steps are discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

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To our knowledge, this is the first qualitative research project to explore the values of the opera-going experience for the form's most devoted followers. Our results comprise a snapshot of what opera fans are interested in, what aspects of opera have emotional resonance for them, what makes opera distinctive from other art forms, and what our respondents hope for and expect from an opera performance. Our sample is small and our conclusions are thus necessarily tentative. Nevertheless, some distinctive outcomes can be identified, with implications for three groups: (i) opera audiences; (ii) opera companies; (iii) researchers in the performing arts.

### 7.1 Opera Audiences

Through our survey and interviews, we uncovered eight key areas of interest to highly-engaged opera-goers: others; emotion; character, narrative and truth; beautiful singing; performer charisma; affordability; the new; combination of art forms.

The strongest finding to emerge from our research is the importance of other people to opera-goers. Other people may not form the focus of audience members' interest – indeed, our respondents professed much greater interest in the operas they were attending than in their fellow audience members – but nevertheless, when people talk about their opera-going lives, they talk a great deal about other people at the same time. We can conclude that attending the opera is a distinctively social activity, where the presence and behaviour of other people has a strong impact on an individual's experience. Almost all our respondents reported first discovering the opera with another person or people, again suggesting the importance of opera-going as a social activity. At the same time, our respondents insisted that they were happy to attend on their own and were motivated to attend by non-social questions, for example, repertoire, performers, and so on.

All our respondents reported having experienced strong emotional responses to opera, and all could identify high points in their opera-going lives that stood out as particularly memorable events. These high points could be produced by various triggers, which are captured in our eight key areas of interest. A certain portion of opera-lovers are highly responsive to

beautiful singing, as distinct from performer charisma or character, narrative and truth. Within our sample, this group seems to be in a minority. More often, opera-lovers seem to be deeply attuned to questions of character, narrative and truth, and their responses to music and singing are closely tied to the use of music to express and portray a story. For these audience members, opera is distinctive as an art form because music can deepen their emotional response to the situations portrayed on the stage. Our research seems to point to two distinct responses to opera; the formal and the fictional. Future research might explore whether and how audience members can be situated along a spectrum between the two, with the 'formal' more responsive to questions of beauty and sound, and the 'fictional' more responsive to story, narrative and character.

## 7.2 Opera Companies

We worked with three companies to devise and conduct this research project; we hope that our findings will have relevance for other opera companies, and, indeed, for other performing arts companies as well. To varying degrees, the companies we worked with hope to develop their work according to our research findings. For Company A, hoping to attract more opera audiences to its work and to produce more opera-focused work in the future, it was useful to confirm that opera-goers responded positively to their work and felt that the performance deepened their experience of the operatic subject matter. For Company B, a greater understanding of what opera lovers expect and hope for when they go to an opera performance will help the creative team to shape the company's artistic work. For Company C, which sells out its opera performances, a greater understanding of what audiences value in opera – in particular, the combination of music with drama and character – will be used to help develop the company's non-operatic singing performances (lieder, song cycles, etc), in order to attract opera-lovers to these events. For each company, it was useful to gain understanding of what audiences value in opera in order to improve communication from the company to the audience.

A key finding from our research was the importance of affordability to many highly-engaged opera-goers. Respondents were aware that there are many affordable tickets available to opera performances, and sought them out with great assiduousness. Our interviewees wanted to go to the opera as often as possible, and therefore could not afford to pay premium prices for tickets.

### 7.3 Researchers in the performing arts

Our project was focused on a particular art form; however, we suggest that our methodology could usefully be employed to discover what audiences value about the experience of other art forms. Qualitative research techniques are labour-intensive and expensive, but can yield rich information about audiences. We propose that such research can best be carried out in collaboration with producing companies; however, such companies, despite great interest in finding out more about their audience, often lack any spare capacity to think about what exactly they want to find out. Therefore, if stakeholders such as funding agencies wish to encourage meaningful research into the impact of a company's work on their audience, provision must be made to resource that research.

The diversity of response amongst even our small group of interviewees demonstrates that current audience segmentation strategies may obscure a considerable range of responses that could be useful to producing companies and artists. Current models of audience segmentation (such as, in this instance, the Arts Council England (ACE) 'Highly Engaged' group, subdivided into 'Traditional Culture Vultures' and 'Urban Arts Eclectic') may disguise other groupings that cross segment boundaries. Our interviewees seem to fall into one such group; they are highly engaged, frequent attenders, but do not fit easily in either of these ACE sub-groups. Accordingly, businesses in the cultural industries could greatly benefit by conducting qualitative research into the experience of their own audiences, and tailoring their marketing strategy in line with the results.

Future research could extend the work we have done here by asking similar questions of less frequent opera-goers. Our work gives insight into the concerns of only a small proportion of the overall audience for opera. Perhaps less frequent attendees have different concerns entirely, or have a different distribution of concerns within the eight themes we identified.

The complexity of researching the audience experience should not be underestimated, and our contribution provides only a modest initial investigation of the experience of some opera audience members. However, as noted by Radbourne et al, audiences describe their experiences in emotional terms.<sup>17</sup> Only recently has research into the audience experience used terms that

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<sup>17</sup> Radbourne et al (2013), p. 1.

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audience members themselves would use. As the field develops, it is to be hoped that an ever-richer picture of the value of the arts to individuals and to society will begin to emerge.

## Appendix 1: Survey for Company A

### Company A Questionnaire

**1. Are you male or female?**

Female

Male

Other (please specify)

**2. Which category below includes your age?**

17 or younger

18-20

21-30

31-39

40-49

50-59

60-69

over 70

**3. Are you**

In full-time employment

In part-time employment

Self-employed

Unemployed

Retired

A student

Not economically active

**4. What is the first half of your postcode?**

## Company A Questionnaire

### 5. Why did you decide to attend the performance?

- I like immersive theatre
- I am a fan of Company A
- I am looking for a new experience
- I am interested in the story
- I like promenade theatre
- I know someone in the company
- I am interested in the composer
- I am interested in the work of the Performance Venue

Other (please specify)

### 6. Which of these apply to your experience of the performance?

- Being the only audience member made me feel uncomfortable
- I felt fully absorbed by the experience
- It was a profound emotional experience
- The experience was physically enjoyable
- The performance inspired me to think about the human condition
- The experience was physically tiring or uncomfortable
- I was not fully absorbed by the experience
- Being the only audience member made the experience compelling and absorbing
- The experience was not inspiring

Other (please specify)

### 7. This production is linked to a specific opera. What is your previous experience (if any) of the story of that opera?

- Previously familiar with the story
- Intend to attend the opera
- No knowledge or experience of the story or opera
- Have previously attended the opera
- Previously unfamiliar with the story

Other (please specify)

## Company A Questionnaire

### 8. Has your experience of the performance deepened your understanding of the opera?

- Yes, somewhat
- Yes, very much
- Not particularly
- Not at all
- Not applicable

Other (please specify)



## Company A Questionnaire

### 9. Have you previously been to an opera?

- No, never
- Once before
- 2-3 times
- regular attender (about once a year)
- 2-3 times a year
- more than 4 times per year

Other (please specify)

### 10. If you are already an opera-goer, what do you look for in an opera performance?

- An opportunity to socialise with colleagues or clients
- An opportunity to socialise with friends
- Interest in star performers
- A feeling of connection with the characters and story
- A strong musical experience
- The combination of the visual, musical, and theatrical
- A chance to recapture a previous profound emotional experience
- A strong visual and theatrical experience
- Beautiful singing
- An opportunity to consider the human condition

Other (please specify)

## Company A Questionnaire

### 11. If you have not previously attended the opera, what do you think you would look for in an opera performance?

- Interest in star performers
- Beautiful singing
- The combination of the visual, musical, and theatrical
- A feeling of connection with the characters and story
- An opportunity to consider the human condition
- A strong visual and theatrical experience
- An opportunity to socialise with colleagues or clients
- A profound emotional experience
- An opportunity to socialise with friends
- A strong musical experience

Other (please specify)

### 12. In your opinion, what makes opera different from other art forms?

- The price of tickets
- It is not materially different
- The behaviour of the audience
- The demographic make-up of the audience
- The venues
- Don't know
- The style of singing
- The combination of music and theatre
- The strong emotional content
- The strength of the audience experience

Other (please specify)

## Company A Questionnaire

### 13. If you have not previously attended the opera, why not?

- It never occurred to me
- Don't like the audience for opera
- Not interested
- Too expensive
- Don't like the style of singing
- Would like to go but have no-one to go with
- Would like to go but don't know what to go to

Other (please specify)

## Appendix 2: Survey for Company B

### Company B Questionnaire

**1. What three words would you use to describe the performance?**

**2. For each of the following statements, please choose whether you strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I enjoyed the performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I thought the performance was beautiful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I thought the performers were highly skilled.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The performance brought to light important social issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I had a good night out.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The performance encouraged me to think differently about the world.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aspects of the performance were challenging.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The performance offered me a new perspective on other people's lives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Company B Questionnaire

**3. Have you previously been to an opera? (tick one)**

No, never.

Once before.

2-3 times.

Regular attender (about once a year).

2-3 times a year.

More than 4 times per year.

Other (please specify)

## Company B Questionnaire

### 6. Have you seen Company B perform before?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

## Company B Questionnaire

### 7. What do you think you would look for in future opera performances? (tick all that apply)

- Interest in star performers.
- An opportunity to consider the human condition.
- A strong musical experience.
- A feeling of connection with the characters and story.
- An opportunity to socialise with friends.
- The combination of the visual, musical, and theatrical.
- Beautiful singing.
- A profound emotional experience.
- A strong visual and theatrical experience.
- An opportunity to socialise with colleagues or clients.

Other (please specify)

### 8. Why have you not attended the opera before? (tick all that apply)

- Don't like the style of singing.
- Not interested.
- Too expensive.
- Don't like the audience for opera.
- It never occurred to me.
- Would like to go but don't know what to go to.
- Would like to go but have no-one to go with.

Other (please specify)

## Company B Questionnaire

**9. What did you most like about this performance?**

**10. How would you have liked the performance to be different?**

**11. Among the people that you know, who would you like to have seen this performance and why?**

**12. Did this experience change your opinion of what opera could be?**

## Company B Questionnaire

### 13. What was your perception of Company B before attending this performance?

- No prior knowledge.
- A charity for the homeless.
- An opera company (professional).
- An opera company (amateur).
- A combination of professional and amateur.

Other (please specify)

### 14. Where did you hear about this performance? (tick all that apply)

- Printed Press.
- Paper flier.
- Word of Mouth.
- Connection to the project or Company B staff.
- Company B e-bulletin.
- Facebook.
- Twitter.
- Through the performance venue.

Other (please specify)

### 15. Why did you decide to come to the performance? (tick all that apply)

- To socialise with friends.
- Convenience of the location.
- Affordability of tickets.
- Curiosity about the work of the company.
- To hear the work of a particular composer.
- To support a particular performer.
- To support the charity.

Other (please specify)

## Company B Questionnaire

**16. Which of the following other opera events do you regularly attend? (tick all that apply)**

- Conservatoire opera.
- Small opera companies.
- Glyndebourne.
- English National Opera.
- Met Opera Live in HD.
- English Touring Opera.
- Royal Opera House.
- None of these.

Other (please specify)



## Company B Questionnaire

**17. If you had designed this survey, what additional question would you have posed, and what would your answer be?**

**18. Is this your first visit to this venue?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

**19. Are you male or female?**

- Female
- Male

**20. Which category below includes your age?**

- 17 or younger
- 18-20
- 21-30
- 31-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- over 70

**21. Are you**

- A student
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Self-employed
- In full-time employment
- In part-time employment
- Not economically active

Other (please specify)

## Appendix 3: Survey for Company C

Company C Questionnaire						
1. For each of the following statements, please choose whether you strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it.						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I enjoyed the performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I thought the performance was beautiful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I thought the performers were highly skilled.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The performance brought to light important social issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I had a good night out.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The performance encouraged me to think differently about the world.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aspects of the performance were challenging.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The performance offered me a new perspective on other people's lives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Company C Questionnaire

### 2. Have you previously been to an opera? (tick one)

- No, never.
- Once before.
- 2-3 times.
- Regular attender (about once a year).
- 2-3 times a year.
- More than 4 times per year.

Other (please specify)

### 3. If you are already an opera-goer, what do you look for in an opera performance? (tick all that apply)

- An opportunity to consider the human condition.
- A feeling of connection with the characters and story.
- Beautiful singing.
- A strong musical experience.
- The combination of the visual, musical, and theatrical.
- Interest in star performers.
- A strong visual and theatrical experience.
- An opportunity to socialise with friends.
- A chance to recapture a previous profound emotional experience.
- An opportunity to socialise with colleagues or clients.

Other (please specify)

## Company C Questionnaire

### 4. If this was your first experience of opera, what do you think you would look for in future opera performances? (tick all that apply)

- A profound emotional experience.
- Beautiful singing.
- Interest in star performers.
- A strong musical experience.
- A feeling of connection with the characters and story.
- An opportunity to socialise with colleagues or clients.
- The combination of the visual, musical, and theatrical.
- A strong visual and theatrical experience.
- An opportunity to consider the human condition.
- An opportunity to socialise with friends.

Other (please specify)

### 5. In your opinion, what makes opera different from other art forms? (tick all that apply)

- It is not materially different.
- The strength of the audience experience.
- The venues.
- The demographic make-up of the audience.
- The combination of music and theatre.
- The behaviour of the audience.
- The style of singing.
- The price of tickets.
- The strong emotional content.
- Don't know.

Other (please specify)

## Company C Questionnaire

**6. If this is your first experience of opera, why had you not been before? (tick all that apply)**

- Would like to go but don't know what to go to.
- Would like to go but have no-one to go with.
- Don't like the style of singing.
- Don't like the audience for opera.
- It never occurred to me.
- Not interested.
- Too expensive.

Other (please specify)

## Company C Questionnaire

**7. What did you most like about this performance?**

**8. How would you have liked the performance to be different?**

**9. Among the people that you know, who would you like to have seen this performance and why?**

**10. Did this experience change your opinion of what opera could be?**

## Company C Questionnaire

### 11. Where did you hear about this performance? (tick all that apply)

- Facebook.
- Twitter.
- Company C paper brochure.
- Monthly events email from Company C.
- Company C website.
- Performance Venue monthly guide.
- Performance Venue website.
- Word of mouth.
- Through a member of Company C.

Other (please specify)

### 12. Why did you decide to come to the performance? (tick all that apply)

- To support a particular student.
- Interested in the particular operas being performed.
- Convenience of the location.
- Talent-spotting (for personal interest).
- Talent-spotting (professional).
- Affordability of tickets.

Other (please specify)

## Company C Questionnaire

**13. Which of the following other opera events do you regularly attend? (tick all that apply)**

- Glyndebourne.
- Royal Opera House.
- Conservatoire opera.
- Met Opera Live in HD.
- English Touring Opera.
- English National Opera.
- Small opera companies.
- None of these.

Other (please specify)

## Company C Questionnaire

**14. If you had designed this survey, what additional question would you have posed, and what would your answer be?**

**15. Are you male or female?**

- Female  
 Male

**16. Which category below includes your age?**

- 17 or younger  
 18-20  
 21-30  
 31-39  
 40-49  
 50-59  
 60-69  
 over 70

**17. Are you**

- Unemployed  
 Self-employed  
 In part-time employment  
 Retired  
 A student  
 In full-time employment  
 Not economically active

Other (please specify)

**18. What is the first half of your postcode?**

Thank you!



## Appendix 4: London-Based Opera Providers<sup>18</sup>

Company Name	Category	Opera only	London only	Postcode	Legal Form	Charity	SIC Code	Public Funding	# Employees	Income (last complete accounting year)
British Youth Opera	Educ	x	x	SE1 0AA		x		x	5	£421,162
Carl Rosa	Light	x		E2 8PR		x				£1,403
Chelsea Opera Group	Am/Pro	x	x			x		0	0	£93,078
City of London Festival	Festival		x	EC1A 2BP		x		x		
Classical Opera	Small/Micro	x	x	W6 0LH		x				£415,124
Clod Ensemble	Border		x	E2 6QQ		x				£311,889
Co-Opera	Micro	x	x	SE26 5BW	PLG	x	85520 85600 90010			£169,707
D'Oyly Carte Opera	Light	x		SE11 4QE		x				£35,418
Diva Opera	Small/Micro	x		W3 0LR	PLC	x		0	0	£274,060
East London Metropolitan Opera	Micro	x	x	not available	N/A	no	N/A	0	0	
Ellen Kent	Big/Comm	x		ME10 4AE	PLC	no	90030	0		
English National Opera	Big	x	x	WC2N 4ES	PLG and PLC	x		x	354	£35,817,000
English Pocket Opera	Micro	x	x	NW1 8JL		x				£83,147
English Touring Opera	Med/Small	x		EC1R 4RP	PLG	x		x	10	£2,450,118
Garden Opera		x	x	SW114BD		no				
Glyndebourne on Tour	Med	x		BN8 5UU				x		
Go-Opera	Micro	x	x	not available	N/A	no	N/A			
Grimeborn Festival	Small	x	x	E83DL	N/A	N/A		x	N/A	
Guildhall School of Music and Drama	Educ		x	EC2Y 8DT				x		

<sup>18</sup> Information compiled from Companies House, Charity Commission, and individual companies' websites.

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<b>Hampstead Garden Opera</b>	Comm	x	x	N6 4BD	Trust	x		0	0	£14,512
<b>Hatstand Opera</b>	Micro	x	x	GU14 9SE		no				
<b>London Handel Festival</b>	Festival		x	TA19 0BQ		x				£377,713
<b>National Opera Studio</b>	Educ	x	x	SW18 4HZ		x			5	£564,533
<b>Opera at Home</b>	Micro	x	x	NW1 0TH	PLG	no	not supplied			
<b>Opera Erratica</b>	Micro	x	x	E1 5QJ	N/A	no	N/A			
<b>Opera Holland Park</b>	Med/S mall	x	x	W8 7RX	PLG	x		x	3	£523,098
<b>Opera North on Tour</b>	Med			LS1 6NU				x		
<b>Opera Restor'd</b>		x	x	SW18 5AJ	PLG	?	90010			
<b>Opera Up Close</b>	Micro	x	x	N1 1QN	PLC	no		0		
<b>Pegasus Opera</b>		x	x	SW2 1JF	PLG	x	85200 , 85520 , 90010 , 90030			£77,159
<b>Pimlico Opera</b>	Med/S mall	x		SO24 9AQ				x		
<b>Punchdrunk</b>	Border			EC2A 3PQ	PLG	x	90010	x		
<b>Raymond Gubbay</b>	Big/Comm			EC4A 1LB	PLC	no	90010	0		
<b>Riverside Opera</b>	Micro	x		not available		x				£31,446
<b>ROH2 and Linbury</b>	Med/Big	x	x	WC2E 9DD				x		
<b>Royal Academy of Music</b>	Educ		x	NW1 5HT				x		
<b>Royal College of Music</b>	Educ		x	SW7 2BS				x		
<b>Royal Opera House</b>	Big	x	x	WC2E 9DD	PLG and PLC	x		x	966	£112,074,000
<b>Silent Opera</b>	Micro	x	x	not available	N/A	no	N/A	x	0	
<b>Streetwise Opera</b>	Comm	x	x	W1K 4QQ	PLG	x		x	7.5	£481,654
<b>Surrey Opera</b>	Comm	x		not available		x		x		
<b>Tete-a-tete</b>	Small	x	x	SW6 5DW	PLG	x		x	0	£247,227

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<b>The Little Opera Company</b>		x	?							
<b>The Opera Group</b>	Med/S mall	x		WC2R 2LS	PLG	x		x	5	£1,012,548
<b>Trinity Conservatoire of Music</b>	Educ		x	SE8 3DZ				x		
<b>UCL opera</b>	Educ	x	x	WC1H0AY						
<b>Vocem Electric Voice Theatre</b>			?	N1 8NT						

## **Appendix 5: Report of meeting between the authors and Company A**

One author (SON), met with a representative (CA) of Company A, a theatre company specialising in immersive theatre. CA was very interested in the results and pleased to have participated in the project. He said that at the time of their production all their staff were very stretched and at various times expressed the opinion that they shouldn't bother with the survey; however, he pushed for it because he felt it was important to have some formal data about audience response to their work. This data was important to him because he said that this production was a new sort of work for the company, but it is the future for them, so it was important to capture people's responses as part of their formal forward planning.

Generally speaking, SON gained the impression that they have very strong informal channels for capturing audience response and incorporating it into their work, and developing their work as a result of it. For example, when audience members had completed the performance, a staff member from the company would sit with them and give them a cup of tea and they could talk about their experience. In the development of the piece, the company listened to audience members' feedback as part of creating it, and during the performance run itself that dialogue continued. CA spoke of knowing regular audience members, some of them very well, so that dialogue seems to be firmly embedded in the company's way of working.

CA did not have figures to hand about the demographic make-up of their audiences, and did not seem to be aware of that information being to hand for anyone else in the company – e.g. when we discussed the age range of audience members for the performance his response was that he could ask the stage manager, who had seen all the audience members, what his impression was of their ages. Neither CA nor his colleague, who SON also met, were aware of The Audience Agency, and they do not seem to have any detailed statistical analysis of their audience make-up. However, they do have very strong informal channels, as mentioned above, for getting audience feedback about their work, and they seem to feel they know their audience well. This is an interesting model of a company assessing the impact of its work on its audience without using formal analysis techniques. It seems to work very well!

The questions CA was most interested in were Questions 6 ('Have you ever attended a Company A show before?') and 7 ('Which of these apply to your experience of this production?') combined; he was pleased that most respondents had never been to a Company A show before, and that they responded overwhelmingly positively to the experience. He had been concerned

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that perhaps the group represented by our respondents – i.e. opera regulars who might not have been familiar with Company A's work – might have found the immersive experience difficult. He felt that the responses confirmed that the way of working was effective.

Our discussion digressed somewhat when CA explained the production to SON, including playing sections of the soundtrack. This gave me some useful insight into the performance experience. After listening and discussing the production itself, SON suggested that, in retrospect, we could have included some more specific questions about the performance itself that might have been useful to the company. CA slightly agreed; however, he said that they already have good mechanisms for getting that very detailed feedback informally, as mentioned above, and he was pleased that the survey did capture relevant and useful responses.

SON asked for feedback as to how we might have done things differently; the only thing CA felt could have been improved on was an early planning meeting to design the survey together; however, he recognised that he and the company were so busy that this was difficult (also, SON was at on sabbatical leave at the time, which was why we didn't push for that meeting but had to just get on with things).

## **Appendix 6: Report of meeting between the authors and Company B**

One author (SON) met with the Marketing and Progression Manager (MB) at Company B, a charity producing performances with a mixed cast of professional opera singers and vulnerable adults.

MB was interested in the different categories of Hans Van Maanen and others regarding the function of the arts, commenting: 'it's just interesting to know, and also, thinking about trying to find out what our audiences want and therefore how to describe it.' Information about what audiences value helps Company B communicate with their audience, for example enabling them to emphasise that there might be challenges for the audience in attending a performance.

MB commented that some of the information from the survey reinforces their own instincts about what worked for their audiences, and what needs to be improved. Company B's performance/film was not a pre-existing opera but was put together by the creative team of the production. There is therefore, arguably, more scope for Company B than for a traditional opera company to change the content of their artistic material according to audience response. MB noted that our survey, as well as feedback cards they collected from their audience at the performance, would be used to help shape their next production. Because of the way Company B works, MB was also particularly interested in the section of the survey dealing with general opera-going experiences, and questions of the value audience members ascribe to opera. SON also reported on the results of the Company C interview findings, which were of interest to MB for the same reason.

Thus, although Company B is not a traditional opera company, there was definite interest in what attracts audiences to opera and in how that could shape the activity of the company. This knowledge is a key part of the company's preparation for its next production.

## Appendix 7: Report of meeting between the authors and Company C

Two authors (SON and JS) reported to the Principal(PC) and the Head of Marketing and Communications(MC) of Company C, a music conservatoire with a course for opera singers.

Both PC and MC were interested in the logistical and facility-related questions, which they considered would be useful for internal reporting to the specific departments involved. There was some discussion about how particular aspects of the audience experience could be improved.

Regarding the material informing us about opera audiences and what they value, there was interest from MC about the distinctive interest opera audiences display in the combination of music and drama. Company C opera productions always sell very well, but performances of lieder sell less well, so the information gained from the survey and interviews could be used to improve the marketing message for lieder concerts. Furthermore, PC suggested that it would be interesting to repeat the exercise of surveying the audience for their smaller performances of scenes from operas, which have different values from the larger opera productions.

PC also suggested that it would be useful to engage the students and staff who are involved in Company C's opera productions with the findings of the survey and interviews. Accordingly, SON reported to the conductor of the performance (MD), who is also Head of Opera at the company. MD was very interested by the findings and made insightful comments about how the audience's concerns contrast with the concerns of the creative team. In particular, he commented that the creative team of an opera production would generally tend to be more interested than the audience seemed to be in opera as a means to consider the human condition.

As a result of discovering which aspects of the company's opera work are of particular interest to the audience, the Head of Opera proposed running a study event for the audience explaining how the programming of the performances is decided upon, and explaining how the programme is an integral part of the students' learning process.

## **Appendix 8: interview questions**

- 1. I believe you attend the opera very frequently; how often do you go?**
- 2. What were your earliest experiences of opera?**
- 3. What do you remember feeling when you first went to the opera?**
- 4. Can you reflect on a memorable high-point in your opera-going life?**
- 5. Can you reflect on an occasion when you had a strong emotional response to opera?**
- 6. Have you had equivalent strong emotional reactions to other art forms (for example, spoken theatre, instrumental music, visual art, etc)?**
- 7. Can you reflect on the difference between opera and other art forms (according to the response to Q. 6)?**
- 8. Who do you go to the opera with?**
- 9. Does your companion (if relevant) have a similar strong emotional attachment to the opera?**
- 10. Have you brought people to the opera for whom it was a new experience, and if so, how did you encourage them to prepare for the experience, if at all?**
- 11. What opera or production would you recommend for a new opera-goer, and why?**
- 12. Do you have a favourite place to sit?**
- 13. Do you have a favourite venue?**
- 14. Can you pick a desert island singer/conductor/director/opera/composer, and reflect on what makes that person/opera different to others?**
- 15. How do you prepare, if at all, before going to an opera you don't know?**
- 16. Do you listen to recordings of opera?**
- 17. Do you watch audio-visual recordings of opera?**
- 18. Do you attend opera broadcasts in the cinema? Can you reflect on the difference between opera in the cinema and in the theatre?**
- 19. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experiences of opera?**



## Appendix 9: Interviewees' Early Experiences with Opera

### Female respondent 1:

First went to the opera when her mother took her to D'Oyly Carte G&S when she was 'very small', which she loved (l. 15). She first went to 'real opera' at Covent Garden at 13 or 14. She found it 'over-theatrical and over-false' and didn't like it. She and her mother used to sit in the cheap seats at the back of Covent Garden and they went to the ballet but was upset because she felt the dancers were out of time with the music. It was a long time before she got to like opera; she dates the love of it from when she went to Jonathan Miller productions with her husband and saw people really acting: 'for the first time ever you saw people behaving like human beings, but just singing in order to communicate their message.' (l. 42, 43)

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental interest? Yes

Trigger: believable acting

### Male respondent 2:

Says it is an obsession that he dates to when he was 4. His parents got a gramophone player and a record of HMS Pinafore and said 'I don't think you'll like this' and he loved it, and insisted on it being played every evening until it broke. Then they took him to HMS Pinafore (a D'Oyly Carte matinee), 'And it was the most wonderful thing I had ever been to in my life. And I can still remember it and I was hooked.' (l. 15, 16) 'I remember being in the theatre. I remember the action on stage, the scenery. I don't remember the story particularly. I know it, but I wasn't following that. I was just following all these people there, hearing the music that by that time I knew very well, and I was just completely enraptured.' (l. 18-21) Then when he was 8 he got into the local grammar school and they took him to see Barber of Seville as a reward. And after that he went whenever the opera came (to Newcastle).

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental interest? Yes

Trigger: a record of HMS Pinafore

### Male respondent 3:

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'My oldest memory is of an old scratchy disk of Kathleen Ferrier, which I thought sounded very strange, that was at the age of about 5.' (l. 10, 11). But: 'I grew up in a household that wasn't musical, a working-class family with no interest in opera or classical music particularly.' (l. 9, 10). In secondary school, he was exposed to music by Bach and Handel and found he couldn't get it out of his head so he started listening to classical music on the radio. At university he started going to concerts and was curious about opera, and saw some on television. He also used to sit and listen to complete operas on LPs with the libretto. When he finished university and moved to London he started going to opera. He was 'gripped by the drama' (l. 26).

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental Interest? No

Trigger: more a gradual burn of various things coming together. When he saw opera live, the drama was important.

#### **Male respondent 4:**

First became interested in opera at school when one of the teachers formed a record-listening club, and organised concert trips. First time was at about 11 or 12, he had not been with his family before that, although his mother sang and played the piano but not in their earshot, and his father played the violin, but not well. They didn't have recordings at home and he heard very little music at home. At the age of 17 he started going to opera on his own, he could queue for cheap tickets to Sadlers Wells. He didn't really remark about having a strong experience at these early operas, but remembered bits and pieces about particular stage disasters and particular good conductors.

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental Interest? Small

Trigger: after-school listening club.

#### **Female respondent 5:**

First experienced opera in her late teens when touring companies visited Oxford. Prior to that she had been to G&S. She was taken to opera with a close school friend, her parents used to buy the two girls tickets to go on their own. She felt she always wanted to go again, even if sometimes she found things too long or did not understand what was going on. 'I think it was the total... I always used to love the orchestras. I used to love that sound... the combined sound... the whole buzz and

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experience.’ (l. 34, 35) She played in youth orchestras and used to listen out for the clarinet (her instrument) when she went to the opera.

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental Interest? Probably, though not directly mentioned

Trigger: excitement of the total experience and ‘buzz’

### **Female respondent 6:**

First got interested in opera when a friend at university took her. She first saw a student production of Simon Boccanegra and then a Covent Garden Traviata with Joan Sutherland: ‘So that was a pretty impressive introduction. I was just hooked. I just find opera a complete experience. [...] ‘I think the... the beauty of the melodies, the storyline. I mean, Traviata has a great storyline. And I just find that the overall combination is... I think it’s the best experience you can have.’ (l. 32-38). And she said that she had that feeling immediately, the first time she went, although more with Traviata than with Simon Boccanegra. She hadn’t listened to opera at all before that.

Childhood Experiences? No

Parental Interest? Not mentioned

Trigger: immediately gripped by the ‘complete experience’

### **Female respondent 7:**

Her father was an impresario. She leant away from it because of that but on the other hand felt it gave her a certain amount of comfort with the classical music world. ‘There was no big deal. I mean, I think dad took me to my first opera when I was 8.’ (l. 55) As an adult, she went sporadically (a couple of times a year) and then started going frequently when her husband was ill and she needed a break from looking after him: ‘And it was only the opera, which is such a multi-overwhelming experience that gave a proper break. [...] by going to the opera house, with all the specialness of going, just walking into that magical space, the whole palaver of sitting there, of squeezing around in the amphitheatre [...] and then seeing something and being overwhelmed with something which was the sound, the production, the vision, the everything, I actually had time out.’ (l. 62-68)

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental Interest? Yes

Trigger: the overwhelming nature of everything coming together in opera

**Male respondent 8:**

He grew up near the Royal Albert Hall and was regularly taken (presumably by parents but he did not specify) to hear a variety of things. And they had classical music records at home. Started going regularly to opera in his twenties. Did not really comment on what he felt about his early experiences.

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental Interest? Yes

Trigger: just the habit of going, I think.

**Male respondent 9:**

His opera enthusiasm started when he was about 12 or 13. He had two friends at school who were 'into music': 'And I remember one of them suddenly said, 'let's go to Covent Garden.' [...] 'And we just went by ourselves. I never ever recall asking my parents if I could go. I just said I was going. And that was actually wonderful.' (l. 4-7) He was immediately hooked. 'I think the spectacle of the whole thing just got me as it were. [...] We enjoyed it so much we then booked to go and see the Bartered Bride, which I remember now to this day.' (l. 9-13) Then they went to Samson and Delilah at Sadler's Wells, which he also remembered very well. Prior to that he was a singer, a chorister, from the age of 7 or 8, 'and that got me hooked on music I suppose really.' (l. 30) They had not had music at home or records, but when he started to go to opera he then started to buy records, and his parents got him a gramophone. His parents didn't know about how to arrange music lessons but still did it, and he had piano and singing lessons.

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental Interest? No, but they encouraged his interest

Trigger: going to a performance with friends, the spectacle of it

**Male respondent 10:**

Had no interest or background in classical music until he got interested in non-vocal classical music in his twenties, then he was given a ticket to a Russian opera at Covent Garden by someone who couldn't go, 'and it was an extraordinary spectacle, as well as the music. Certainly I saw the point of it in a flash.' (l. 20) Then he began to go to the opera wherever he was, and he was travelling a lot so he saw a great variety of things, some small and intimate, some large and spectacular.

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There had been no music to speak of at home except his father had a recording of the Brandenburg Concertos. He had an interest in rock music and had been to rock concerts before going to opera, as well as heavy metal and punk.

Childhood Experiences? No

Parental Interest? No

Trigger: the spectacle

**Male respondent 11:**

Started going to the opera at the age of 19, when he moved to London as a student. Before that, he had been a chorister and learnt the piano, and went to a boarding school with a lot of music, where 'I became very interested in the voice as a medium for making music. But the one thing we didn't do was opera, because it was... thinking back to the 1960s, it was still a pretty esoteric thing.' (l. 34-36) Then, his first taste of opera was on vinyl and Radio 3, and he did some background reading. He first went on his own, out of curiosity. 'But it appealed... love at first sight.' (l. 41, 42) 'It obviously derives from liking the sung voice and I think it's because it added drama as well.' (l. 44, 45) Then once he had started going he went regularly to the cheapest seats.

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental Interest? Not mentioned

Trigger: singing and music-making at school

**Male respondent 12:**

Parents did not go to opera. Brought up with a wind-up gramophone, on which he listened to light classics. Was evacuated to Bedford during the war and saw the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Corn Exchange there at the age of 13. Went by himself. 'And I got a love of music from then on' (l. 25). When married used to listen to opera on the radio and when they had enough money, started to go: he and his wife got their love of opera from the radio.

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental interest? No

Trigger: going to live orchestral concerts AND opera on the radio.

**Male respondent 13:**

First strong emotional response to hearing someone sing was when he was 7 or 8 and his parents took him to the local G&S in Essex. 'And that was the first time really that I was just thrilled' (l. 308,9). 'There was a sudden kind of awareness of the beauty of the singing and you wanted to hear more. And I've never forgotten it. It was sort of a door, a key... it was lovely.' (l. 313-315) Then he sang in a church choir from the age of about 9. They didn't have any recordings at home, the record player was broken.

When he was 'young' (I surmise in his twenties), he used to queue up for cheap single seats on his own. 'When I was young I used to think, either I'll have dinner [out] or I'll go to the opera – I can't afford both. Because the price was about the same but nowadays it's not.' (l. 58-60).

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental interest? Yes

Trigger: soprano voice heard live when very young.

**Male respondent 14:**

He was a boy chorister and in their choir they once played the street urchins in a production of Carmen in Peterborough: 'It was a wonderful experience, because we obviously had to rehearse, and being on stage... because we had to put all the make-up and everything.' (l. 17, 18) Then as an adult he met two friends who introduced him to opera: 'I think I did enjoy it, because it was a completely new experience to me.' (l. 41)

Childhood? Yes

Parental Interest? Not mentioned

Trigger: being in an opera as a child

**Male respondent 15:**

He dates his enthusiasm for opera to a particular encounter when a friend of his at university played him a recording of the trio from the last act of Der Rosenkavalier: 'and that got me hooked. [...] I just thought it was fantastic music and real human characters.' (l. 7,8; 12). Then he used to go to the opera with that same friend. Previously to that, his parents had once taken him to the opera, to see The Marriage of Figaro, 'but I don't think that impinged very much... that was when I was [...] 15, 16, something like that.' (l. 18; 20) He also saw a small touring opera at school, and

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listened to a lot of orchestral music at school. 'I remember hearing some opera [at school] that didn't make any sense to me because I couldn't make out the words.' (l. 25, 26). In contrast, when his friend at university took him to the opera the friend always explained the scenario, which seemed to help him.

Childhood Experiences? To a limited extent

Parental Interest? Implied

Trigger: a recording played by a friend in early adulthood; music and characters

**Male respondent 16:**

He was first taken to the opera for his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday (Marriage of Figaro). He was taken by his aunt, uncle and mother: 'I thought it was wonderful. It was a good opera to start with and the whole experience was just lovely.' (l. 17, 18) He was already interested and had listened to opera on the radio. He began to follow opera in music magazines, and listening to a programme on Sundays with recordings of old singers. A year later, he was taken, by a family friend, to Lucia di Lammermoor at Covent Garden, with Matty Wilda-Dobbs, and then saw it a second time, with Joan Sutherland: 'And then when Sutherland did Lucia at Covent Garden, that put the nail in it.' (l. 10, 11) 'And it was just the most beautiful sound I've ever heard. There was one moment at the end of the first recit that just got me. The sound just floated up to the back of the gallery, which is where I was, and it felt as if it was just going on forever. It was just so wonderful. And that got me.' (l. 71-74) Then he started going on his own and getting his own tickets. When he was at school he was able to queue for tickets with the help of his mother: he stayed overnight on the pavement in some cases and got a queue ticket at 8:30am, then went home, gave the ticket to his mother and went to school. She took a flexible lunch and went to the box office to get his ticket at the appointed time.

At home, he listened to records, and also at his piano teacher's. His parents were not musical but his aunt was, and 'there was music around.' (l. 27) He 'nagged' his parents to let him have piano lessons, which he did from the age of 10 or 11 to when he went to university.

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental Interest? Implicit

Trigger: going to the opera at the age of 13, and the sound of the singing

**Male respondent 17:**

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His father used to play classical music recordings: 'so it was there in the background. Then as a teenager you rebel against your parents' interests.' (l. 19) Then when he was a student at university he started going to things. He was then interested in going to things but for much of his working life did not have time, so in the last ten years has started going to things more frequently, '[I] suddenly realised there's a lot of things that I've missed over the years, so I'm trying to catch up. [...] basically anything I can get to that's opera I will go to.' (l. 7; 9).

Childhood? Yes, but classical music rather than opera

Parental Interest? As above

Trigger: seems to have been a gradual slow burn

**Male Respondent 18:**

During World War II he and his brother discovered opera broadcasts from La Scala on the radio and they started listening. He was 11 or 12. 'My mother was very forward thinking. Although she wasn't interested she thought we ought to go to the opera as part of our general education. So she used to take us from time to time to Sadler's Wells, which was fun actually.' (l. 310-312) Their parents were not musical and they didn't have a musical education, but he likes all kinds of music and had a strong interest in jazz at university. He started his formal musical education when he retired (25 years ago). When he went to university he went to student productions. His brother had his voice trained and sang in some student productions.

Childhood Experiences? Yes

Parental Interest? No, but very supportive of his interest

Trigger: radio broadcasts in childhood



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