Sustaining Culture & the Role of Performing Arts Centres: Audiences

A study based on in-depth interviews with more than 100 people around Australia and in New Zealand on the experiences, motivations and values of major performing arts centre audiences.

REPORT

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A special thank you to our interview participants who generously shared their time, memories, and ideas with us. The conversations we enjoyed with you opened our eyes to the richness of experiences made possible through the performing arts.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Sustaining Culture & The Role of Performing Arts Centres* is a research collaboration between Griffith University and members of the OZPAC forum of performing arts centres: the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, the Sydney Opera House, the Adelaide Festival Centre, the Arts Centre, Melbourne, Perth Theatre Trust and The Edge, Auckland.

The research partners believe that performing arts centres are experiencing new imperatives to encourage wider cultural participation, maintain standards of excellence in arts practice, and develop innovative arts management practices. Meanwhile, existing aesthetic, social and economic paradigms have been unable to deliver comprehensive rationales for the major performing arts and its impact on artists, audiences and the wider public.

Based on a successful pilot study conducted by Griffith University and QPAC in 2004, *Sustaining Culture* secured Australian Research Council Linkage Grant funding to undertake a dedicated three-year study that examines and evaluates the social, cultural, environmental, educational and economic values and impacts of Australia's major performing arts institutions.

This report focuses on a subset of the *Sustaining Culture* project that looks specifically at the motivations and practices of performing arts centre audiences. Known as the ‘Audiences’ study, this branch of research aims to build a comprehensive and nuanced picture of how a performing arts audience can ‘become’, ‘be’ and ‘persist’.

Audience members were invited to provide detailed accounts of their experiences and activities through a series of qualitative, semi-structured interviews. These interviews explored a range of subject matter: from earliest childhood and educational experiences through to adult arts consumption practices and preferences. Interview participants were encouraged to not only reflect on what they value about their performing arts experiences but how their experiences affect their personal identity and relationships, and impact on other spheres of existence such as consumer and media choices.
Phase 1 of research saw a total of 69 interviews conducted at Queensland Performing Arts Centre; The Arts Centre, Melbourne; Sydney Opera House; and Adelaide Festival Centre. The participant sample captured a range of ages, genre preferences, and attendance frequency. Participants also completed a written survey providing quantitative as well as qualitative data which was analysed alongside relevant material from the Australian Bureau of Statistics regarding arts consumption.

Key themes and findings identified from this initial phase were then developed into a second phase of research that focussed on participation and well-being, kinship and inter-generational practice, and media consumption. Phase 2 interviews were conducted with 36 participants at The Edge in Auckland, New Zealand and venues part of the Perth Theatre Trust (Subiaco Arts Centre, His Majesty’s Theatre, Playhouse Theatre, and Perth Concert Hall).

This report presents the findings from both sets of research provides high quality, rich data about the audiences who frequent Australia’s most iconic and important performing arts centres.

The information within these pages can be used to inform program development, marketing, and audience development strategies both within the major performing arts centres and other arts and cultural institutions that present live works. It can assist centres’ to enrich and deepen their current audience experiences and tastes, and engage with new audiences.
PHASE 1: QUEENSLAND PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE, SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE, ADELAIDE FESTIVAL CENTRE, & THE ARTS CENTRE, MELBOURNE

RATIONALE

Major international reports on culture and the arts agree that while quantitative research methods are good at capturing factors like frequency of attendance they are of limited use in identifying and communicating audience experiences. Qualitative research methods are needed to address the questions at the heart of performing arts engagement and the quality of life outcomes sought by stakeholders.

By listening to participants’ detailed accounts of events, experiences, or activities it is possible to build a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of arts participation and consumption than can be achieved by quantitative research alone. Presenting personal and anecdotal data begins the process of building a new pluralistic picture of arts participation, one that takes into account the broad range of values that audiences ascribe to their arts experiences. We anticipate that the diverse and rich range of information produced by these methods can be used to inform program development, marketing, and audience development strategies.

This report contains examples of responses collected through the interviews. Quotes such as these will be presented alongside final findings and outcomes. Although they represent important themes raised throughout the interviews, these quotes represent a small fraction of the content collected in the interview process. Their inclusion in this report is meant simply to highlight the diversity and depth of the responses, and demonstrates the interview subjects’ abilities to reference particular performing experiences in detail and reflect on their values and motivations as patrons of the Centres.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH BENCHMARKS

International efforts to develop a pluralistic language of cultural value tackle different aspects of the problem. There are attempts to articulate a variety of personal, interpersonal and wider social benefits and values; others unpack ‘the arts’ and ‘participation’ into their component parts and represent these in a coherent manner;
and there are related efforts to capture the temporal dimension of immediate and cumulative impacts. We took a number of these major international reports as guiding benchmarks when designing and conducting our research.

*The Gifts of the Muse* (2004) by McCarthy et al distinguishes private intrinsic values (described as the “missing link” in many rationales for the arts) from public instrumental values (where agendas like crime-reduction or social inclusion policies are the measure of arts participation). Impacts and values are placed in a continuum, from the most intimate and hard to articulate, to those that are the objects of routine public political debate.

*The Values Study: Rediscovering the Meaning and Value of Arts Participation* (2004) is a report produced by Alan S. Brown and Associates for the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism. The report identifies impacts and values by unpacking ‘the arts’ into specific art-forms or disciplines and by identifying different kinds of participation. An ‘Involvement Framework’ combines four disciplines – music, theatre, dance and visual arts – and five modes of involvement, organised by levels of creative control exercised by participants. These modes of participation are: Inventive (“an act of artistic creation that is unique and idiosyncratic, regardless of skill level”); Interpretive (“a creative act of self-expression that brings alive and adds value to pre-existing works of art”); Curatorial (“selecting, organizing and collecting art to the satisfaction of one’s own artistic sensibility”); Observational (experiences an individual “selects or consents to, motivated by some expectation of value”); and Ambient (art experienced without being “purposefully selected – art that ‘happens to you.’”).

Brown (2006) developed an integrated value model that identifies five clusters of impacts – personal development, human interaction, economic and social, the imprint of the arts experience, and communal meaning – plotted along two key axes: the personal/community continuum and the temporal axis of immediate/cumulative impacts.

Intellectually, this study takes as one of its starting points the pioneering research on artistic and cultural consumption by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu’s study of the composition of French national tastes in his book *Distinction* explores the modes, styles and taste for consuming culture, whether it be the performing arts, visual and plastic arts, or popular culture such as music, food and forms of leisure.
Bourdieu is resolute in his empirical exploration of the modes of consuming culture, linking it to distribution of economic and cultural capital which inform the way people ‘see’ culture and in turn their incorporation of cultural value into modes of social differentiation. But, in addition, in this study we add to Bourdieu a sensitive and informed qualitative and interpretive research approach which takes seriously modes of experience, subjectivity and aspects of people’s everyday experience with the performing arts. Moreover, drawing from cutting-edge work in new studies of audiences, ways of viewing and experiencing culture, and the way audiences as constituted as micro-publics within particular city and consumption settings, this study seeks to expand the way consumption of the arts is conceptualised within public discourse.
RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative interviews approximately 40 minutes in length were conducted with approximately 15 – 20 participants from each centre (a total of 69 people). Participant details were supplied from the centre’s membership, ticket purchasing, and subscription databases. Each sample featured people who were either occasional or frequent attendees, and who attended a broad range of artistic genres. Attempts were also made to include a variety of ages and a balance of gender in the sample. Before participants were interviewed they were asked to fill in a survey that had been designed to capture demographics data and broadly identify patterns of cultural consumption.

Sample data – Phase 1

A descriptive statistical snapshot of the interview sample that is based on the survey is outlined below:

People interviewed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>68.11%</td>
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Ages:

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<td>25 &amp; under</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 – 35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 – 50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 – 65</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 +</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age</td>
<td>50.579</td>
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Marital Status:

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>42.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnered</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Class (Self-Assigned):
Sustaining Culture & the Role of Performing Arts Centres: Audiences

Upper: 1 (1.45%)
Middle: 53 (76.81%)
Working: 9 (13.04%)
None: 4 (5.80%)
N/A: 2 (2.90%)

Work:
- Working full-time: 24 (37.78%)
- Working part-time: 12 (17.39%)
- Retired: 21 (30.43%)
- Self-employed: 5 (7.25%)
- Studying: 3 (4.35%)
- Volunteer work: 2 (2.90%)
- On holiday: 2 (2.90%)

Attendance types:
- Frequent/sub. 15+: 12 (17.39%)
- Regular 8-14: 13 (18.84%)
- Occasional 3-7: 28 (40.60%)
- Rare 1-2: 9 (13.04%)
- Never: 6 (8.69%)
- N/A: 1 (1.45%)

Based on the nature of sample size and qualitative interviewing, the sample is not statistically significant, nor does it aim to capture a representative section of the audience population. Instead the qualitative interview process aims to stimulate conversation and provide new perspectives on familiar phenomena. Generally with qualitative interviewing, fewer people are studied more intensively and the outcomes are grounded in deep, or ‘thick’, descriptive accounts.

Research questions:

The study’s design and analytical approach serve to explore and test the following key questions:

1. What are the diverse perceptions of value held by performing arts audiences?
2. What is the **biography of the audience**? (When do audiences start and cease? How does an audience ‘become’, ‘be’ and ‘persist’?)

3. How does the performing arts experience **transfer to and connect with other aspects of life**? (For example, how do life stages and/or the ongoing acquisition or modification of cultural capital alter audiences’ behaviours, attitudes and experiences?)

4. How can the research findings (which are audience-grounded perceptions of value) be used by centres to **better understand the preferences, motivations and choices of their audiences**?

The interview process was comprised of four parts, featuring a series of sub-questions and themes that relate to:

**PERCEPTIONS:**

- Personal impressions and attitudes towards the performing arts;
- Early involvement as an indicator of adult pathways to performing arts;
- Perceived barriers to attendance and participation.

**RECOLLECTION:**

- Delves further into the content and themes of ‘Perceptions’ by encouraging participants to draw upon actual childhood and adult memories of performing arts in order to explain current tastes and practices;
- Builds a picture of attendance and consumption through life stages and various influential factors such as familial influences, school curricula, intra-generational or peer encouragement or discouragement, & mentors;
- Examines the important of shared experiences as a way of predicting attendance patterns and genre preferences.
• Situates us well and truly in the ‘now’ of audiences’ experiences by encouraging discussion of current behaviours;
• Participants discuss the criteria for a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ experiences at a performing arts centre, addressing both spiritual or emotional expectations and physical needs;
• Looks at who people choose to attend with and why;
• Discusses attitudes towards expenditure associated with attending a performance.

PERSISTING:

• Identifies personal and broader (social and community) benefits of arts and cultural consumption.
• Participants consider the complex role the centres play in the eyes of the community;
• Attitudes towards inclusion and access as they are expressed in performing arts attendance and programming.
ANALYSIS – KEY FINDINGS & THEMES

The interview transcripts have been coded and analysed using NVivo, a qualitative data management program. The NVivo software allows researchers to systematically manage and work with data that is not numerical. It helps researchers access, manage, and analyse detailed textual data by removing manual tasks like classifying, sorting and arranging information.

NVivo coding and analysis helped identify key findings and themes such as:

• Inter-generational and intra-generational influences:
  o The role parents, particularly mothers, play in building tastes.
  o The influence of friends, family and educators during different life stages.

• The processes involved in recalling performing arts experiences:
  o What we remember about our experiences with live performing arts and how this shapes our future patterns of attendance.

• The relationship of performing arts attendance with other patterns of cultural consumption: how they interact and reinforce each other.

• Insights into tastes and aesthetic preferences as a way of predicting attendance at performing arts events.

• Obstacles to a richer performing arts experience.

• The roles and influences of co-attendees:
  o The importance of who you attend with in influencing your perception and experience of the performing arts
  o What audiences required from the performing arts centre and their experiences there to fulfil their perceived obligations to co-attendees

• Public impressions of the Centres and their role in both audience members’ lives and the cultural life of the city/community/precinct.

• Uses of language:
o How positive or negative experiences are articulated.

- New consumer types:
  o Are performing arts audiences best captured by traditional categories such as age, gender or social status, or can we better understand performing arts audiences by examining their personal relationships, values, and expectations?

Although the ‘Audiences’ study did not intend for its sample to be statistically representative of broader arts consumption patterns, our participants reflect some of the findings in the Australia Bureau of Statistics’ report on *Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues and Events, Australia, 2005-2006*.

In this ABS research, it was reported that:

- Females were more likely to go to cultural venues and events than males except for museums and popular music concerts.

- People aged 55 – 64 years reported the highest attendance rate at classical music events. People aged over 45 had amongst the highest attendance rates of opera performances, musicals, and theatre.

- Employed people (and particularly those employed part-time) had significantly higher attendance rates at classical and popular music concerts, theatre performances and musicals and operas than people who were unemployed or not in the labour force.

- For each of the venues and events included in the survey, with the exception of libraries, residents with household income in the highest quintile reported significantly higher attendance rates than those in the lowest quintile. Generally, as gross household income decreased, so too did attendance rates.

*(ABS Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues and Events, Australia, 2005 – 2006)*
PERCEPTIONS

Content:
- Pathways to performing arts attendance
- Barriers to performing attendance

Themes:
- Early arts education
- Formative arts experiences
- Perceptions and frameworks for thinking the arts
- Arts in the city: space, place, locale

Pathways to attendance

Prior experience with the arts is often an important and necessary prerequisite for current arts attendance. This prior experience does not necessarily have to be recent, but can be based upon a wide range of types of exposure to the arts from an early age. This involvement, which is often recounted by our participants as occurring whilst they were a young person accompanied by their parents, allows them to form a framework – or ‘habitus’ to use the language of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu - for understanding performances and for appreciating their value. It is a type of cultural capital, something learned through the everyday, routinely practised patterns and preferences of parents, friends and one’s locale. These type of formative positive arts experiences – broadly what might be imagined as an informal ‘arts education’ – can happen in childhood, amateur theatre, military bands, church activities, or through travel experiences involving consumption of the arts in iconic international settings.

Our survey questions addressed this topic of the pathways participants took to performing arts attendance. They show that approximately 60% of participants were involved in some type of arts as a child and around the same proportion were directly encouraged to become involved in attending the arts.
As a child, were you involved in any arts activities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>QPAC</th>
<th>Arts Centre, VIC</th>
<th>Adelaide Festival Centre</th>
<th>Sydney Opera House</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13 (18.8%)</td>
<td>13 (18.8%)</td>
<td>8 (11.6%)</td>
<td>7 (10.2%)</td>
<td>41 (59.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5 (7.3%)</td>
<td>6 (8.7%)</td>
<td>7 (10.2%)</td>
<td>9 (13.1%)</td>
<td>27 (39.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>1 (1.5%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>1 (1.5%)</td>
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</table>

Did anyone encourage your participation or attendance in the performing arts?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>QPAC</th>
<th>Arts Centre, VIC</th>
<th>Adelaide Festival Centre</th>
<th>Sydney Opera House</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9 (13.1%)</td>
<td>14 (20.3%)</td>
<td>13 (18.8%)</td>
<td>6 (8.7%)</td>
<td>42 (60.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9 (13.1%)</td>
<td>5 (7.3%)</td>
<td>3 (4.4%)</td>
<td>10 (14.5%)</td>
<td>27 (39.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did anyone discourage your participation or attendance in the performing arts?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>QPAC</th>
<th>Arts Centre, VIC</th>
<th>Adelaide Festival Centre</th>
<th>Sydney Opera House</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2 (2.9%)</td>
<td>6 (8.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>1 (1.5%)</td>
<td>9 (13.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16 (23.2%)</td>
<td>13 (18.8%)</td>
<td>16 (23.2%)</td>
<td>15 (21.7%)</td>
<td>60 (86.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research interviews confirmed the importance of early collective school experiences in encouraging future attendance. For instance:

*I came from the eastern suburbs. I landed in the western suburbs when I was 25 by accident. I didn’t know the western suburbs existed. I thought they were a smelly place you drove through to get to the surf, because I lived in the more affluent eastern suburbs even though we were as poor as church mice. But the thing that got to me was that all of the kids that I dealt with in the western suburbs over 40 years, none of those kids ever saw a ballet performance, nobody, nobody went to the opera, nobody went anywhere, and nobody went to the kids programmes. So, wherever I’ve been at a school I’ve [initiated] a thing called a “Friday Assembly”. The Friday Assembly happens every Friday and it [involves] every kid in the school and every teacher. It’s a sort of a together time - I would find talented people to come along and perform [for the school].* (TAC, Male, 66)
Many participants also had experience with learning a musical instrument during their youth and this seems to be an indicator for positive reception of the arts in later life:

I used to play the piano in England. And the recorder. I got up to junior teaching level in those. But economics didn’t allow [me to continue] unfortunately … I suppose the encouragement came when my mum used to play the piano and the same thing happened to her – you know, economics didn’t allow her to continue. (SOH, Female, 51).

A significant number of participants in our interviews were involved in the arts in some capacity as creative professionals or enthusiastic amateur players which also positively effects attitudes toward the arts, as the following quotes illustrate:

I was an actor in one of the short plays … just an interest, something I enjoyed in my high school years … I actually submitted some scripts as part of a writing competition and they were unsuccessful and then when they needed actors, I always enjoyed acting in high school and decided it would be a great way to get back into it. (TAC, Male, 27).

I did play the violin in the school actually. We used to put something on every year. … I did it for about three years, but I also was quite a good athlete so I tended to not want to go to music lessons and wanted to go out for a run instead…. And I chose running. Terrible mistake because I can’t run now. (SOH, Female, 46).

Perceived barriers to attendance

Perceptions can be significant barriers to arts attendance because they mobilise strong feelings of cultural belonging, competence and affiliation based upon widely used symbolic referents. The term ‘performing arts’ is probably the most commonly used term to describe the activities and endeavours of the Centres in our study, so to ask attendees about their own understanding of the term constitutes an interesting ‘test’ of the symbolic frames of reference people use to understand the Centres’ activities. Indeed, the term ‘arts’ or ‘performing arts’ itself acts as a symbol of a range of issues surrounding the ‘arts’.
One interesting finding of this research is that even people who attend ‘performing arts’ shows recognise the negative symbolic connotations of that term. In fact, it seems correct to say that the idea of the ‘performing arts’ acts as a type of negative symbolic frame for understanding the arts generally. There is a type of stigma, understood by the participants themselves, around the term ‘performing arts’.

A principal set of associations is that the term ‘performing arts’ is relatively formal and old-fashioned. There is awareness among the attendees surveyed and interviewed that many exciting and innovative forms of performing arts have already substantially moved outside of the large centres in capital cities. Attendees frequently shared a sense that performing arts is not ‘popular culture’. Here, comparisons are often made between rock or pop music and ‘performing arts’. Much popular music is ‘self funding’. The performing arts, by contrast, are seen as being institutionally representative of the mainstream and, sometimes, the ‘government’: something that has legitimate artistic value and recognised importance yet is relatively conservative. There is also a corresponding and sometimes contrary awareness that this is not the only place for culture and that indeed, there might be better or more interesting arts activities happening elsewhere. The notion of a competitive field for arts consumption is generally well understood amongst the audience.

The following quotes show how some respondents believe that arts have moved beyond the performing arts centre:

*Basically for me it's always been very formal – theatres, orchestras, ballets. I'm a lot more aware now that street performers and all their sorts of things are part of the performing arts in a way that they weren't [in the past].* (QPAC, Female, 59).

*I've a great respect for well-staged performances and I got a good friend who is a lighting designer and we have lots of conversations about how he builds his systems to make his multi-media kind of lighting systems happen for the ballet. But as an art-form themselves, I find them very outdated. I mean, opera I find totally ridiculous. I think the higher art forms have a good place but I love the idea that the arts self-fund. I’m totally for limited government sponsorship of the arts. I see a lot of [funding providers] role being about personal and professional development of artists. Rather than spending $60,000 on an opera set, I’d love to see them give $500 micro-grants to you.*
know, how many hundreds of artists that are around Melbourne and see what comes out of that. (TAC, Male, 30).

On the other hand, other interview participants explain that the idea of ‘performing arts’ represents and guarantees a standard - it is a type of brand, defined by a notional standard of quality:

I think I sound like such a snob, but there’s a standard to it. There’s a level that distinguishes it from just some guy whose trying to make three bucks on the street corner to someone who’s actually performing, someone who’s actually an artist. (TAC, Female, 66).

Some participants from a self-disclosed working class background professed to not understanding the language and associations of the term ‘performing arts’. These attendees made a strong association between performing arts being high-brow activities and their attraction for elite audiences. Space and place – the locale in which arts takes place -form a strong point of association and reference for these distinctions between high and popular culture, elite and broad audience types.

That's quite interesting, the language around art. I come from a working class background and didn’t actually attend the theatre or dance or anything like that until fairly recently really. I suppose it’s just a term that’s used for everything. It doesn’t really have any particular meaning for me. The whole art language, I don’t really get. In fact some of the stuff you sent me that I read I didn’t really understand it. (SOH, Female, 46).

My perception of the arts is that it's a narrow portion of the population who are really interested in what I call 'the higher level' of the arts. I think that one of the reasons for that is it doesn't get down and around enough. The scale of some of the plays and operas and ballets and that, the scale of them is such that they can't be taken down and around to the public.

Q: What do you mean by 'down and around”?

Small theatres in the suburbs where they're very accessible to ordinary people – middle class people.
Q: So in a sense, do you suggest that a big centre like this is more of an extraordinary experience, or perhaps also shuts some people out because of its expense?

Yeah. I think that that's possibly the case. I think it narrows the potential audience. (TAC, Male, 65).

Summary of key findings: Perceptions

- Prior experience with the arts is often an important and necessary prerequisite for current arts attendance.

- Many participants identified formative positive arts experiences as taking place in childhood whilst learning an instrument, amateur theatre, military bands, church activities, or through travel experiences involving consumption of the arts in iconic international settings.

- In adulthood, people's early impressions of the performing arts take on more complex forms as they confront barriers to their present day attendance such as impressions of performing arts as being an ‘elitist’ pursuit.
RECOLLECTION

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In the section themed ‘Recollection’, participants were encouraged to reflect on their earliest experiences attending or participating in a broad range of performing arts activities, and to make connections between these formative experiences and attendance patterns and personal preferences in adulthood. Participants were asked to recall both instances where they encountered a performance or attended an arts and cultural facility, as well elaborate on their perceptions of encouragement or discouragement to pursue any early interests in the performing arts. When reflecting on their adult experiences, participants were asked to consider the ways in which they researched the performances they were interested in attending beforehand via media or social influences, and the ways in which they might extend or enhance their experience afterwards through conversation or debate.

Recalling encouragement & discouragement - Family

Participants who attend performing arts events as adults were generally able to cite with ease early childhood exposure to one or many forms of arts genres.
Approximately 65.2% of interviewees recalled actively participating in the arts as a child, with approximately the same percentage (65%) recalling some form of encouragement to do so through family members.

These memories were often quite vivid and significant to the interviewee. For instance, a graphic designer and artist recalled:

> *When I was five I used to do drawings. We had this big roll of paper and I used to do drawings all the way down the entire length of my house. You know, the 50 metre long drawings I did as a kid - I've never had any doubt that is what I'd be doing [as an adult].* (TAC, Male, 30).

A large number of people could specifically recall being encouraged by their mother to attend and/or participate, or recalled their mother’s fondness for the arts in the form of music lessons, piano, singing or similar activities (47.8% of the sample mentioned their mother’s influence). By comparison, very few people mentioned being encouraged by fathers with only 11 out of 22 males recalled being encouraged to participate in the arts as a child (50%).

One interviewee cites his mother’s example as one he carried with him more than half a century later:

> *As a child, we were as poor as church mice, we really were. My mother married below her station. It was wartime and my father was in the war, but she saved up to the point where we could go to a pantomime at the Tivoli or something like that. She saw it as important enough to put away money and forego things. In lots of ways it’s that way for me too, because I’m on a super-pension and that’s not a lot of money [so arts attendance] really becomes an issue of priority.* (TAC, Male, 66).

Encouragement by either parent was often accompanied by a mention of the parents’ own interest in the arts, usually demonstrated through playing instruments and being actively involved in some form of artistic performance. One of the participants described the influence of various family members:
My father – no interest. He thinks classical music and performance are full of… - and I’ll use his words - …poofeters and dunces. But my mum was born in Germany. She grew up in the war – remembers being bombed in Hamburg, in a war shelter. She remembers being a little girl walking around the hills and hearing the music waft across the valleys. You know, hearing a classical concert. And I think she had it ingrained in her…I think it's in the genes, I really do [laughs]. I never met my grandfather and my favourite form of music is choral music – he was actually choral master for the Dortmund city choir. There’s something there that it's in your chemical makeup, it really is. Because the fact I love choral music, and my grandfather I never met loved choral music. (QPAC, Male, 42).

With regards to feeling discouraged from engaging in the arts, a larger percentage of males reported being dissuaded from artistic pursuits (as opposed to merely not actively encouraged), with 50% of males interviewed having experienced some sense of discouragement as opposed to only 35% of female subjects.

In relation to mentors and facilitators, those interviewed who experienced the influence of such people in their early childhood carried the impact well into their adult years. For instance, one subject describes the thrill of attending a show as something fostered by a family member in childhood and a sensation she feels compelled to provide to her own grandchildren:

You know, velvet curtains and the buzz before it goes up. I had this wonderful aunt who took us to things like this when we were little and [it] opened doors. [T]hat’s probably why I was so keen to do the same for my grandson. (TAC, Female, 67).

External factors such as the cost of lessons or tickets, or the prioritisation of other activities such as academic subjects, were often attributed to a lack of interest in arts activities or a decline in participation as children grew older.

Recalling encouragement & discouragement - School

The benefits of an arts education through a standard school curriculum are well documented. Some two thousand years ago Plato wrote: “I would teach the children
music, physics and philosophy, but the most important is music, for in the patterns of the arts are the keys to all learning." More recently, research published by the Music Council of Australia shows that participation in active music making contributes to the emotional, physical, social and cognitive growth of students (Pascoe et al., 2005). Performing Arts Centres themselves are well aware of the importance of fostering a lifelong connection with their audiences, providing programs such as Out of the Box, school excursion and matinee performances, House:Ed, teachers’ resources, Kids at the House, Something on Saturday, kid-friendly catering and menus, Kids at the Arts Centre, and much more.

It is therefore interesting to observe the varied responses amongst our interview participants in relation to whether or not they recalled being encouraged to attend or participant in the performing arts during school. A number of people interviewed could recall having some form of involvement in the arts through school, either as a participant or audience member. However, although almost half the sample (43%) recalled some involvement through school, very few people interviewed were able to articulate clear or linear connections between their school experiences and their tastes and attendance patterns as adults. While a majority of participants were able to conjure up family-related arts experiences, few generated the same type of enthusiasm, nostalgia or fondness for school-based arts experiences. This is evident in the language used to recall childhood arts experience through family – terms such ‘enjoy[ed]’ and ‘love[d]’ were used with noticeably greater frequency than in recollections of school experiences.

Of the people who cannot recall having had any exposure to the arts or encouragement to participate through school, a large percentage (33%) were aged 65 or over, and cited reasons such as lack of facilities and pressure to focus on vocational training. Many people could not recall any meaningful engagement with the arts as primary school aged children, but rather that these types of opportunities came in later years such as high school.

The following quote gives such an example:

[In] primary school there was no real introduction to performing arts. It wasn’t until high school that all that opened up in terms of my high school offered an instrumental music programme, the school musicals, which everyone was always encouraged to audition for. But
primary school, no. There was, I have no real memories of attending performances in primary school. (TAC, Male, 27).

This may also be attributable to individual’s perceptions of what it means to undertake arts activities, for example, is colouring or singing in primary school considered ‘arts education’, or do people only consider formal training and excursions to cultural centres?

As in the case of mentors in family contexts, some key facilitators in school were regarded with reverence as ‘life changers’ responsible for major turning points in perceptions of the arts or one’s own engagement with it:

[M]y drama teacher was really passionate about the theatre and the written word. And my media teacher; he was my mentor character. I've since gone back to work in my old high school, so I work with him every day now. I think his big thing was teaching film, and he was able to relate everything back to something about life – something really important – so it always felt like we were in there learning about everything in the world, but it would always relate back to studying. I know that – because I have a business with two others of the guys I went to high school with – and I know one of them didn’t even consider that he could make films or do anything artistic for a living until that class. That was certainly life-changing for him. (TAC, Male 25)

Recalling performing arts experiences - Earliest memories

Participants were asked to recall their earliest arts experience as a way of exploring what types of content, themes, or physical stimuli left the most indelible imprints on people. Are adult arts attendance patterns influenced by habits developed and sustained by parental interests and school or are they based on more visceral, subjective sensory experiences that encourage the participant to continue to seek out similar sensations or pleasures?

As suggested in the ‘encouragement’ section, earliest memories have a strong correlation with positive experiences – encouragement, joy, excitement. For instance:
I think I was four when my dad was in the Mikado back in... it was just a very small production back in the country. I can remember going to those rehearsals I can remember just really loving some of the music. Do you know the Mikado at all? I loved the “Flowers that were in the Spring”, my dad used to play he had a record of that and I danced to it. (AFC, Female, 23).

When asked to reflect on first memories, a similar number of people recalled a specific performance (eg. ‘The Sound of Music’, the ballet) (34%), as did the number of people whose memories were focussed on the act of spending time with their family enjoying an arts activity (eg. playing the piano, watching a sibling in a school show) (32%).

Lasting impressions were left by attendances which carried with them an air of ceremony, importance or rarity. A number of people recalled rituals of being ‘taken out’ by grandparents or parents when a special performance came to town.

A small number of people (13%) recall their first arts experience as one where they were actively participating as a performer:

I actually remember the performance but what I actually did was something that my family reminds me of all the time. There is a scene where Snow White is asleep in one of the beds and the seven dwarves come back and they quietly walk into the room. And when they came too close apparently I got up and ran to the stage and said: “Leave her alone - she needs to sleep she’s very tired.” It was really loud, the whole theatre heard me (there are very good acoustics) and the dwarves didn’t know what to do. At the end of the performance they actually took me on stage and I was dancing with the whole family. So that was quite a memory for the whole family and hard to forget. (AFC, Female, 50).

Some people were unable to recall their earliest memories of a performing arts event, but were able to recount a point in their adult life where arts attendance took on a new significance:
It would have been when I was training to be a teacher when I lived in Canada - this is probably what got my interest going. At that time the auditorium - which was really a big barn, a mezzanine, seating around it that served as a boxing ring as well as a performing arts theatre - had asked for people to volunteer as ushers and came out to the teachers' college I was attending. So that got my interest going, so I saw the gambit from symphonies to opera, to ballet and musical, and I think that's what really sparked my interest. (QPAC, Male, 63).

Recalling performing arts experiences - Adult memories

As adults, a number of participants claim to reflect on or recall performances they have seen for an indefinite period of time after the event. A majority of these recollections are about ‘positive’ experiences, with the act of reflection a way of generating similar sensations of joy or excitement at a later point in time. For example:

I’ll wake up and I’ll still be thinking about it and [the memory of a performance] will probably carry me through the day. (SOH, Female 51).

More than one-third (34.7%) of the people interviewed identified this recollection as being a sensory memory, that is, a sound or sight that left an impression. People suggested that the nature of live performance and the ability to see something ‘real’ and ‘live’ enhanced their enjoyment:

Even something that I found dull at the time I still value very highly for the experience of it, even if I’m bored. Like the festival event where [they] just had sand pouring on their head and all over the main stage. The pace of the whole thing was hypnotic, like it was so slow, it was deadly boring from that point of view. If you were hyperactive you couldn’t have stood it. Whereas part of the whole thing was to wind right down to watch. This incredibly slow pace of sand literally pouring on people’s heads and then raking sand in very very slow motion. And it was fairly difficult to sit through an hour and a half or two of that… So some of that stuff that is at the festival, I’m not as excited about it as a lot of people might be who go more
to those high brow I suppose events. But I still appreciate them when I go for the experience of having experienced it. (AFC, Female, 47).

Recalling media and forming opinions

While early childhood experiences may foster patterns of taste and attendance in adulthood, the ‘Recollection’ section of the interview also sought to investigate how people’s current arts or performing arts behaviours are sustained through an active seeking out of related information. Specifically, people were asked if they felt their levels of attendance, or even their opinion of how pleasant or unpleasant a performance was, could be influenced by media such as reviews.

Almost nine out of ten participants (86.8%) claim to read reviews either before or after attending a performance, with a large proportion of these (43.5%) being accessed through print newspapers. However, only about 15% (slight variation between cities) claim that a favourable review influences their decision to attend a performance. For instance, one participant states:

Something will be advertised or I might see a flier somewhere. I'll have a look at it [or s]ee if there’s anything in the paper about it. Sometimes I read through reviews. But if I’ve decided I want to go, I think I won’t read a review. Sometimes they put you off, don’t they? (AFC, Female, 66).

A number of other participants reinforce this idea by suggesting that despite seeking out opinion in review or newspapers, these opinions, if negative, don’t necessarily prevent from attending. Reasons given for this included opinions such as the importance of keeping an “open mind”, the “risks” of attending the performing arts (eg. “there will always be someone who doesn’t like a particular performance”), and also a determination for people to make their own minds up about a performance.

Furthermore, despite the fact that a majority of people sought out reviews, a large number of disparaging comments were made about the credibility of the critics, for example:
What a lot of bollocks. (QPAC, Female, 64).

I think the reviewer might be biased in a particular way. (SOH, Male, 66).

I’ve read reviews sometimes and thought ‘did we go see the same thing?’ (SOH, Female, 46).

Despite the large of people who access reviews, other influences such as recommendations from family or friends, or the actual cost of a ticket have as great an impact on someone’s decision to attend a performance, or their opinion of the performance afterwards. More than half of people interviewed referred to the opinions of friends or family as highly influential.

**Recalling through conversation**

A majority of participants claimed to spend time discussing performances after having seen them. These conversations primarily took place with family or friends (66%), and focussed on giving recommendations or ‘extending’ the experience with fellow viewers:

*My girlfriend and I were talking just the other day about The Boy from Oz and that was six years ago or something. We were also talking about other things we’d been to: Phantom of the Opera and [the fact that I had] wanted to see Cats but we didn’t end up going to see it. I’d love to see Lion King as friends have seen that and they talk about it.* (AFC, Female, 34).

A few of the participants saw the act of conversation after an event as a ‘bonding’ experience, reinforcing the stronger elements of a performance such as the emotion evoked, or an educational messages. People who attended with friends were more likely to mention the act of recalling a performance as something done after a show, over coffee or wine, highlighting the importance of the audience experience beyond the end of an actual event.
The act of active recollection and discussion was especially common in instances where people attended with young children. Parents and grandparents cited that following a show, they sought out opportunities to discuss particular themes, feelings and ideas. One participant stated:

Many a time we’ll go home in the car and the kids will be talking about a particular character. “Why did he or she do that?”. I’d go “why do you think that they did that? What experience do you think has made them react that way?”. It’s a good discussion thing. It’s a good family thing in that respect it gives you an opportunity to connect. (SOH, Female, 51).

Yes. If I take the kids we talk about it and I ask if they enjoy it. They bring [a performance] up all the time: “remember when we saw this?” They talk about it all the time, they love it. (TAC, Female, 28).

Despite a tendency for a majority of people to enjoy sharing performance related experiences and opinions with other, few (11%) people nominated to discuss performances with work colleagues.

I wouldn’t talk about certainly things like the classical performances and the theatre. There are a few that I do. I mean, the fact that I’m an engineer doesn’t help. So it’s often [only] with older colleagues that I speak about what I’ve seen. (SOH, Male, 27).

Summary of key findings: Recollection

- Childhood recollections focussed primarily on the family shared experienced. Many people identified their adult tastes in the arts as having roots not only in the exposure gained through trips to the theatre or arts centre in the company of parents, but also in the encouragement – primarily at the hands of one’s mother – to pursue creative activities such as music instruction or art lessons. A small number of subjects were able to actively recall being discouraged from participating in the arts within the family context, with a larger percentage of males interviewed reporting this phenomenon than females.
• Approximately half of the sample recalled engaging with arts activities through a school curriculum, yet few were able to articulate if this exposure influenced their current arts interests. Unlike the evocative and nostalgic language and memories frequently evoked when subjects recalled family trips to see a show or their mother playing their piano, school participation was less consistent.

• In both family and school contexts, there were a small number of subjects that attributed their current interests in the arts to a key ‘mentor’ figure or facilitator such as an arts teacher, mother, or another family member. In some cases, this person would serve as a catalyst to solidify previous arts exposure ie. years of unfocussed ‘play’ with the arts as a child or young adult would all be made to seem more significant and focussed once acknowledged and encouraged by a mentor-figure.

• A majority of participants conducted research into the performances they intended to see by reading reviews. Interestingly, negative reviews did not necessarily deter people from attending a particular performance. Participants cited the recommendation and opinions of friends and family as having as great an, or even greater, influence on their attendance choices as positive or negative media reviews.

• Many participants enjoyed the opportunity to ‘extend’ or reinforce their experience of a show by actively recalling or discussing it with they people they attended with. This was considered a special bonding opportunity for parents attending with children. A number of people felt it was essential to have opportunities to ‘debrief’ with family or friends right after a performance, adding to their experience of a ‘big night out’ and reinforcing the importance of PACs providing spaces beyond the concert hall in which people can gather, socialise and enhance their experiences through conversation or debate.
BEING THERE

Content:
• Attending a Good Performance
• Attending a Bad Performance
• Solo or Co Attendance
• Facilities and Experience
• Expenditure on a “night out”

Themes:
• Co-attendance – who do we choose to attend with and why?
• Factors influencing the development of opinions and preferences.
• Purchasing patterns before and after attendance.

In the section “Being There” participants share their intimate stories of personal value and discuss in detail what they find rewarding in the moment and why. Each individual narrative provides explicit and descriptive data on positive and negative inclination; external and internal awareness of the “in the moment” experience; the importance of sharing (or not sharing) the immediate experience with others; as well as simply overcoming practical barriers in order to ‘be there’.

The data collected here forms an integral part of our broader research goal to provide insight into the processual, holistic and dynamic processes associated with performing arts consumption.

Attending a good performance

The words most used by participants when asked to describe good performance feelings were: “uplifted”, “engaged”, “enriched” and “transported”. Most discussed how wonderful it felt to be “challenged”, and the exquisite moments of not wanting the performance to end.

Participants expressed their personal values regarding live performances by discussing the sounds, smells, energy, atmosphere and surroundings, a sense of occasion, and the joy of sharing the experience, for example, coinciding glances and touch with a companion as well as a strong physical energy and connectedness with
all the people in the room. Participants also talked about a distinct sense of relaxation, of experiencing tears, nostalgia, goose-bumps, breath-holding, and butterflies in the stomach. Many mentioned an awareness of leaning forward in their chair, of aching muscles after sitting frozen in total absorption and descriptions of deep and ‘moving’ moments of self discovery, reverie, sensuality, joy, revelation, aspiration and escape.

When asked to describe the kinds of feelings and emotions evoked by a good performance, answers included:

I don't drink alcohol. I don't take any stimulants, anything. So I always go in and all my experiences are totally clean, so when I see them I really feel them. (QPAC, Male 42).

Sort of euphoric adrenaline … ‘spellbound’ … just sitting with a kinstroking kind of enjoyment… (TAC, Male, 30).

Height of emotion. There's nothing better. The only thing is probably travelling to a place that is just full of colour and noise and you're standing in a market … It leaves a lasting impression forever… (QPAC, Male 42).

… You do become one, yes. That is very strong - the link between the audience and the performer is very strong. (TAC, Male, 90).

Elated … I think that it is the experience with the other people … that’s what I find kind of cathartic. (QPAC, Female, 19).

It's relaxation - it gets us out of the house. (AFC, Female, 79).

It sort of touches the soul … gives you a lovely sense of wellbeing and joy… (TAC, Female, 57).

It is self-development, because you get immersed. But it’s not deliberate self-development… (TAC, Male, 66).

Attending a ‘bad’ performance
When asked about attending “bad” performances, the word ‘cheated’ was mentioned not in a monetary sense, but in reference to unfulfilled expectations or a sense of “lack”.

Most interviewees felt “disappointed”, “annoyed”, “uncomfortable”, “a sense of emptiness” and “emotionally drained”, however a number of participants were frequently empathetic towards the performers and still happy to have had the experience:

*I think [audiences] are too appreciative. They’re not critical enough. … Apparently they used to employ people to boo things off the stage. But we’re much more polite now we don’t actually boo when we’re disappointed.* (SOH, Female, 75).

*I think it can make you feel cheated. Very cheated, if you come away and think “well, that was ordinary.”* (TAC, Female, 50).

*I don’t like coming out unhappy… I don’t mind being made to think but I don’t like being made sad.* (TAC, Female, 75)

*I still want to intellectually engage with it to say “why was it a bad play? Why didn’t I like it?” … I still want to talk about it and talk it through.* (QPAC, Female, 59).

*It can leave you emotionally drained.* (TAC, Male, 47).

*It's a very physical experience. And if it is sort of sadness… …you're left with really quite a legacy for sometimes … I don't think I grow or develop from subjecting myself to those sorts of feelings anymore.* (TAC, Female, 57).

Participants discussed the feelings they experienced during bad performances in relation to personal and professional contexts, and included value judgements about indulgence and elitism. One interviewee discussed a sense of empowerment when walking out of a performance:
I've walked out of a few things recently, in the past few years, which I never would have done. I just can't bear to put up with it … That's a powerful feeling actually – to say 'no' and to leave. And you actually feel a bit rebellious to walk out of something … gives you more status to have left something and said, "No". Snubbed the elite. (TAC, Female, 28).

Solo or co-attendance

*When you attend performances, which best describes your mode of attendance?*

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<th>QPAC</th>
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<th>Adelaide Festival Centre</th>
<th>Sydney Opera House</th>
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<td>1 (1.5%)</td>
<td>5 (7.3%)</td>
<td>9 (13.1%)</td>
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<td>Spouse or partner</td>
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<td>5 (7.3%)</td>
<td>9 (13.1%)</td>
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<td>2 (2.9%)</td>
<td>4 (5.8%)</td>
<td>1 (1.5%)</td>
<td>8 (11.6%)</td>
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<td>7 (10.2%)</td>
<td>10 (14.5%)</td>
<td>6 (8.7%)</td>
<td>1 (1.5%)</td>
<td>25 (36.2%)</td>
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Good performance feelings involve extended positive experiences around catching up with friends and colleagues, identification with peer groups or community, and with supporting a particular company. Family interaction, for example, taking a child in order for him/her to develop skills and providing them with the opportunity to have transformative experiences, was considered by some participants important as is spending time with a partner.

Going solo is not considered a barrier to attendance for a number of the interviewees.

*Sometimes I’m selfish … 90% of the time I’d go by myself because I get a better seat. (SOH, Female, 41).*

*I went to see Victor Borge twice on my own. Well no one would come with me! (AFC, Female, 66).*
I guess it’s a bit sad and lonely and awkward to be standing around on your own. … You miss out on being able to share that with somebody. I don’t think you react as much unless you can discuss it. I know that until I’ve started discussing something I may not be aware of an opinion I’ve formed – it’s only in response to somebody else’s comment. (TAC, Female, 28).

Probably 50% solo, 50% friends. If it’s a last minute decision I’ll go by myself, just because it’s too hard to organise other people. And sometimes I won’t want to drag them to something that costs $35 if it’s crap, which I’ve done [in the past] and felt terrible. (TAC, Female, 26).

I go with my partner. I used to go with an extended group, just like a social group - have a group booking thing. When we were doing that I wasn’t in a relationship and I was going to more things I suppose and I would be less discerning as to what I was going to. (QPAC, Male, 40).

…and image is important in some ways because sometimes my youngest daughter comes and joins us for the meal, which is great. I guess it is an important evening. It’s just nice to have your kids around. (TAC, Female, 25).

I used to attend with my parents until they were too old … I kept the tickets going and now come with a friend, an old friend who I was at school with… I go with other friends to different things on an ad hoc basis. I go with my daughter, daughters-in-law, grandchildren. (TAC, Female, 66).

Facilities and Experience

Practical issues such as size and venue affect the quality of the experience as does price, parking, availability of food, air conditioning, space and seating. However, sometimes a good performance can overcome these problematic practicalities.

Yes, recently we went to the comedy theatre and saw “Menopausal Woman” and that was a scream, but the comedy theatre seats were just disgusting. I’m never going back there. (TAC, Female, 57).
I have trouble with my back and I find the seats in the Town Hall more comfortable than the ones at the Festival Theatre…. But then again I took my grandchildren to see Swan Lake on Ice a couple of weeks ago and because something was happening all the time I didn’t even use my special cushion I got so caught up in it. (AFC, Female, 79).

I like sitting right down the very front almost in the orchestra. Because there’s this intimacy, particularly if it’s a solo performer. You’re almost sitting here… (AFC, Female, 73).

It gives you a sort of sense of occasion every time … you come up the stairs and you know it’s a special thing … I never lose that, … the smell of coming up. You know, the actual surrounds. (QPAC, Female, 62).

Expenditure on a night out

Thinking about a night out, make an estimate of how much you spend on tickets, parking, eating, drinks, etc?

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<th>QPAC</th>
<th>Arts Centre, VIC</th>
<th>Adelaide Festival Centre</th>
<th>Sydney Opera House</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<td>$0 - $50</td>
<td>3 (4.4%)</td>
<td>4 (5.8%)</td>
<td>3 (4.4%)</td>
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<td>37 (53.6%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>$100 - $200</td>
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<td>2 (2.9%)</td>
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When asked about expenses incurred on a “night out” 11 participants checked the “enthusiastic spenders” box while the majority, 56 participants, checked standard expenses.

I don't really care all that much how much it costs me…I'm embarrassed saying that because I know that there are people out there who are struggling… But that is the advantage of not going
every week. It is one of these little luxuries that you enjoy. … a restaurant meal and then interval, a drink, tea coffee and biscuits. (QPAC, Male, 66).

On occasion we’ve made a weekend of it. Like we did when we came to see ‘Let it be’. Thought, why not? It’s a good excuse to have a weekend even though we’re only half an hour from home, its still a weekend away. (SOH, Female, 69).

My wife buys a dress or shoes or earrings and necklace. Usually it adds a fair amount to the cost of the event…Yes, she wants to feel good and look good and its going to be an event to remember. (QPAC, Male, 66).

Enthusiastic spending did not always mean buying a programme. Respondents answered No (26), Yes (25) and Depends (23).

No, never. Good God. My husband will pay for the expensive seat but he won’t pay for the programme. It’s just the frugality of it all. (QPAC, Female, 36).

We love where you pay for your program up front and then you come in with a voucher and you don’t have to fiddle around getting your money out. (SOH, Female, 69).

I’d love to find out a little bit more but every time I have bought a program in the past it’s just filled with advertisements and nothing I couldn’t get on the Internet in terms of information. (SOH, Male, 27).

My wife is a big influence because she just doesn’t like paying money for that sort of thing. We don’t buy cheap tickets when we go to the theatre, we usually go to a restaurant, so for us it’s a big night out. (SOH, Male, 66).
Summary of key findings: Being There

- Many participants described an intense feeling of captivation as key to regarding a performing arts experience as worthwhile. Powerful emotions generated – euphoria, joy, uplifted, transported, challenged – correlate with the level of satisfaction reported by participants. Whether or not the emotions were ‘positive’ (eg. happy, joyful) or ‘negative’ (eg. angry, afraid) did not matter so much as the degree to which the participant felt moved.

- Participants felt that a ‘bad’ performance was one where their expectations were left unfulfilled or that the experience was ‘ordinary’. Expectations were attributed to both how the performance was promoted as well as the general expectations people attended a flagship performing arts centre.

- The participants we spoke to ranged in their mode of attendance with many emphasising the importance of social aspects while others would readily attend on their own in order to secure the best seats or not miss out on a particular performance.

- The quality of practical physical aspects of a performing arts centre such as seat, parking, or sound do contribute to the overall satisfaction levels of participants, but in far more complex ways than we often consider. Many people felt that uncomfortable seating or poor lines of sight could be ignored should they feel ‘transported’ by the actual performance enough. A number cited the physical surrounds as intrinsically connected to the overall experience as things such as the ‘smell’ or act of walking into the venue reinforcing the expectations of quality or international standards.
With regards to expenditure, our participants reflect a variety of attitudes. Most acknowledged that a considerable level of expense is involved in attending a show at a major performing arts centre but that it was justified as a treat or ‘little luxury.’ Approximately 50% of participant considered spending between $50-100 on a performance as a ‘standard’ amount.
**PERSISTENCE**

**Content:**
- Social Significance of attending and participating in the arts
- Community value of the arts
- Valuing inclusion

**Themes**
- What can the Arts do me?
- What can the Arts do for others?
- Transformative effects
- Analogies for the Arts
- Mediations
- Politics/identity
- Knowing the city

Participants were prompted to identify (or otherwise comment on) personal and, if applicable, broader benefits of the arts by considering persistent benefits. Necessarily, this overlaps with the section on ‘Recollection’ but is distinguished by posing the question within a values frame. The audience members’ lasting impressions contribute to the formation of more general, summative and broadly political attitudes towards the performing arts. It is here that interview subjects began to suggest what the arts are “for”. In response to this line of questioning, interviewees freely imagined or indeed, advocated of behalf of the social impact of the performing arts. The examples below are selected with an eye to identifying some recurrent and intertwined themes that are widely represented throughout the interview set as a whole.

**Social Significance of attending and participating in the performing arts**

What emerged in the course of analysing these interviews were efforts on the part of participants to map (and differentiate) their experience of the complex social significance of the performing arts. Interviewees described the performing arts through a range of metaphors and analogies that find their source in nourishment, be it physical (the arts are as essential to physical sustenance as access to a grocery store) or metaphysical (the arts may be a more important source of spiritual values than a cathedral).
From the vantage point of arts professionals defending the sector, such comparisons may seem at best overly familiar and at worst hackneyed and exhausted. What is surprising is less the content than the vigour and sincerity of their expression. In what may well prove significant, for some participants, this perception - that the performing arts represent a storehouse of important (and even transcendental) content - was predicated on an understanding that the performing arts were understood as a special and exclusive form of communication that evades normal channels of social and political inhibition, if not censorship itself. This unburdened cultural material expressed through the performing arts was then free to “flow” into society with imagined or at least anticipated transformative consequences. For instance:

_For me, it allows certain ideas to be communicated in a different forum ... I see the performing arts is still an avenue where you can get up and you can communicate a story and it’s not silenced. It’s in its raw form. Sometimes it allows me to think about things in a different way, or at least go “hey, that’s an idea. I hadn’t thought about, maybe I should explore that a bit more”. That then flows into society because whether it is subconscious or otherwise it has that effect on other people and that in itself I think is extremely important._ (TAC, Melbourne, 27).

_It’s as important as having the grocery shop really. You have to feed that part of people._ (AFC, Female, 66).

_To me, this place has a greater symbolic and spiritual value to me than the cathedral up the road which to me represents abhorrence of religion and suppression and conservatism. I’m just using it as a contrast, I guess, because some people would see [the cathedral] as a sacred place that represents the best of what people are and should be. To me it represents a lot of hideousness and not what it purports to be. The things that I hold really dear are often represented through artistic endeavour._ (AFC, Female, 47).

Taking these selected quotes in turn, the first speculates on the significance of the performing arts centre as a transit point for “certain ideas” that pass through it. Routing something through a different forum is, at least here, perceived as
consequential. This participant discussed the performing arts centre in terms that seek to differentiate it from other contemporary spaces and experiences. In this account, the centres are significant because they offer time and space for deliberation, a thoughtful and speculative experience that stands in marked contrast to an alternative (the media sphere perhaps?) that registers as overcooked, noisy and affording no such opportunities for reflection. While the performing arts centre is recognised and valued as a unique space that cultivates and encourages individual contemplation, critically, it also possesses a potentially transformative social capacity. This reaffirms and enriches the original conception of the performing arts centre as a transitional space for socially significant thought.

The second and third quotes similarly argue the significance of the centres as well as demonstrating how the (rare?) opportunity to discuss the arts at a level of some institutional abstraction occasioned a discussion of social and political value.

Community value of the arts

Other participants amplified on the status of the performing arts as a privileged form of communication that is exempted from the habitual constraints imposed by the media and political spheres. They considered theatre as “raw” and, curiously, unmediated. This relates to the “liveness” of theatre, something identified by a number of participants as both aesthetically and culturally significant. In spite of the seemingly self-evident ways in which performance is to greater and lesser degrees scripted and staged in a fashion that is far removed (at least for many if not most forms of performance) from the spontaneous and improvisatory, respondents construed liveness as if it were synonymous with sincerity and authenticity. Not only are the performing arts discussed in terms of a kind of privileged truthfulness, but they also apparently partake of global cultural movements, tying participants simultaneously to a specific site and to much broader networks of significance.

*I see performing arts is still an avenue where you can get up and you can communicate a story and it’s not silenced and it’s in its raw form, especially some of the local theatre groups … you’re really getting that communication of ideas from what people are really thinking. Not what the newspapers tell you to believe or the TV tells you to believe, but just grass-roots people that you’re likely to pass down the street and a complete stranger and then you’ll see those same people get up and communicate their ideas in whatever*
forum it might be whether it is painting or sculpture or indeed drama through plays. Umm, and so, that is important to me personally because sometimes it allows me to think about things in a different way, or at least go “heh, that’s an idea I hadn’t thought about, maybe I should explore that a bit more or …” and that then flows into society because I think, it’s, I think that we’re probably, whether it is subconscious or otherwise it has that effect on other people and that in itself I think is extremely important. (TAC, Male, 27).

Some of the benefits identified were apparently peripheral to the performing arts yet actually reveal the way that attending performing arts centres can generate feelings of community. One notable example is the participant who spoke fondly of lining up for the Spiegeltent. One might consider queuing a grim necessity or, at best, a neutral experience, yet here it was a place to consider the connectedness of the arts centre to global cultural movements, as well as an important and pleasurable occasion to converse with fellow audience members. It is also a location from which to appreciate the city – not celebrate it histories or view its pageants - but to enjoy and personally claim a stake in its specific urbanity. While this relates broadly to the role of performing arts centres play in producing a “sense of occasion”, there are other larger claims that might be made on behalf of the role of PACs in fostering cosmopolitan attitudes evidenced in the interviews. Referring to the capacity of citizens to have interest and experience in different cultural experiences and to have a general attitude of openness to the different worlds around them, cosmopolitanism will become an increasingly prominent word in cultural policy discourses. These attitudes should be considered evidence that performing arts centres are a subset of public institutions that actively promote feelings of ease amid social and cultural difference as well as an aesthetic and psychological appreciation of urban diversity.

You know the Spiegeltent puts on amazing performances; raunchy, way-out performances that I think are just glorious. What I think is that it makes you feel like you’re not isolated ‘down under’ and that you’ve actually got exposure to a whole range of cultural events. I think it’s just wonderful and I think that it can only benefit… And then when you’re queuing up for the Spiegeltent, you’re standing next to, you know, all different sorts of people and you all start up little conversations; there’s a great sense of goodwill; the city is all lit-up; you feel that you’re in a special place and somehow where you are or who you are of what background you come from – you’re all lining up as equals and I really, really like that. (TAC, Female, 57).
Valuing inclusion

Concerns were raised about the benefits of the arts not being made available to all members of society. Specifically, the economics of ticket pricing was suggested as a fault-line of social exclusion. To this was added a further barrier in the form of an aging audience. Intriguingly the solution imagined by respondents was a form of private subsidy such as might occur inter-generationally within a family.

That’s the issue for the western suburbs because for those people to put money into a subscription, they would have to see that as a priority. How do you make them see that as a priority when they are not involved? And they can’t get involved because they can’t afford to pay. And that’s this business with the people in, the young people that we’ve encouraged to come. I reckon that there is a lot of grey haired people, but everybody’s got grey hair. You could go to any of these things, the opera stock is not as bad, the ballet is better, but by and large, there are all these grey people. I reckon if every grey couple went home and nominated a young person that they like, or a young couple, even if it’s in their family or whatever and bought them a couple of tickets to anything.

Well I guess it relates to how I feel about the kids and how I feel about the western suburbs … it is an essential aspect of kid’s development and that means people’s development. It needs to be part of the wallpaper that is normal because of the development and the expression and the communication and the way you see the world and the way that you see yourself. In turn, particularly for kids, you just open their minds and if adults don’t do that. I mean, there’s a million western suburbs families out there that don’t get involved … all the years we’ve been coming, all the things we’ve been coming to, not one person have I met that I know from the western suburbs. Not one. and that is incredible. All of those people, in my view, are being denied … being denied the benefits and the mind broadening aspects of the whole thing, the enjoyment, the fun, the way other people see the world. (TAC, Male, 66).
Summary of key findings: Persisting

- The performing arts generally and the major performing arts centres involved in this study specifically are associated with sincerity and authenticity that distinguishes them from other forms of contemporary communication. This is predominantly due to peoples’ perceptions of the ‘liveness’ or ‘raw-ness’ of performances (whilst simultaneously acknowledging that they are scripted and rehearsed).

- Performing arts centre is recognised and valued as unique spaces that cultivate and encourage individual contemplation, offer time and space for deliberation, and provide a thoughtful and speculative experience unique to that of everyday life. Some participants believe that this personal reflection can flow on into social transformation.

- Performing arts centres foster cosmopolitan dispositions.

- Access was cited as important. Many participants acknowledged that costs associated with performances prohibited a broad cross-section of the community from attending. This was considered a shortcoming not simply for the financial implications to audiences but because it prevents the greater community from being able to share the educational, reflective, and transformative experiences on offer at performing arts centres.
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings outlined in Phase 1 of the ‘Audiences’ study pointed to a number of future directions that can be explored to further our understanding of the roles of performing arts centres in regards to audiences. For instance:

- Performing Arts Centres were identified as institutions that can generate feelings of community and, significantly, spaces from which to appreciate the city. What are the ways in which they can foster potentially transformative consequences?

- There have been many studies that explore links between early exposure to the arts and adult attendance. There is great potential to further explore people’s early experiences and adult tastes and attendance patterns. For instance, how does early exposure to ballet, for instance, lead to an adult ‘literacy’ in this art form and does this encourage greater participation?

- Cross-generational attitudes towards arts attendance – how has encouragement or discouragement to participate in the arts changed over time?

- There was very little consistency across people’s experiences with arts education in school. This ranged from non-existent to boring, mandatory in some instance but generally unenjoyable. Why is it that so few people attribute adult tastes to patterns commenced during school?

- Relationships were continually referred to throughout this series of interviews: the relationships fostered between parents or grandparents and children via arts attendance, the adult friendships or marriages strengthened by attendance off show and discussions afterwards, the impacts of mentors etc. How can appreciating these connections between audiences serve as a lens through which to better understand why, how, when, and where people attend arts performance or engaging in arts activities?
• How do people contextualise attendance at performing arts centres in terms of competing events, reflecting both time and other cultural preferences, and budgetary demands?

• What is the relationship between performing arts attendance and media consumption - how they may interact and reinforce each other? Given people’s impressions of the performing arts as a privileged form of communication, how do audiences compare live performance with mediated performance experiences such as television, film, and the internet?
PHASE 2: PERTH THEATRE TRUST & THE EDGE, AUCKLAND

BACKGROUND – ‘AUDIENCES & COMMUNITIES’

In 2006 the Sustaining Culture ‘Audiences’ study conducted phase 1 of its research. This involved conducting 69 individual, semi-structured, qualitative, hour-long interviews across four Australian cities. During each interview the participants completed a written survey providing quantitative as well as qualitative data. The sample for phase 1 was drawn from the major performing arts centres’ audiences and non-attendees recruited in Brisbane (Queensland Performing Arts Centre), Melbourne (The Arts Centre), Sydney (Sydney Opera House) and Adelaide (Adelaide Festival Centre).

Phase 2 research, titled “Audiences and Communities”, was based at The Edge, Auckland (TE) and Perth Theatre Trust (PTT) and developed from key themes and findings identified from phase 1 results. Phase 2 adds value to the extensive qualitative data collected in phase 1.

Key research themes and questions – ‘Audiences and Communities’

The phase 2 study features a targeted focus on the ways in which audiences integrate and value attending the performing arts alongside other everyday commitments, interests, and motivations. The findings in phase 2 give an insight into the complex range

This study developed research instruments based on the themes identified from coding and analysis of qualitative data collected throughout Phase 1. These themes centre around the following concepts and questions:

1. Arts participation and well-being. One of the important themes from the initial interviews relates to the way people use their arts participation for material, emotional and spiritual sustenance. People’s experience at performing arts centres becomes a resource that builds personal and familial capital. In the Phase 2 study we use a survey instrument developed through
our qualitative study to measure and describe the ways in which arts participation becomes a resource for people.

2. **Arts participation, kinship and intergenerational practice.** For people of all ages and life stages interviewed in Phase 1, performing arts experiences are frequently perceived as valuable. How is attendance of performing arts events understood as an opportunity for individuals, families, friends and communities to connect and bond?

3. **Arts participation and the field of media consumption and practice.** The relationship between participation in the performing arts with media consumption and practice is explored across various art forms. Information on media consumption and use contributes to an understanding of the relationship between perception, relevance and value across media formats. For example, does attendance at film festivals correlate with attendance of performing arts shows? How do they build upon and sustain one another?

4. **Arts participation, cultural economics and ‘broader’ benefits.** How is attendance at arts events associated with household budgeting and spending preferences? When, why and how do people decide to allocate their discretionary spending on the arts? What types of benefits do they expect, and receive, in return? What types of benefits do individuals perceive their community or city expects and receives in return?

**RESEARCH METHOD**

The research instrument is a qualitative semi-structured interview based on the themes emerging from the first phase of data collection conducted by the "Audiences" study in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide. Audience members who meet required sampling criteria (based on variables such as frequency of attendance, participation in a particular program, attendance at a specific performance or art form, or gender) were identified by the industry partners – The Edge, Auckland and Perth Theatre Trust and invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Participants were also asked to fill out a short survey questionnaire online either prior to their interview or on the day, in order to provide basic demographic data such as age group and occupation.
INTERGENERATIONAL PRACTICE

Content
- Earliest memories
- Encouragement and discouragement from family
- School participation
- Co-attendance choices in adulthood

Themes
- Performing arts and biography
- Literacy & early exposure
- Social bonding & relationships

For people of all ages and life stages, arts experiences are frequently perceived as valuable. Under the area of inquiry we refer to as “Arts Participation, kinship and inter-generational practice”, we explore the following key questions:

- How is attendance at arts events and participation in arts activities understood as an opportunity for individuals, families, friends and communities to connect?
- How does this change or evolve across life stages?
- What role do mentors, peers, and other ‘influencers’ play in our arts consumption and participation?

In order to examine these themes, interview participants were once again, as in Phase 1, asked to reflect on their earliest experiences and consider how they may or may not have been encouraged to engage in activities that focussed on their own active artistic expression or more passive viewing of arts performances. Participants were further encouraged to identify any parallels between their earliest experiences and their current attendance patterns & genre preferences, particularly their co-attendance choices.

This series of questions began with a natural starting point that required people to recollect their earliest memories of a performing arts experience. Participants were prompted to consider the context in which that experience occurred and whether or
not they recalled being actively encouraged or discouraged by family members, friends, the broader community, or school from engaging in creative pursuits.

Although numerous studies exist that demonstrate ways in which early life exposure increases the likelihood of arts participation in adulthood – a finding reflected in our research – our qualitative approach served to capture the complexity of these formative influences. For instance, participants revealed that early exposure in some cases deterred their adult participation (mandatory music lessons, genre over-saturation such as Gilbert and Sullivan musicals in high school). Also noted was the rich variety of outcomes people expect from their attendance that extend beyond the simply enjoyment of a performance for its own sake. Many participants also reflect on the numerous contemporary barriers they are required to overcome in order to maintain their attendance (e.g. increasing lifestyle costs, availabilities, competing agendas, changes to the relationships held with people who previously accompanied them to shows).

The ways in which people choose to use visiting an arts performance as a way of maintaining or enriching personal or professional relationships was investigated by asking participants to consider not only their response to a performance, but the ways in which they attempt to extend and share the experience after the performance is completed. By asking the question: “Do you discuss performances after they take place?” we were able to investigate motivations and expectations relating to performing arts attendance, and the ways in which people attempt to enhance their experiences by being highly selective in who they choose to go to shows with and selecting performances based on co-attendees rather than content.

The question prompts of co-attendance and post-event discussion revealed insights into the ways people use the opportunity to visit an arts centre or see a performance to enhance their relationships with partners, children, colleagues and friends by affording unique opportunities to debate contemporary issues, develop shared memories, facilitate self-education opportunities or the ‘education’ of one’s family members or friends, or simply utilise the performing arts centre as the backdrop for a social occasion.

At the core of interrogating arts participation, kinship and intergenerational practice is the premise that early exposure to the arts is integral to peoples’ participation as adults. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu posits that inherent to a person’s aesthetic
preferences (including a broad range of lifestyle preferences, of which arts attendance would be a part) is the combination of economic, social and cultural financial resources pertaining to one’s family situation. Bourdieu argues that these aesthetic preferences are cemented in the earliest stages of our lives rather than accumulated over time through a person’s experiences during their education. In fact, Bourdieu believed that the schooling system simply reinforces aesthetic preferences that already exist, rather than contributing to the development of an individual’s cultural capital.

More recent research in the field of cultural consumption builds on Bourdieu’s work by expanding it to include more varied cultural and social contexts, and finding that education can and does play a crucial role in the development of aesthetic preferences. In some studies (cited in text below), results have shown that ‘literacy’ developed through formal arts education can have a far greater impact on adult participation than even finances, income, costs or time availability (although these other variables do possess differing levels of impact).

Through our qualitative interviews in Phase 2, we uncovered some of the complexities that pertain to the above empirical findings, adding richness and a local context to our understanding of early influences, adult preferences, and the ways in which people interested in the arts maintain their attendance and share their preferences to others.

**Earliest Memories**

Orend and Keegan (1996) emphasise that early exposure to the arts is imperative in building levels of knowledge and participation throughout one’s life. This core principle – the basis of much of the research conducted in the fields of cultural participation - was used to inform our questioning into each interview participants’ earliest memories of their performing arts engagement.

When asked to recollect their earliest experiences of a performance or arts event, a majority of people were able to cite specific examples of childhood attendance. Many recalled active, participatory experiences in which they were involved in a school play, ballet classes, or music lessons and performances. The very nature of childhood means that most people’s encounters with the arts in their early years take place in these types of structured social contexts. Furthermore, given the young age
at which these first experiences occur, it was only natural that a number of people have distinct memories of attending performances with parents, siblings or other family members.

The evidence that many children enter a school environment with pre-existing aesthetic opinions and tastes developed through their everyday encounters with family, friends, media consumption, and attachment to particular objects demonstrates the high importance that the family context plays in early arts exposure. The socialising effect of arts participation in early years can serve to establish a context in which the arts are valued and people are encouraged to engage and develop this creative literacy. Art works and performances are metaphorical representations – the impact of early arts exposure and education allows people to develop their skills in interpretation and awareness of shared cultural capital (Borgonovi 1875).

For instance:

*My sixth grade teacher in Hollywood, California, took us down to the Concert Hall to hear an afternoon concert - I would have been about 11, 12 years old. It made an impression alright - I really did get a fine appreciation for classical music. When I came to Perth I was so disgruntled with what was on the radio that I just started tuning in on the classical station and realised how much I missed classical music and have been a fan ever since. When the Concert Hall opened in 1973 I think I probably attended about 80 per cent of the performances all these years. (PTT, Male).*

*I think my earliest performance was when I was in school. We went to the ballet and the grandeur of it is something that I remember. I remember thinking, “Wow, it’s actually real people doing this sort of thing, and aren’t they talented”. (PTT, Female).*

*When I was quite young, my mother took me to see like a skating on ice show. My mum was a very big influence in my trying different activities throughout my schooling years. I remember going to the show and I really loved it - I actually did start figure skating after that. I remember when I used to go to those shows I was just quite spellbound by the whole production and I thought it was really, really beautiful. (PTT, Female).*
Encouragement and discouragement from family

The work of Pierre Bourdieu argued that school-based arts learning has little or no independent positive value on a person’s acquisition of cultural capital and its translation into instrumental outcomes. Rather, Bourdieu regarded the resources of the family unit and the socialization experience attained through this as the key to developing one’s cultural capital. Bourdieu believed that much of an individual’s success in school is pre-determined by the family’s resources, and that school merely served to reinforce and legitimise what was already established.

More recent research has built on Bourdieu’s early work. By taking into account different social contexts, it is shown that school-based arts education can indeed play all too important a role in the attainment of cultural capital. That said, there is a significant body of research available on the invaluable influence of the family context in establishing early patterns of recognition and value of cultural activity, or reinforcing the impact of school arts programs.

In a 2004 study by Kimberley Kracman titled “The effect of school-based arts instruction on attendance at museums and the performing arts”, it was found that a mother’s education has a significant effect on the probability of a child attending a gallery or museum. Similarly, people’s who have mothers with a college education are 1.52 times more likely to be arts consumers than those whose mothers have a high school education only (p.210).

In “Performing arts attendance: an economic approach” (2004) Francesca Borgonovi reveals more artform specific findings. For instance, she finds that a mother’s educational attainment positively correlates with participation in ballet performances and increases the likelihood of a person attending such performances. A mother’s educational attainment was also found to be more likely to positively influence the frequency of participation in classical music performances (p.1882). In both studies, the father’s education had no significant effects. Kracman suggests that the reason for the verifiable influence of mother’s on our adult tastes and activities is the important socialisation role that mothers play in their children’s lives through reading to them, talking with them, helping with homework etc (p.1981) in addition to the more overt practice of taking them to concerts or dance recitals.
In our study, we explored people’s memories and impressions of their own experiences of arts participation in the family context. A majority of people could recall some form of encouragement to engage with the arts, whether it be active engagement (classes, lessons, choirs, etc) or passive participation (going to show with parents). Approximately 81% of people surveyed in Auckland could recall participating in arts activities as a child with 76.2% recalling being actively encouraged to engage with creative pursuits. Perth participants registered a different level of engagement with only 52.2% recalling being encouraged to participate as a child.

My mum made sure we were exposed to the arts because I remember going to see ballets and things like that as a child, and I learned the piano and my sister went to dancing. With my own children I made sure they were encouraged to do lessons in ballet and in music as well. (PTT, Female).

I think that the reason why I’m so obsessed with live performance is because my parents took me to the theatre when I was a kid. I feel really strongly when people are talking about audience development - it's really basic, you just take your kids to the theatre. (TE, Female).

When I was a child, fathers had very little to do with their children. My mother was always the one that took me to classes and brought me home again and made all the costumes and did all the things that were necessary. My father was always there to watch the performance but I can’t remember him ever being involved in actually taking me to a music lesson or a dancing lesson. (PTT, Female).

I remember the first time I went to a big, large scale professional show when I was about 11 and went to see Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat at the London Palladium. I remember it being a big, big night out for the family, a big Christmas treat. I just remember how exciting the whole event was, not just what you were seeing on stage but the whole act of actually going out, going into the theatre, going out for dinner before, all the different things associated with a night out at the theatre as well as the actual show. I was hooked from then, basically, and just tried to see as much as I could. I knew I wanted to be part of it somehow and I currently work as a producer for a theatre company. (TE, Male).
Many interview participants also reveal a range of factors that hindered a deeper engagement with the arts during childhood. Most common among these self-identified obstacles was the lack of resources available to their families. This included limited financial resources, disinterest on the part of one or both parents, preferences for other pastimes such as sports, or regional isolation.

My parents never really influenced me in terms of art and the like one way or the other. I was very sports oriented when I was a lot younger, so that was more that influence there. Albany, where I lived most of my childhood, was very barren of theatre, art, performances in general, which was a shame. (PTT, Male).

I was one of four boys [and therefore] there wasn't much money. (PTT, Male).

Mum’s not a great art lover. She’s been to the odd ballet, but I don’t think she enjoys it. Never been to an opera, not a great film goer, plays, no, so she’s not a great arts lover. (PTT, Male).

I tend to be more of a sporty person … so I was mainly in sporting teams and things like that. I probably didn’t become very interested in [the arts] until probably in my early 20s. When I went to University I’d go and see some productions there and that’s where it started. (PTT, Female).

I don’t have a recollection of my very first performance. It was a very small country town, not much happened there. (PTT, Female).

I was always an attendee if possible. I think my parents were too but we lived in the country, on a farm, so we didn’t get really too many opportunities. (PTT, Male).

Although economic, physical, cultural or social obstacles hindered some of our interviewees from participating in the arts until their circumstance altered in adulthood, a number ascribed their arts appreciation being fostered in ways other than attendance at theatre or arts venue. A number of participants recalled their early arts participation as taking place almost exclusively in the context of the family home through singing, playing musical instruments, listening to records, or through other social opportunities such as church attendance and choir singing.
My mum’s family were all quite musical. They were a Scottish family and I can remember having parties and we’d all sing around the piano. Mum liked mainly music, but she would go to the ballet sometimes too. (TE, Female).

An interesting and unexpected range of responses that came up during our interviews were cases in which children influenced the tastes and attendance patterns of their parents. One participant recalled her exposure to new art forms and performances during her children’s attendance at an elite high school with a strong performing arts program:

We [my husband & I] were stunned at the productions that we’d go along and see at the school and think, “wow, this is as good as you see in professional theatre.” They’re really high quality and I think the children were very, very blessed with that. Our son got really interested in back stage management and was involved in a couple of productions at His Majesty’s Theatre because of the school that he went to. (PTT, Female).

Other interview subjects mentioned that they enjoyed attending selections made by their children, both for the opportunities these times provided to bond as well as the ways their children’s selection of content (experimental, populist) extended them beyond their comfort zone and exposed them to productions they would not otherwise choose for themselves. For instance:

Yes, we did go to some [productions] when Liz was at university that we wouldn’t have normally have gone to. Some really alternative stuff and it was interesting. (PTT, Female).

School Participation

A number of key studies in arts participation show that education and financial factors are the best indicators of attendance (Baumol and Bowen 1966; Throsby 1979; DiMaggio and Useem 1983; McCarthy et al 2001), with increasing evidence of education being the best predictor of attendance (DiMaggio and Useem 1978; Orend 1989; Bergonzi and Smith 1996; Borgonovi 2004; Kracman 2004).
In the study “Performing Arts attendance: an economic approach” (2004), Francesca Borgonovi finds that arts education in particular is more important in determining arts attendance than general education (p.1884). The effects of this education as complementary, for instance education and attendance in one type of performing arts form, is more likely to result in attendance in another art forms. While Borgonovi agrees that financial factors, time constraints and geographic proximity also result in variations in attendance patterns, they are less likely to influence the propensity for people to attend than their arts education exposure.

Similarly, in Kracman’s 2004 study, findings show that arts education provided through the school system has a significant positive effect on adult participation in the arts, independent of measures of family background (p.215). Kracman believes that consistent arts exposure in the school system often works to equalise any family-based variations such as income and parental education. By placing a value on arts participation, schools may “serve to lessen initial differences in cultural resources among students, thus making the acquisition and exercise of cultural capital more generally attainable (p. 216).

Based on what is now decades of evidence, the value of arts education in a school context cannot be under-estimated. Yet, throughout our interview process, school-based arts performance remained one of the most variable factors captured. While many participants were able to recall some form of participation in school-based arts education such as formal classes, collective activities such as school plays or musicals, or extra-curricula excursions to see shows, roughly 50% of all participants could recall little opportunity or encouragement to participate in the arts throughout their education.

Our interviews show that school participation tended to occur more frequently in younger participants, or those with schools based in urban or city environments. Many cited geographic isolation as a factor in the availability of arts resources at their schools (particularly the case in Perth and surrounding regions), while others suggested that activities such as sport or academic subjects were more highly regarded and encouraged in their schools or communities.

The highly variable, inconsistent approach to arts education across schools can also be attributed to the ways that arts education have evolved over the years - older interviewees were less likely to have participated in arts activities during their primary
school and high school years than younger interviewees. Another possible explanation for the variability in response to this question is the interviewees’ own perception of what does and does not qualify as ‘arts education.’ Some participants understood this question to refer to only formal, structured programs such as music lessons, school plays, or arts classes. Others took a broader definition and included less formal types of arts exposure such as excursions to galleries and museums, access to practice rooms or other arts resources after hours, or regular opportunities to watch touring arts council productions.

As both young experiences through family and schools demonstrate, these encounters can have enormous impact on future cultural opportunities and participation in both individuals and their families and friends likelihood of participation.

There were no options for doing drama or music or anything. I was bright. I was in the academic stream, but it didn't tip over into any of those sorts of things. I never went on one single arts excursion of any sort on the whole of my schooling, and only sports things. I went to a few away games with cricket. That’s about the extent of it. It just didn't happen in those days. (PTT, Male).

I went to a good city school in Auckland for girls but I didn’t learn [any arts activities]. I had learned piano and dance as a child a little bit and I wanted to continue but I wasn’t able to when we came to Auckland. There was very little motivation or encouragement through school in those days that I was aware of. (TE, Female).

I can remember performers coming to my school and that was the first time I saw a performance. There was a group here called Theatre Corporate and they used to come around to the schools, so I remember that very fondly. That was fantastic. (TE, Female).

I went to quite a small school, so everybody was involved in everything. That’s why I started in school plays. I didn’t really have any interest in acting and I don’t anymore but I did act in school plays, just because everybody was involved in. It was just a fun kind of thing to do, a social thing. (TE, Female).
It was probably when I was about 16 and it was the first time that I felt that I got Shakespeare and it was just having one inspiring teacher who actually believed in what they were teaching, rather than just teaching Shakespeare because it was on the syllabus. I never really did drama lessons at primary school when I was younger, it was when I was much older that I started to get interested and involved through good support from my parents and a particularly inspiring English teacher. (PTT, Male).

Co-attendance choices in adulthood

There is significant and consistent evidence in our study that points to the important role that arts attendance plays in developing and maintaining social bonds. Asking who a person chooses to attend the performing arts with often reveals their motivations for attendance, and vice versa. A number of people we interviewed reflected on the ways their attendance provides opportunities to spend time with partners or other family members, and many people discussed the ways in which friendship groups were maintained through attendance. Also, a number of participants reflected on the ways in which they seek to establish the same patterns of attendance with their children or grandchildren that their own parents established with them, using the experience of arts attendance as a bonding opportunity, educational experience, special ‘treat’, or even a parental obligation.

While there is the obvious understanding that people select shows and events based on the content of a performances and their own personal tastes, the question of who one attends with also plays an important role in which show and venue people may end up visiting. Walker and Sherwood’s study “Participation in Arts and Culture” (2003) finds that there are unique motivations pertaining to attendance at a high end arts venue versus attendance at a community arts venue. On average, people who primarily attend arts and cultural events in community venues are less likely to be motivated by an interest in the art on show and more motivated by social reasons such as getting together with family and friends, or celebrating their heritage (p.7). This finding is of particular relevance to the Perth Theatre Trust which encompasses both high-end venues such as the Perth performing arts centre and smaller community-focussed spaces such as the Subiaco Arts Centre.

In “Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance” (2007), Brown and Novak investigate the “role of the arts in community vitality and how arts experiences create
social capital – the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values that bind human networks into communities” (p.16). They find that attendance produces benefits at both the community level, as well as on an interpersonal level by providing opportunities for family cohesion, expanding one’s social networks and enhancing audience’s abilities to empathise with others. Brown and Novak qualified these findings by maintaining that such benefits do not happen overnight, but are developed over many years.

In our interviews, a number of people commented on how both venue and performance play a role in allowing them to explore the social dimensions of their attendance and co-attendance. For instance:

*I just think it is a wonderful experience. I get lost in anything I watch. I actually become right there on stage. Maybe they don’t have the ability to do that, but most of my friends aren’t very open to it [theatre]. I take my mother and I pay for her and I usually pay for my best friend to come with me because she won’t pay the prices, so it’s a real Catch 22.* (PTT, Female).

*I attend with] women in the same age group [as me]. One of them is divorced, one of them has just lost her husband, and my husband works away during the week and comes to Perth on weekends. So we’ve sort of got this little group where we’re all similar.* (PTT, Female).

*[My sister] studied music a lot more than I did so she’s got a much more intellectual understanding of it, so she’s my main person that I go to performances with.* (TE, Female).

*[I attend with people] I’ve met since I’ve stopped work, through going to bridge, at the local community centre, as well as my sister.* (TE, Female).

*There’s a core of 7 that go to virtually everything, the full season. If people know they are going overseas they might drop out for a couple but other than that people say, “Whatever it is we’ll go, we won’t discriminate, we’ll go.* (TE, Female).

*I’ve only been in Perth four years and I have not made many friends or they don’t appreciate the same things as me, so I do tend to go on my own … I*
would prefer to go with somebody to share it with because it’s more fun but if there’s no one around then I’m happy to go myself. You meet other people there at the same time anyway. (PTT, Female).

Quantitatively, the audience samples and their preferred attendance partners varied between the Perth and Auckland venues. The audience at both the Perth Theatre Trust and The Edge indicate they are highly likely to attend performances with friends and/or their spouse or partner. 38.1% of The Edge participants indicated attending with their spouse or partner, as compared to 56.5% of the participants in Perth. Attendance with friends is greater for the sample at The Edge at almost 43%, compared to only 26% for the people we spoke with in Perth.

The following quotes reflect an interesting cross-section of attitudes towards adult co-attendance:

*I’m glad that my daughter’s now in her twenties and she’s beginning to appreciate the fine arts. I think if I’d asked her when she was 15 to go to the ballet she wouldn’t have gone, but at 25 she’s quite happy to go and she’s got a lovely boyfriend who likes going to live shows too, so we often take them.* (PTT, Female).

*I go with my girlfriend. We’re getting similar interests at the moment. I like concerts, going to shows but have never really gone and she’s into the painting, drawing, sculpture side of the arts. So I’m introducing her to the music and performances and she’s taking me elsewhere to galleries and the like.* (PTT, Male).

*The last one would have been was Swan Lake. The reason I attended it is because I read some really good reviews. I also saw it as an opportunity to actually offer it to some of my students and parents to come along and so I organised it. I just booked, made a group booking and had lots of parents come and lots of students.* (TE, Female).

*Generally I go by myself, but if I do go with a group of people it is either some friends of mine or a couple of friends from work ... The subject matter of the performance is not important. It just tends to be more that I think we all enjoy the company.* (PTT, Male).
Summary of key findings: Intergenerational practice

- People’s adult attendance patterns and aesthetic choices may be steeped in their earliest experiences, but are ever changing throughout their biography due to a combination of engagement, exposure and formal education. Co-attendance choices and social bonding opportunities possess a powerful influence over and contribution to this development.

- Arts experiences in childhood through family or school situations provide important social, literacy-development, and legitimating opportunities that can develop into long-lasting patterns of behaviour. A majority of participants cite their early experiences as having some form of impact on their present day genres preferences and frequency of attendance. However, early exposure needs to be relevant, stimulating and ‘natural’ in order to avoid a feeling of mandatory involvement, ‘genre over-exposure’ (eg. high school musicals, only attending populist shows),

- Participants used the opportunity of attending arts performances to create social capital on an interpersonal level. Co-attendance preferences and choices reflected the participants’ desire to share values and experiences with friends, colleagues and family; enrich a variety of relationship bonds; and reinforce their membership across communities. Some participants choose shows based on their ability to provide a context for social interaction (eg. community-type programs) than the actual genre, content or message of the performance.
CULTURAL ECONOMICS AND BROADER BENEFITS OF ARTS PARTICIPATION

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In this section we examine information collected which gives us an insight into the relative importance of the arts and specifically performing arts attendance in people’s time budgets and their financial budgets. We consider the audience member not simply as just a visitor to performing arts centres, but as a person who has limited supplies of time and money, reflecting multiple life demands and an associated relative scarcity of each. In this section, we aim to contextualise attendance at performing arts centres in terms of competing events, reflecting both time and other cultural preferences, and budgetary demands. Assuming time and money are both scarce and people can only marginally increase their absolute supplies of both, we must then focus on the discourses and narratives which frame allocations of this time and money. In the absence of falling ticket prices it is the narratives of attendance, as much as the absolute time and money available to people, which are important.
EVERYDAY WAYS OF KNOWING THE ARTS: IMPORTANT DISCURSIVE FRAMES

‘The performing arts’ as negative symbolic construct

We know from our Phase 1 analysis that people’s ideas and perceptions of ‘the performing arts’ constitutes an important reference point for their attendance patterns, even if they have already attended a performing arts centre at least once before. The term ‘the performing arts’ is a potent symbolic marker, tapping not just into people’s sense of their own cultural identity, but connecting with bigger myths of elitism, intellectualism and cultural life in Australia. In our Phase 1 study, we identified that a significant number of performing arts attendees themselves – the people we would expect to be resistant to such negative ideas and discourses - are able to access and report the negative symbolic connotations of that term with ease. There is a type of widespread stigma, understood by the participants themselves, around the term ‘performing arts’.

One of the important ways we can think about the idea of the performing arts is through the idea of cognitive schemas. Cognitive schemas are cognitive classificatory systems which cluster associated phenomena into meaningful categories, including combining culturally accessible symbols and value judgements. As a cognitive schema, ideas about ‘the performing arts’ perform what is called a metonymic function. That is, ‘the performing arts’ is a powerful term under which a whole range of associations can be readily identified. It is an attractor of strong social discourses, around which people can quickly assemble a whole range of ideas and stereotypes, and which divides opinions rapidly. So, when you ask people about ‘the arts’, or suggest to them that their experience must be understood through the schema of ‘the arts’, you run into problems of activating this strong, universally known schema which puts the arts into a framework narrativised by ideas of elitism, arcane cultural forms, snobbery and lack of contemporary relevance.

Yet, while traditional arts are being increasingly seen as just one style of engagement with the arts favoured by particular social groups, many people are embracing the possibility that arts broadly conceived as anything from dj-ing to attending cultural festivals, do indeed constitute an important part of people’s leisure diets. In part, this trend to schematize the arts in such a way is a response to cultural democratization
processes of the last few decades involving the challenge, and possible breakdown, of high-low cultural hierarchies and the rise of local, community-based arts programs. Research evidence from many western countries shows that people’s cultural diets are broadening, and their ideas about the traditional arts are shifting to incorporate a wider diversity of styles into notions of the arts. Given that such traditional narratives of the arts are held by only a small, and generally dwindling, percentage of arts attendees, understanding such a process has important implications for how Performing Arts Centres market their programs.

**Arguments in favour of the arts**

The irony is that despite the negative historical connotations surrounding ideas of ‘the arts’, attendees - both regular and periodic – have access to a type of counter-discourse related to ideas of enjoyment, psychological flow and reflection which establishes the arts as a vital component of leisure time. This is the positive, universal theme of aesthetic engagements offering a deep emotional exchange between viewer and art object, or art performance. Here, attendees point to the way arts experiences ‘give life depth’; a sense of personal satisfaction associated with being able to transcend the mundane, the usual and the banal of popular culture as pointed out by one of our interview participants:

*I feel that it takes you out of the rut of political commentary and accidents on television. It just gives your life a little bit more depth than just doing the same things over and over again. It's really important to us.* (PTT, Female).

Another participant described that aspect of participating in the performing arts as enabling them to ‘soar’. In this positive, counter-discourse of the performing arts, encounters with the arts afford a cathartic possibility which has the power to erase stress, heal and transcend. As a foundation point, this involves a type of self-reflexivity; which refers to the capacity of an individual to ponder, reflect and look at themselves. The theatre affords people this possibility and effectively becomes a safe, socially sanctioned space for the making of the reflexive self:

*Art is a way to sort of make the person reflect back on themselves.* (PTT, Female).
For us it is an opportunity to participate in and to engage in something other than, something bigger than life, something more than just our day to day existence. (PTT, Female).

Part of the challenge of marketing the performing arts is to understand these discourses, amplifying and emphasising them, but at the same time minimizing the potential ascendancy of negative traditional counter-discourses.

THE ARTS AND EVERYDAY LIFE: TIME-BUDGETS, DAILY ACTIVITIES AND PATTERNS OF ATTENDANCE

The real and ideal aspects of spending leisure time: the context of the performing arts

In this aspect of our research we sought to understand not just the idealised sets of schemas and attitudes which orient people in their relationship with the arts, but to understand the ways in which their attendance is determined by a range of practical and pragmatic factors, including things such as their personal and family time-budgets and their other leisure patterns and preferences. It is a widely-established aspect of social change in western societies that people are, or feel they are, increasingly time-poor. The case for bringing in an understanding of time-budgets is in the first instance to understand how aspects of the audience’s everyday life effect and possibly interfere with their ability to attend performing arts centre shows. More than this, it suggests how marketing the arts could benefit from emphasising not just the intrinsic centrality of the arts for human pleasure and enjoyment, but providing discourses to justify people’s investment in the arts in terms of the pressures on their own time and budgets. This would involve trying to locate at least a minimum level presence of the arts within people’s leisure budget, alongside the argument that such engagements are worth the investment in time they require and the opportunity cost – of being with family and friends, watching sport, cleaning their house, or mowing the lawn – they necessarily involve.

To measure our participant’s perceptions and expectations regarding their routine everyday activities we presented them with a range of everyday leisure and household tasks and asked them to rank their preferences for each in terms of the ‘actual’ and ‘ideal’ amounts of time they would like to spend on each activity. In the
context of the variety of activities, from the mundanity of cleaning the house, to spending time with their family or partner, to exercising, we also asked them about how they feel about their own frequency of attending the performing arts.

We found that the PTT and The Edge participant differ on several preferences regarding time devoted to certain activities throughout a typical week. When indicating time spent doing household duties, there was significant variance between the samples. Nearly thirty five percent (34.8%) of PTT participants indicated spending high ‘real’ amounts of time on household duties, as compared to only 15.8% of The Edge participants. Overall, both samples indicate their ‘ideal’ week would include less time devoted to household chores. This is of course, nothing if not an expected finding.

When comparing ‘real’ time spent and ‘ideal’ time spent attending performing arts events, there is a general increase indicated by both samples. That is, people express the preference that it would be more ideal for them to increase their levels of participation in the performing arts. This implies that there is room to increase regular attendance rates for both venues, based on people’s expressed desires for having more performing arts in their diet of weekly activities. Time spent socialising with partner, family or friends is lower than the ideal for both samples, suggesting the potential profitability of combining performing arts centre attendance with other social commitments or time spend with one’s partner. Interestingly, both groups indicate a general increase between ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ time spent attending other types of arts – galleries, music gigs and festivals. For both samples there is a general increase between ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ time spent exercising and also, time spent on hobbies.

Similarly, time spent exercising is also lower than the ideal for both samples. Volunteering efforts between samples indicate a significant difference between the samples. Those from The Edge sample indicate a greater difference between ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ time spent volunteering. Both groups indicate a general increase between ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ time spent. This may be an indication of public consciousness concerning volunteering efforts.
The arts, leisure and lifestyle preferences in the context of spending patterns

We also asked our participants a series of questions which allowed us to gauge what types of activities attending the performing arts are frequently bundled with in terms of people’s leisure patterns or diets.

Our data shows a strong statistical correlation between attending performing arts for leisure and a liking of visual arts and performing arts for both samples. There is a strong correlation between attending performing arts for leisure and equal interest in attending a sporting event for both samples. There is also a strong statistical correlation between the ability to attend any performing arts event as desired and enjoyment in shopping. This may indicate that those with greater discretionary incomes have a wider range of recreational activities – suggesting they are what we might call cultural 'omnivores', meaning they are open to attending a range of cultural and sporting activities, without necessarily committing strongly to one, and without fear of being judged by others as culturally unsophisticated for their involvement in a range of both popular and arts-oriented activities.

There is a statistically significant difference in the strength of the correlation between attending arts events as a form of leisure and going shopping for The Edge and PTT samples. The correlation between attending arts events and shopping is statistically most significant for the PTT participants. This indicates that those attendees at PTT also enjoy a range of other forms of recreational activities other than performing arts events. There is no statistical difference between the groups when comparing attending performing arts as a main form of leisure and attending free events. However, the correlation between the two variables for The Edge and PTT sample is statistically significant. Those who attend performing arts events as a main form of leisure indicate a high attendance to free arts events in their community.

For both samples there is a strong correlation between preference for attending large performances and likelihood of attending performances with well-known or highly-esteemed directors or performers. This finding is likely an indication of an important perceived risk and area of potential anxiety among performing arts centre audiences. Attending performances ‘branded’ by their association with popular companies or esteemed directors seems to alleviate the risk of attending a poor show or
performance. This risk-mitigating strategy of choosing according to available knowledge or reputation of a performer or producer is an entirely understandable aspect of audience attendance choices, who strive to spend their relatively scarce time and money wisely. However, it does of course present a challenge to performing arts centre programmers and marketers who wish to introduce innovative and challenging programming and to expand audience's capacity to appreciate and interest in new programming ideas.

There is a strong correlation for both samples between preference to attend performances of the classics and preference to see performances that personally challenge the audience. This finding may be perceived as something of a contradiction, or it could suggest a strong preference for both aspects of attendance. This correlation is stronger for the PTT participants than The Edge participants. There is almost a statistical difference between the two when comparing attending arts events as a form of leisure and attending performances with others as a great way of connecting with people. Of note, there is a stronger relationship between the two variables for The Edge sample compared to the PTT sample. This may indicate that those who attend The Edge are more likely to attend performances with others compared to the PTT audiences and reflect a potential area of possible audience expansion at PTT.

**Thinking about a small personal financial windfall: where does the performing arts fit?**

A novel way to test the relative dedication of people toward spending money on the arts is to ask people to consider how they would spend a financial windfall. We presented this scenario to participants, asking them to rank a series of potential areas for spending such a windfall, from ordinary things like paying off a bill or putting more money into their mortgage, to going out for dinner or to see a live show at a performing arts centre.

When asked what they would do with a windfall of $500, both samples indicated similar preferences for ways of spending the extra money. The most highly ranked and significant ways of spending were: a weekend away, tickets to a live show and going out for a nice dinner. This is a somewhat encouraging finding for performing arts centres. One thing it does suggest is the ways performing arts shows are
bundled with ‘treats’ as part of many people’s everyday thinking; suggesting they are understood as a part of a special, or possibly romantic, night out with a loved one.

But, by this precise act of categorisation, suggesting that they are part of the category of ‘treats’, we can see a problem for performing arts centre’s marketing. Committed, long-standing attendees who have a strong interest in the arts and capacity to pay will find the money and time as part of their budgets, but for many others the cost of attending performing arts centre events mean they are resigned to the category of occasional treats. The challenge of performing arts centre marketing departments is to encourage such an association, but, of course, longer term patterns of repeat attendance and deeper engagement rest on drawing arts attendance out of the category of ‘treats’ and closer to the category of a regular part of leisure of lifestyle spending. If ticket prices are not about to come down and make attendance easier, then demand can be shaped and possibly shifted upwards by changing the discourses and narratives of attendance. Treating the performing arts as ‘treats’ is one thing and can make small differences to those with already low attendances, but the challenge is to make the arts a more central part of time and economic budgets.

Summary of key findings: Cultural economics and broader benefits of arts participation

- Participants, even those who regular attend performing arts centres, are aware of a negative symbolic connotations of the term ‘performing arts’ which can be regarded by some as a form of elitism, intellectualism and cultural life in Australia. However, our findings support other research evidence from many western countries that people’s cultural diets are broadening, and their ideas about the traditional arts are shifting to incorporate a wider diversity of styles into notions of the arts, which can serve to overcome any negative stigmas.

- On the positive side, many participants point to the way performing arts experiences ‘give life depth’; a sense of personal satisfaction associated with being able to transcend the mundane, the usual and the banal of popular culture. When performing arts centres
understand these discourses, amplifying and emphasising them in programming and marketing can serve to minimize the potential ascendancy of negative traditional counter-discourses.

- Participants express a desire for having more performing arts in their diet of weekly activities. Time spent socialising with partner, family or friends is lower than the ideal for both samples, suggesting the potential profitability of combining performing arts centre attendance with other social commitments or time spend with one’s partner.

- Our findings show a strong correlation between preference for attending large performances and likelihood of attending performances with well-known or highly-esteemed directors or performers. This indicates an important perceived risk and area of potential anxiety among performing arts centre audiences. The risk-mitigating strategy of choosing according to available knowledge or reputation of a performance is an understandable aspect of audience attendance choices, who strive to spend their relatively scarce time and money wisely. Performing arts centre programmers and marketing departments who wish to introduce innovative and/or challenging programming and to expand audience’s capacity should keep this in mind.

- Many participants regard attending the performing arts as ‘treats’. Emphasising the pleasure associated with this type of treat has the potential to make small differences to those with already low attendances. The greater challenge is to make the performing arts a more central part of time and economic budgets.
ARTS PARTICIPATION, MEDIA CONSUMPTION & PRACTISE

Content
- Preferred media activities
- Comparing live performance with mediated performance
- Film and television genre preferences
- Influence of media or communication forms on decisions to attend a performance
- Social groups and attendance at performing arts centre events

Themes
- Live vs mediated: risks & advantages
- Word-of-mouth
- Reviews - impacts
- Community groups

Findings from Phase 1 of the ‘Audiences’ research highlighted the role of performing arts attendance within patterns of broader cultural consumption and in particular the role and use of media.

Phase 1 interviews explored the relationship between attendance patterns and people’s genre preferences across a variety of cultural practices, and sought to investigate how current arts or performing arts behaviours are sustained through an active seeking out of related information. People were asked about their media ‘habits’ and, for example if media could influence their levels of attendance, or even their opinion of how pleasant or unpleasant a performance was. For example, findings revealed that despite the large number of people who access performance reviews in the media, other influences such as recommendations from family or friends, or the actual cost of a ticket have as great an impact on someone’s decision to attend a performance, or their opinion of the performance afterwards. More than half of people interviewed in Phase 1 referred to the opinions of friends or family as highly influential.

Interview participants also emphasised the status of the performing arts as a privileged form of communication, for example, describing theatre as “raw” and
unmediated when comparing the “live-ness” of theatre in comparison to screen (film television and internet) or viewing and listening to recorded music.

In light of Phase 1 findings, Phase 2 interview and survey questions were designed to extend exploration of the relationship between performing arts attendance with media consumption and how they may interact and reinforce each other.

In this portion of the study, referred to as “Arts participation, media consumption and practice”, we explored participants’ preferred media activities, asked them to compare live performance with mediated performance experiences, noted their film and television genre preferences and discussed which media or communication forms influence their decisions to attend a performance.

Analysis of these Phase 2 survey questions and follow-up interview discussions on the topic of performing arts attendance, media consumption and practice reveals insights into the ways people choose and use media to enhance performing arts experiences and the use of ‘old’ and ‘new’ media to communicate opinions within family and friendship groupings.

Preferred media activities

When asked what type of media activities they regularly enjoy, both samples indicate a high rate of listening to recorded music, listening to the radio, using the Internet to research interests, emailing family and friends, accessing social networking sites and watching movies at the cinema and at home:

- Listening to recorded music (39 responses)
- Using the Internet to research interests & email friends or family (34)
- Watching movies at the cinema (34)
- Listening to ‘live’ or ‘real time’ AM/FM radio (32)
- Watching movies at home (28)

When comparing attending film festivals with attending performing arts centre events responses included comments about genre and quality as well as co-attendance:

When you go to a film festival we’re not just going to art films, we’re going to all sorts of genres. (TE, Female).
The film festival is usually really difficult, because there is so much in such a short time … [so] no, I go to the film festival with my husband only. (TE, Female).

I do go to movie festivals, I go to movies quite regularly because I belong to a film group at the local community centre. So we meet once a month and talk about movies we’ve seen and we try to see two or three movies, so we’ll all go to those, sometimes we go together, if we can’t go together, we go separately… I tend to like, the more art type movies, I suppose, they’re better quality. (TE, Female).

With regards to television watching The Edge sample indicated a low use of free-to-air television at 30%, while the PTT sample indicated a much higher use of free-to-air television at almost 70%. This may be an indicator of lifestyle and those hours spent at home, or the socio-economic status of the samples – those with greater superfluous income may engage in more activities outside the home.

Overall within this sample group, not surprisingly, attending performing arts events rate highly in terms of media and cultural activities. However, responses also include:

My choice is if there’s a sunny day and the surf is up and at the same time there is a good performance in town, chances are I will decide to go and surf. (TE, Female).

Comparing live performance with mediated performance

When comparing a live performance with a mediated experience such as attending a cinema or listening to the radio at home, responses are explicit in their descriptions. For example, attending a movie or listening to the radio is considered less risky because it allows a person freedom to come and go, eat, talk, laugh and do other things. However, the very personal live experience is considered special, fragile and precious:

A movie’s less risky. A theatre production is a risky thing, because you can’t leave or you feel like it’s so hard to leave … If you want to laugh, it’s harder. It’s personal in a theatre, very personal. It’s very special and very precious.
and when it’s amazing, it’s fantastic, but as a cinema audience it’s less risky. You can laugh when you want, you can go off to the bathroom and come back and you don’t disturb anybody. You can…people noisily crunch around with their papers, you know what I mean? It’s just less personal and less fragile, the cinema. (TE, Female).

I don’t remember the last time I sat down and watched something on DVD that I could go and see live. I would only really watch a DVD or a recording if it was an event that was taking place somewhere that I couldn’t get to … if there was production that I’d seen that I really felt was something very special, I don’t think I would be buying a recording of it … something to do with tainting the original… (TE, Male).

I find that the live performances impact a lot more than a movie. The movie I’ve always taken the tack that it’s just there for entertainment. It’s a moneymaking thing to fill time in…. I don’t remember a lot of the movies. … I suppose when you get into that sort of genre where it’s sort of a little bit different from your mainstream or your Hollywood style movies I should say, it does impact a little bit more but not as much as live performances. (PTT, Male).

We go to the movies a lot more than going to a live performance. I suppose only because we do things on the spur of the moment and you think “Oh we’ll go to the movies” whereas going to a live performance you really have to be organised and have your tickets and think about it beforehand. (PTT, Female).

I listen to the radio a lot, much more than I watch television and I can do things and it’s like reading without having to sit and look at the book, so I love it. I love it a lot! (PTT, Female).

Film and television genre preferences

Phase 2 participants indicate high viewer-ship of television programs or films that are classified as dramas, comedies and documentaries. 95% of The Edge sample watch dramas, compared to almost 74% of the PTT sample. Interestingly, 65% of The Edge sample indicated that they watch arts/ experimental movies or programs, while less
than a quarter (21.7%) of the PTT sample indicated watching similar viewing tastes. This indicates that the PTT sample prefer to watch live performing arts rather than on TV or at the cinema.

When attending cinema or watching television participants listed their top genres as:

- Drama (36 responses);
- Documentary (35);
- News & Current Affairs (32);
- Comedy (30 responses);
- Australian/New Zealand Drama or Film (20);
- Music (19);
- Arts & experimental (18)
- Sport (17)
- Police Detective (16)
- Cookery/Home Renovation (13) & Action (13)

Reasons given by participants for their genre preferences included:

*When I go to movies it's only if they have some substance. I don't go for light entertainment or comedy. I go for true biology or a true historical, fact or something of that sort. Except if Anthony Hopkins is playing and I'll see it anyway.* (PTT, Male).

*Well I'd rather see the live performance rather than look at it on television but you still get a lot out of a television program as well.* (PTT, Female).

*I watch the news, that's about it really. I haven't got anything else on a regular basis that I watch.* (TE, Female).

**Influence of media or communication forms on decisions to attend a performance**

When asked to list media or communication forms that influence the decision to attend a performance, most participants relied on the newspaper followed by "word of mouth" and opinions from friends, family and partners. Newspapers (hard copy and on-line) continue to play an important role in providing motivation to attend. Critical
reviews (hard copy and on-line) and email as a form of communication between friends and family is extending and enhancing “word of mouth” influence. The sample at PTT indicate word-of-mouth to be a strong influencing factor at around 78%, while the audience from The Edge indicated word-of-mouth factored lower at 50%. The sample at The Edge indicates that the opinions of friends, family or their partner factor highly at 75%.

- Newspaper (34 responses);
- Word-of-mouth (28);
- Opinions of friend, family or partner (25);
- Promotional material from PAC (23);
- Radio (21);
- Television (18);
- Internet (10)
- Official PAC website (6);

Critical reviews in the media do play an important role in the decision-making process for these participants. However, there are distinct differences when comparing the use of newspaper, radio and Internet reviews. Newspapers are frequently read after ticket purchase to reinforce a decision that has already been made whereas radio interviews and email correspondence between family and friends provide the motivation to purchase tickets.

We’ll look up reviews of things if we’ve either bought tickets or we’ve been interested or someone’s mentioned it. We’ll then read the review. But a lot of times just listening to the radio you hear someone interviewed, and that will perhaps be the spur to actually buy tickets. Whereas with newspapers, it’s the other way around. We’ve usually got the tickets or we’ve already got an interest before I read it…. With the newspaper, it’s usually more to give me more of an insight into what we’re going to see. Whereas the radio interviews, that’s quite often the instigation to think, “oh yes, that sounds like it’s our cup of tea. (PTT, Female).

I’m a taxi driver so I listen to the radio all day. Most of them are talked about or the actors come on and have interviews, yeah I like listening to them. … I’m not usually swayed by someone’s opinion although the radio and TV does help. (PTT, Female).
Reviews and blogs published on the internet are used by participants to inform, however, a number of respondents prefer face to face discussions

“I’m always on the Internet, always searching for something … I’m a librarian, I should have been a detective. … and I guess that’s why I like entertainment because it’s all that knowledge …” (PTT, Female).

“I get the My Ticketek and Box and all that come on my email and immediately they show you all of the shows coming up, so I just have a little look and see what’s happening in Perth.” (PTT, Female).

“I only have access to the internet at work, I don’t have it at home, so I think we’re restricted to the sites we can go … And to be honest, I’m a great believer in having a discussion face to face with someone. I’m sure it’s the way of the future, blogs and whatever, but I prefer to actually see someone that I’m speaking to or try and carry on a discussion with.” (TE, Male).

Seeking opinions from friends and family is frequently mentioned:

“Word of mouth too through my daughter who’s the younger generation, she knows when all of the younger performers are coming to Perth.” (PTT, Female).

“Again, word of mouth for children’s shows. I’ve got some more friends who don’t have children, so I like to know what they’re up to, … I would rather make sure that it’s likely to be something that I’m going to enjoy.” (PTT, Female).

Interestingly, agreeing or disagreeing with a critic does not necessarily influence a decision to attend a live performance. Rather, the act of reading a review is considered an enjoyable participatory experience.

“I very rarely agree with the critics. I will, actually if it’s a really bad crit, I might think, “can’t be that bad, I must just go and see it to make my own decision.” And if it’s something I had thought of going to, and it’s a good crit, I’ll think, “it must be okay.” It encourages me to go.” (PTT, Female).
I’ve over the last couple of years learned to look to other sources [online] and learned to have a degree of suspicion about a writer’s objectives or reasons for writing the review. (TE, Male).

Social groups and attendance at performing arts centre events

When Phase 2 participants were asked whether or not they were part of any social groups that encouraged attendance at performing arts centre events, the majority replied ‘No’. However, attendees at these venues indicate a moderate level of membership to recreational clubs or groups: around 33% of The Edge sample and around 39% of the PTT sample indicate membership to a recreational club or group. Of those who are members of groups, almost 43% of The Edge sample indicated they are encouraged to attend events at The Edge while almost 22% of the PTT sample indicates that they are encouraged to attend events at PTT. This indicates a stronger community presence and promotion of The Edge to clubs or groups in comparison to PTT.

This section identifies some similar patterns of media usage in the Phase 2 sample group contributing to the construction of broader behavioural profiles of performing arts attendance.

Summary of key findings: arts participation, media consumption and practice

• When comparing a live performance with a mediated experience such as attending a cinema or listening to the radio at home, participants felt that attending a movie or consuming other media types is less risky because it allows a person freedom to come and go, eat, talk, laugh and do other things. However, as an offset to this risk, the very personal live experience is regarded as special, fragile and precious.

• When attending cinema or watching television, participants listed their top three genres as: Drama, Documentary, and News & Current Affairs preferring movies and television programs of ‘substance’ rather than light entertainment.
• Critical reviews in the media do play an important role in the decision-making process for participants. However, there are distinct differences when comparing the use of newspaper, radio and Internet reviews. Newspapers are frequently read after ticket purchase to reinforce a decision that has already been made, whereas radio interviews and email correspondence between family and friends provide the motivation to purchase tickets.

• Interestingly, participants felt that agreeing or disagreeing with a critic did not necessarily influence a decision to attend a live performance. Rather, the act of reading a review is considered an enjoyable participatory experience.

• Our findings showed a stronger community presence and promotion of The Edge to clubs or groups in comparison to the Perth Theatre Trust venues.
ARTS PARTICIPATION AND WELL-BEING

In this component, interview participants were asked to reflect on the benefits of performing arts attendance over time. While participants were free to set the parameters of the time frame, in broad terms they were prompted to consider anticipatory emotions, feelings experienced while immersed in the performance event itself, and any persistent memories. In its longest horizon, memories of performances feature as a measure of cultural and institutional history in which changing technologies, practises and mores are placed in alignment or opposition to one’s tastes. Impressions of past events were shown to contribute to the formation of general, summative attitudes towards the arts. It is here that we discover what audience members think distinguishes the performing arts from other forms of entertainment, and, more broadly, what the arts are “for”.

In Phase 1 of Sustaining Culture’s “Audiences” research, the key findings accumulated under the ‘Persistence’ section yielded the following themes:

**What can the arts do for me?** Some participants observed that the arts were a source of joy; a pleasure explicitly acknowledged as distinct from any social or personal improvement. Others located their performing arts consumption within a narrative of self-culture, where each separate exposure to the arts,

**Content**
- Live-ness
- Arts language
- Emotions during performance

**Themes**
- Live performance as transcendent or inspiring
- Audience-based language & vernacular
- Escapism
- ‘Moved’
- Transformed / Uplifted
- Fusion
- Pleasure & motivation
- Conversations about the performing arts experience
regardless of its aesthetic success or failure, contributed in some way to their development as a person.

**What can the arts do for others?** Performing Arts Centres were identified as institutions that can generate feelings of community and, significantly, spaces from which to appreciate the city - as distinct from celebrating its official histories or observing its pageants. The Performing Arts Centre was identified as a place to enjoy and personally claim a stake in an experience of urbanity. One participant referred to the ‘theatre outside the theatre’, a concise description of the way that the Performing Arts Centre and its urban environs might mutually exchange affinities. In addition to contributing to a sense of urban community, Performing Arts Centres were claimed as vantage points from which to observe, or indeed generate, urban distinctiveness; a place to measure (and appreciate), for example, the difference between Brisbane over Melbourne and vice versa.

**Analogy for the performing arts.** In an attempt to characterise the significance of arts attendance both as a legacy and ongoing participation, participants drew from a wide range of metaphors and analogies from the nutritive (Performing Arts Centre as grocery store) to the spiritual (Performing Arts Centre as cathedral). Surprisingly, for a number of respondents, the Performing Arts Centres were perceived as offering a special and exclusive form of communication that evaded the habitual constraints imposed by the media. In these accounts, theatre avoided the normal channels of censorship as it was seen to be unmediated, and ‘raw’. Such information that found expression in theatre was imagined to then flow into society with potentially transformative consequences. Although this position was given voice by a minority of participants, nevertheless it drew upon the language of a more widely held attitude towards the performing arts as distinctively live. While seemingly a banal observation, participants repeatedly seized upon the liveliness of theatre as a key descriptor of the source of their pleasure in performance, and as the condition that enabled or sparked further consideration of the meaning of their experience.

In the second phase of qualitative interviews, the questions were subtly modified to encourage a more detailed and intensive consideration of the legacy of arts participation. Here legacy (as distinct from memory – the ability to recollect the
performance) suggests the abstraction of some higher values attributed to the arts. Below are a series of extracts from the interviews that have been grouped by theme. Their language adds nuance and complexity to the preferences measured in the empirical findings.

**Live-ness**

Participants at both venues indicated high viewer-ship of television programs or films that are classified as dramas, comedies and documentaries. 95% and almost 75% of The Edge and PTT participants, respectively, watch dramas. Interestingly, 65% of The Edge participants indicated that they watch arts/experimental movies or programs, while only 21.7% of the PTT sample indicated the same. This indicates that the PTT sample prefer to watch live performing arts rather than on TV or at the cinema.

Q: Do you ever feel some sort of connection with the performer, or some sort of fusion with what’s happening on stage?

*Oh, sure, yes, yes, definitely, definitely, I think that’s one of the things that you do get a lot out of, like a live performance that you don’t necessarily get from a TV show or a movie.* (PTT, Female).

*It was a massive company’s production of 100 Cousins and I remember there was a moment where the performer was so alive to what was going on in the audience he actually stole a sweet from someone who was opening a sweet in the front row. And just that being able to break from the fourth wall … just acknowledging that the audience are actually in the space with the performers and that we’re all part of something together. I remember thinking … the performer was so in control of what he was doing, he was so alive to the response of the audience that he was able to change what he was doing on stage and incorporate that without breaking character or without changing what the play was, but just alive to those possibilities … and also the rest of the audience sat up and took notice from then on and realized that the performers could see what you’re doing as well as you can, it’s just a more, a two way experience.* (TE, Male).
I've always loved that moment just before the lights go down or just before it starts. It's kind of intangible really to try and describe it but the sense of something about to happen ... when you go to see a theatre event or a live event, it's unique and it's happening there in that room. Once the production’s over or the show’s finished, it’s gone. But those of you who were actually there, have experienced it, which is very different from, perhaps, watching film or television. So it’s, kind of, it's really hard to pin down what it is that you’re specifically feeling and obviously it changes from show to show but there’s definitely something about the live experience. (TE, Male).

When you stop noticing what time it is or even the temperature of the room, or people rustling or noises and when you become so focused on what’s actually happening on stage that you almost lose where you are and you can really buy into the experience and sometimes it’s very short, that moment of connection actually happens and something will break it but when you really do have that connection of what’s going on the stage, that’s when it’s most exciting for me. (TE, Male).

I think the interaction with the actors and everything (makes the performance memorable). I think it’s marvellous. It’s like ... it’s natural, it’s nothing you can redo you know? It’s what they do, what they say, it’s what they say right? It’s spontaneous. (PTT, Male).

They interact, the audience interaction I think is better if you are closer. Like it’s a more personal experience I think. (PTT, Female).

The second group of excerpts gathers participant answers to questions about their feelings during a performance. This was a particularly rich field of data revealing a range of telling responses. In their 2007 study, ‘Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance’, Brown and Novak identified what they called ‘Impact constructs’. These included the ‘emotional resonance index’, measuring the intensity of emotional response, and the ‘Spiritual Value Index’, capturing transcendent, inspiring or empowering experiences. As conceptualised, our questions did not differentiate between ‘emotional’ and ‘spiritual’ experience, nor did they seek to draw participants towards this type of language. Nevertheless, it was striking to observe how these terms featured across a range of subjects. That range might usefully be expressed
as a spectrum of audience experience which, when mapped, revealed emotional intensities undocumented in Brown and Novak’s study.

This spectrum of emotional responses moved from least engaged to most engaged through feelings of escapism; being moved; absorption; transformation or being uplifted; to fusion.

The least engaged level of response - escapism - recognises live performance as a diversion, an activity circumscribed by time allocated and, as such, described in terms that imply reduced significance. As the level of engagement and commitment to the performance increases, participants describe elevated feelings in terms that adopt the language of transcendence. In other words, leisure experiences are translated into language associated with faith practices. This suggests a much higher allocation of significance. The most intense responses eschewed the language of uplift (broadly transcendental experiences), in favour of a kind of bond with the performer on stage. This ‘fusion’ overcomes the spatial barriers that habitually separate performer and spectator. In so doing, participants laying claim to this experience go some way to refashioning the audience experience in thoroughly active and creative terms. Contextual examples of this language follow:

**Escapism:**

I suppose it’s an escapism to start off with and I do like a bit of a challenge too, to really think about a social issue or yeah, ... not the usual run of things and I don’t like something that’s sort of predictable. I like something that challenges you a bit and gets you thinking. you go away thinking about it and then it’s nice to go and just see a light musical too, just to sort of just relax and not have to think about it too much as well. (PTT, Female).

I have a very stressful life so it’s nice to go to the theatre and just relax and just have a laugh. (PTT, Female).

**Moved:**

I think the first symphony I saw was Tiber Paul conducting and I felt quite connected with him at that moment and I’ve felt likewise with David Meacham for the years that he was conducting. Oh and for a performer, the greatest
one was quite recently in fact, Sarah Chang the violinist was incomparable I think. Absolutely marvellous. (PTT, Male).

**Transformation/Uplift:**

*Can you describe what feelings or physical sensations a good performance leaves you with?*

Oh yes. Well elated and uplifted and satisfied. (PTT, Male).

Well probably an elevation in your spirits, an elevation or else even going the other way. Going out and feeling even a little bit depressed sometimes. That’s good too because, I don’t know, someone else’s misery makes you feel better. (PTT, Female).

How would you describe it? It’s almost a sense of euphoria at times of the performances that I remember. It’s an extremely uplifting experience, especially a good one with the right subject matter for want of a better word. Like a good piece of classical music, it’s got a good tempo to it, to the final nice peak, climax is very uplifting. I know when I went to Bach and Strauss I was in an extremely foul mood to be fair and I came out of it feeling an extremely different person. So it can change one’s demeanour in a way. I think anyway, but yeah I find a very good performance very uplifting. There’s another word I’m trying to think of but I can’t think of it. It does encapture, I find it encaptures me. I’m just focused, almost trance-like at times especially when you (have) nice and comfortable seats and all this sort of thing. (PTT, Female).

**Fusion:**

Well, I suppose it’s a kind of admiration and empathy and connecting into those vibes that they’re giving out and just feeling caught up in the whole thing, almost as though you’re part of it, I think. Just feeling an emotional connection to do with the thing, as well as an intellectual one, depending on what you’re watching. But, it’s pretty important. (TE, Female).
I can just go from being very, very sad to very, very happy. I could cry on cue, do you know what I mean? I can just swing very easily and just really become that person. I don’t know how to describe it. (PTT, Female).

... they can draw you in as if you were just sitting, just on the sidelines. Did I say you almost feel like you are sitting on the stage? (TE, Female).

While it is true that much of the language used to describe the significance of witnessing performance is broadly conventional, it is noteworthy that participants engaged with these questions in a non-trivial manner. Taking one’s pleasures seriously might at first glance feel dismissible on the ground of self-indulgence, and yet most interview participants wished to explore the shape, meaning and intensity of their experience. The interview transcripts yield a rewarding insight into a vernacular aesthetic appreciation of the performing arts. Conclusions might be drawn here about the desire to speak of one’s experience on the one hand, and the dwindling culture of arts debate and review on the other. Institutionally, Performing Arts Centres might benefit from asking those more abstract questions about the meanings audiences attach to their pleasures.

**Summary of key findings: arts participation and well-being**

- When given a choice, participants expressed a greater preference to watching live performing arts rather than telecast programs on TV or at the cinema. Many stated their preferences for the live performance for its potential to become a transcendent, inspiring or empowering experience.

- When asked to articulate their emotional responses during a live show, participants moved from least engaged to most engaged by describing feelings of escapism; being moved; absorption; transformation or being uplifted; to fusion. Participants who claim feelings of being ‘at one’ with performers on the stage (‘fusion’) go some way to refashioning the audience experience in thoroughly active and creative terms.

- Most interview participants wished to explore the shape, meaning and intensity of their experience, providing a rare insight into a vernacular aesthetic appreciation of the performing arts. The pleasures people attach
to their performing arts experience can yield much in the way of determining motivations for attendance. The desire to speak of one’s experience suggests the importance of a social context around the performing arts show.
CONCLUSION

The Sustaining Culture & the Role of the Performing Arts: Audiences study yielded almost one hundred hours of recorded interviews & hundreds of pages of transcribed conversations with performing arts centre audiences. Our role as researchers was merely to offer prompts and encouragement, providing ample opportunity for participants to express - in their own words - the values they ascribe to their performing arts experiences.

This methodology allowed us to capture the complexity of people’s attitudes towards the performing arts and their motivations for attending, especially in the context of their attendance interacting with the other social, economic, spiritual and emotional aspects of their lives.

We believe these conversations and findings capture some of the most personal, in-depth and profound data available in Australia on the people who attend our major performing arts centres.

Although we have also discussed some of the more mundane aspects of the performing arts centre experience, such as parking or seating, we were often moved by the degree to which our interview participants treasured, enjoyed, and celebrated the opportunities they had to attend a live show. Their responses reinforced the exceptional role the major performing arts centres occupy in our cities. They are often the first formal, ‘cultured’ occasion we attend as children, either through a school trip or with our families. As iconic institutions within their respective state capital cities, they endorse and embody a degree of quality and a uniqueness of experience. They provide educational opportunities, escapism, entertainment and foster artistic expression.

Our participants frequently referred to the uniqueness of the live experience on offer at the performing arts centres, the sense of fusion they felt with the performers on stage and the degree to which they felt completely moved, absorbed and uplifted. So intense were these feelings in some that they were described with an almost religious fervour on a personal level, or imbued with the potential to transform thinking and actions on a broader, social level.
Given these powerful emotional and political resonances, it is no wonder that so many of our participants choose to experience the major performing arts centres in the company of family & friends. Couples would willingly compromise on which performance to attend (eg. husbands will attend the ballet, even though they weren’t fans) because going to a centre was regarded as enough of an experience in and of itself. Significantly, participants understood and framed their own early memories of seeing performances, in terms of a responsibility to recreate this experience with their own children. In other words, the pleasures of witnessing performance provoke a generous intergenerational impulse, itself party to much older ideas about the way cultures establish continuities over stretches of time longer than cycles of taste and fashion otherwise dictate.

Often the participants we spoke with would use the performing arts centre as the backdrop for both a social experience with friends or family, as well as a way of experiencing the diverse social and cultural offerings of the city. For some individuals, performing arts centres were regarded as sites of contemplation and reflection, a marked contrast to everyday life. Attending a performance might afford an escape from the pressures of the workaday, an intensification of urban experience itself, and an opportunity to experience a profound form of cultural connection.

Out of our interviews and analysis, we believe the following are the key considerations for performing arts centres:

- People hold a diversity of attitudes towards performing arts centres, from reverence to elitism. Attitudes still exist of the ‘high-brow’ nature of the major centres, even amongst audiences themselves. These can often tap into bigger discourses concerning snobbery or arcane cultural forms. However, as people’s cultural consumption practices grow more omnivorous, performing arts centres can work to overcome negative stigmas by both diversifying programming whilst amplifying and emphasising the positive discourses expressed by participants concerning the transformative, consistently high quality, and rare experiences on offer at the centres. Developing these positive discourses can also serve to encourage people’s investment in the performing arts in terms of the pressures on competing time and budgets.
• The ways in which a variety of social experiences are attached to the performing arts centre experience cannot be emphasised enough. Major performing arts centres are only too aware of this and as such go to great lengths to provide lounge areas, cafes, restaurants, bars, and flow-on programs to their audiences. However, we are not always fully cognisant of the often quite profound reasons behind the high value audiences place on the social experience. Participants frequently commented on the ways they use the opportunity to visit an arts centre or see a performance to enhance their relationships with partners, children, colleagues and friends by affording unique opportunities to debate contemporary issues, develop shared memories, facilitate self-education opportunities or the ‘education’ of one’s family members or friends, or simply utilise the performing arts centre as the backdrop for other more personal social occasions (birthdays, anniversaries, dates).

Access to appropriate social spaces before or after a performance allow for spaces in which to have these important conversations after a show, both in order to extend and enhance the experience as well as meet other perceived obligations to co-attendees, such as making a ‘night of it’. The values people place on the social experience around attending a performing arts centre often extend back to early childhood incidents through family and school. Often people continue to attend with their own family and friends in order to recapture the sense of occasion they first encountered in their youth.

• People’s social networks can wield a surprising degree of impact over their choice of whether or not to attend a show, or which performance to choose. Often the opinions and recommendations of friends, family or colleagues take precedence over formal reviews or marketing materials. Encouraging ongoing discussion of a performance amongst audiences has potential to generate flow-on interest and new audience members.

• The ‘live’ experience on offer at performing arts centres was frequently cited as a major appeal to audiences. Reasons ranged from the personal feelings of immersion experienced when absorbed in a live show, to the ‘raw-ness’ and seemingly uncensored nature of the live performance and its role as an unmediated form of communication with potentially
transformative consequences. These qualities are unique to the performing arts and can be promoted as an important point-of-difference to the broader public, media and policy makers.
RESEARCH TEAM

David Ellison is Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities at Griffith University in the areas of Literary Studies and Cultural History. He is reviews editor for the Journal of Australasian Victorian Studies, and on the Editorial Committee of Cultural Studies Review. He has research interests in Victorian literature and culture, domesticity, technology, architecture and bioethics. Recent publications include 'Inimitable Marionettes, Dickens with Napoleon in his Eyes', 'The Spoiler's Art: Embarrassed Space as Memorialisation', and 'Reproduction without Women: Frankenstein and the Prohibition of Human Cloning'. His current book project - Home Discontents - challenges accounts of comfort’s progressive triumph over the Victorian home, focussing instead on discomfort’s curious dispersion into the improvisatory and everyday practices that shape modern life.

Wendy Keys has a background in government policy and audience research and currently lectures in Screen Studies, Television and Film at Griffith University. As a researcher specialising in children and the media, Wendy co-edited an issue of the refereed journal Media International Australia, and has been published in the Australian Literary Review. She has been cited in a number of internationally respected publications and is frequently invited to contribute to debate around issues of children’s media in interviews published in The Age, The Australian, The Courier Mail and The Sunday Mail and broadcast on community television and ABC Radio National radio. She has a Masters and PhD degree as well as qualifications in Education and TESOL and her current research interests include audiences, the film and television production industry, media regulation and policy; and young people and screen culture.

Susan Kukucka has extensive experience as an arts manager, creative producer, researcher, and cultural policy officer. She currently manages the events department at the State Library of Queensland, curating and delivering a broad range of public programs. Susan has held positions as a researcher at Griffith University; in cultural policy development with Brisbane City Council; and she co-founded the Straight Out Of Brisbane independent arts and culture festival. Her arts journalism has been published in numerous industry journals, street press and online publications, and she has been a member of committees for Youth Arts Queensland, the Arc Biennial, and 2High Women and the Arts festival. As a recipient of an Asialink residency, Susan worked with the Shanghai Cultural Development Foundation in China.

Ian Woodward is Senior Lecturer in Sociology in the School of Humanities and Deputy Director, Griffith Centre for Cultural Research, at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia. He has research interests in the sociology of consumption, aesthetics, cultural valuing and material culture, and in the cultural dimensions of cosmopolitanism. He has published
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