
BOOST Award

Using digital content to build audiences for live opera

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Abstract

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to report on audience response to selected digital content produced by English Touring Opera (ETO) in support of the company's Autumn 2015 tour.

Methodology

This study was conducted collaboratively between ETO and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. The research team used focus groups to explore audience reactions to five items of supporting material produced by ETO. Through a qualitative analysis of the transcribed sessions, this report investigates how the items function, both individually and in general.

Research Limitations

As this is a qualitative study with a small sample group (23 individuals; 8 sessions), the results do not take the form of statistical conclusions. Future research might test the findings and hypotheses using a large-scale, quantitative study.

Findings

Viewers use online materials such as trailers, interviews, and rehearsal footage to appropriately align their expectations of a live performance, and to increase their familiarity with both the producing company and with specific productions. Viewers want the clips to feature music and imagery from the productions. In order to function well, the online materials must clearly demonstrate their relationship to the company and to the production. If successful in performing these functions, the online materials are likely to increase anticipation and thereby enhance the impact of attendance at a live performance.

Practical Implications

Digital content should help audiences know what to expect from a production, and encourage them to feel anticipation about attending. Content should be carefully contextualised so that viewers know what to expect from it and can decide whether or not (and when) to engage with it.

Value

The originality of this study lies both in its collaborative methodology and in the newness of the subject under investigation. Arts companies are increasingly interested in producing digital content, and this study could help inform strategies to ensure that those materials effectively enhance the audience experience.

Keywords

Opera, Arts, Audiences, Arts Marketing, Online Materials

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Executive Summary

This research project, funded by a BOOST Award from Creativeworks London, investigates audience response to supporting materials made by English Touring Opera (ETO). It was a collaborative project conducted by the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and ETO. The research is part of ETO’s on-going efforts to increase audience engagement with ETO beyond attendance at performances. ETO asked the research team to use viewers’ responses to existing supporting materials as a tool to explore the following questions:

1. Do audiences engage with ETO’s additional content as it stands?
2. Did they know that this content existed?
3. If they did engage, how did they discover this content?
4. If not, why not?
5. What kind of material would different audiences find engaging?
6. What media would they like to receive them through?
7. What should the tone be?
8. Can ETO monetise some of this content?
9. Is there something ETO is missing?

We conducted six focus groups and two interviews with audience members from the Hackney Empire, in which we watched and discussed supporting materials from the ETO Autumn 2015 tour. The materials discussed were as follows:

- 1) *Hoffmann* trailer: a cinematic trailer inspired by the production design and featuring the lead performers from the production, but not showing any performance footage.
- 2) ‘*Werther* in Rehearsal’: a short film with interviews with the director, singers and conductor, taking place in the rehearsal room.
- 3) ‘Pourquoi me Réveiller’: footage from the performance of *Werther*.
- 4) Season Introduction: a video of ETO General Director, James Conway, explaining why he programmed these three operas.
- 5) Podcast: an introduction to *Pelléas et Mélisande* with a narrator explaining the story, and contributions from the lead soprano and the conductor.
- 6) Paper Programme: the season programme that is available for sale at performances of all three operas.

We discussed these items with representatives of the following audience segments:

1. Regular opera-goers.
2. Young opera-goers.
3. Families who attend the theatre through offers provided by Mousetrap Theatre Projects.
4. Regular attenders of the Hackney Empire who do not currently attend opera.

Summary findings

There was a wide diversity of opinion amongst our respondents, and it was not possible to predict an individual's response based on their demographic grouping. Some individuals within groups had opposing views on the same items. Accordingly, our results do not allow us to conclude that opinion of the supporting materials is divided according to audience segmentation. However, there are 'headline findings' for each item, which may be summarized as follows:

***Hoffmann* Trailer**

Participants displayed some confusion in relation to this item. Not everyone was able to decipher the relationship of the video to the production. Frequent opera-goers seemed to 'read' the clip more easily than others, and some of them responded very positively. Non-opera-goers found it difficult to interpret.

***Werther* in Rehearsal**

This clip was well received and reactions to it were straightforward and largely positive. However, respondents wanted to hear the music.

'Pourquoi me Réveiller'

This clip offered respondents an opportunity to test their reactions to the performance itself, and that was useful to them in deciding whether or not to attend. The clip did not contain enough information about the opera, and needed additional contextualisation in order to function.

Season Introduction

This video elicited a mixed response, with some strong, negative reactions to both content and delivery. There was some positive response to the content from participants who wanted to learn more or to rectify what they saw as gaps in their knowledge. Some respondents felt the content was 'beyond' them. Overall, respondents did want to hear from the General Director, but they mostly wanted to hear different things, and in a different format.

Podcast (*Pelléas et Mélisande* section only)

The podcast was the least engaging item for our respondents. The format was considered less accessible than audio-visual material. Most people in our groups were not interested in podcasts. Those who did enjoy podcasts were critical of its quality. The presenter and speakers were criticised for lacking spontaneity and dynamism.

Paper programme

The programme was very well received; considered to contain everything that was expected of it and to exceed expectations of quality. Both the format and content appealed to participants across a diverse range of knowledge and experience. The relative lack of advertising drew particular comment. However, not all respondents said they would pay for the programme.

Analysis

Our report concludes that the supporting material allows viewers to increase their familiarity with the work of ETO and to align their expectations of the company and its work before attending a performance. Existing research demonstrates that familiarity is an important aspect of positive audience experience. We suggest that the supporting materials offer audience members a shortcut to this familiarity, making them more likely to have a positive experience of attending a performance. This hypothesis could be tested by examining reactions to a performance amongst audience members who variously had and had not engaged with the supporting material.

In order to effectively support the development of familiarity and the management of expectations, we found that the supporting materials need to provide viewers with clear insight into storyline, production, and music. The most successful material combines insight into all three. For the insight to function, the viewer needs to be able to understand the relationship between the clip and the performance. Amongst our participants, the young, highly-engaged opera-goers were more sophisticated in interpreting cinematic language than either older opera-goers or non-opera-goers. Apart from that distinction, we found that all audience segments were open to and interested in specialist knowledge, as long as it was presented in a clear manner.

Introduction

Background

This collaborative research project between English Touring Opera (ETO) and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama was funded by a BOOST Award from Creativeworks London. Creativeworks London (2012-2016) was one of four Knowledge Exchange Hubs funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. These Hubs were formed to support, conduct and promote collaborative research between university arts and humanities departments and the creative and cultural industries.

BOOST awards provide follow-on support for research funded by Creativeworks London's Creative Vouchers. This project builds on the research conducted by the Guildhall School, in collaboration with ETO, into audience response to opera broadcasts in cinemas. One of the many findings to emerge from that project was that most audience members at cinema broadcasts respond positively to the cinematic production values (e.g. close-ups) and the extra footage (e.g. interviews and backstage footage) that characterise the event cinema experience. They value these features as a means to enhance a sense of intimacy, dramatic engagement, and connection with the performers. Some respondents view these features as compensatory – at best, a good alternative to being physically present at the live performance. Others see the cinematic features as offering an experience that is different from and no less valuable than the live experience.¹

As a result of the findings of the Creative Voucher research project, ETO increased its development of supporting materials such as trailers, interviews, podcasts, and rehearsal footage for the company website. These materials are designed to offer audiences for live opera an equivalent to the extra footage presented during cinema broadcasts of opera. The follow-on research funded by the BOOST Award was conceived as a way to investigate how

¹ Wise, Karen, 'English Touring Opera – 'Opera in Cinemas' Report,' Creativeworks London Working Paper No. 3: <http://www.creativeworkslondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ETO-Working-paper-May-2014.pdf> [accessed 9 March 2016].

successful the supporting materials have been in enhancing audience experience of ETO performances, and in encouraging repeat attendance and longer-term engagement with the company.

Specifically, ETO asked the research team to investigate the following questions:

1. Do audiences engage with ETO's additional content as it stands?
2. Did they know that this content existed?
3. If they did engage, how did they discover this content?
4. If not, why not?
5. What kind of material would different audiences find engaging?
6. What media would they like to receive them through?
7. What should the tone be?
8. Can ETO monetise some of this content?
9. Is there something ETO is missing?

These research questions were derived from ETO's interest in expanding and developing its business practice by engaging with the following mid-to-long term goals:

- To increase box office (and fundraising) revenue by deepening audiences' engagement with ETO year round.
- To use digital content to enhance the audience experience of ETO performances, and make repeat attendance more likely.

The longer-term aspects of these business development goals are beyond the scope of this research project, but the research findings will inform the company's engagement with these goals.

Method

To investigate these questions, the research team needed to obtain the response of viewers to the existing supporting materials. In order to access open-ended responses, and to allow for the unexpected, it was determined to conduct this research using a discursive, rather than a survey-based, approach. ETO staff were interested in whether different audience segments might respond differently to the material, so it was decided to use focus groups, organised according to audience segmentation, as the primary investigative tool.

Although ETO operates on a nationwide basis, Creativeworks London funding is specifically targeted for research into London audiences. Accordingly, our research was focused only on this group. ETO's 'home' venue in London is the Hackney Empire, so it was decided that research participants would be mainly drawn from the Hackney Empire database. ETO was interested in the views of four sections of the Hackney audience:

1. Highly-engaged, regular opera-goers.
2. Young, new or occasional opera-goers.
3. Families who attend the theatre through offers provided by Mousetrap Theatre Projects.
4. Regular attenders of the Hackney Empire who do not currently attend opera.

The research could only be carried out in partnership with the theatre because ETO, as a touring company, does not hold its own box office data. ETO staff arranged for audience members to be invited by the Hackney Empire and Mousetrap to participate in the research.

A pair of complimentary tickets was offered as an incentive. There was no coercion or pressure implied by the invitation, and participants were free to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason. The research was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Committee at the Guildhall School.

Responses to the invitation varied greatly between groups. Regular Opera-goers were the most numerous, with 11 participants in total and six cancellations. Young Opera-goers were more difficult to attract to attend a group, with a total of 5 participants attending and 2 cancellations. Non-opera-goers were easier to attract than Young Opera-goers, but less numerous than Regular Opera-goers. There were a total of 6 Non-opera-goers, with one cancellation. Mousetrap Families were the most difficult to attract. We had to postpone our Mousetrap groups and the ETO staff had to work particularly hard to get any participants. Two groups were scheduled but only one participant attended each, with 2 cancellations.

In summary, the total number of participants from each audience segment was as follows:

Young Opera-Goers: 5 participants (in 2 groups)
 Non-Opera-Goers: 6 participants (in 2 groups)
 Regular Opera-Goers: 11 participants (in 3 groups)
 Mousetrap families: 2 participants (individually interviewed)

The following table shows the distribution of participants across the groups (*italics indicates an estimated age range*):

| Group/Age Range | 19-25 | 25-35 | 35-50 | 50-65 | over 65 |
|------------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Young Opera-Goers A | | Vanessa | | | |
| | | Giovanni | | | |
| Young Opera-Goers B | Sara | | | | |
| | Alisa | | | | |
| | Amy | | | | |
| Non-Opera-Goers A | | <i>Francesca</i> | | | |
| | | | | Carly | |
| | | | | <i>Matteo</i> | |
| | | | | Dora | |
| | | | | Robert | |
| Non-Opera-Goers B | <i>Vince</i> | | | | |
| Regular Opera-Goers A | | | | Valerie | |
| | | | | Neala | |
| | | | | Renée | |
| | | | | | Deborah |
| Regular Opera-Goers B | | | | Mark | |
| Regular Opera-Goers C | | | | <i>Samuel</i> | |
| | | | | <i>Martin</i> | |
| | | | | | George |
| | | | | | Dan |
| | | | | | Patricia |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|--|--|----------|--|--------|
| | | | | | Denise |
| Mousetrap A | | | Clara | | |
| Mousetrap B | | | Jennifer | | |

Focus Groups

The materials discussed in the focus groups were selected by Sinéad O’Neill and Andrea Perseu (Head of Marketing at ETO). They were all supporting materials designed to accompany the Autumn 2015 Tour, which consisted of three operas: *Pelléas et Mélisande*; *The Tales of Hoffmann*; and *Werther*. The marketing department had created diverse types of material, and we chose a selection of items that were different from each other, that represented the three performances equally, and that the marketing department had questions about. The items chosen were:

- 1) *Hoffmann* trailer: a cinematic-style trailer inspired by the production design and featuring the lead performers from the production, but not showing any performance footage. It is the first example of its kind created by ETO, and accordingly, the company was interested in audience response to it.
- 2) ‘*Werther* in Rehearsal’: a short film with interviews with the director, singers and conductor, taking place in the rehearsal room.
- 3) ‘Pourquoi me Réveiller’: footage from the performance of *Werther*.
- 4) Season Introduction: a video of ETO General Director, James Conway, explaining why he programmed these three operas.
- 5) Podcast: an introduction to *Pelléas et Mélisande* with a narrator explaining the story, and contributions from the lead soprano and the conductor.
- 6) Paper Programme: the season programme that is available for sale at performances of all three operas.

Focus groups were held at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Milton Court building. They were led by Sinéad O’Neill and attended by either John Sloboda or Karen Wise (with the exception of the two Mousetrap participants, who were individually interviewed by Sinéad O’Neill). Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes. With the permission of the participants, the meetings were recorded and transcribed, with all names changed during transcription.

Each focus group was structured in the following way:

- 1) Introduction to the research by the focus group leader, including asking permission to record the session.
- 2) Discussion of the participants’ previous attendance at opera, knowledge of ETO, and previous usage of digital material.
- 3) Four videos, a podcast, and the paper programme, shown and discussed in turn, in each case following a set format of questions:
 What did you like about this item?
 What did you dislike about it?
 Who do you think this item is aimed at?
 Does this item make you want to do anything?
- 4) Final discussion, encompassing the following questions:
 Which was your favourite item?
 Would you pay for any of these items, and if so, how much?
 Will you seek out similar items in future?
 Do you now want to see the shows?

The above protocol for structuring the sessions was broadly followed each time and the items were always shown in the same order. At the same time, the conversation was open-ended and varied according to the interests of the participants.

Each session was recorded and transcribed, with participants' names changed during transcription. An initial analysis was conducted, in which the transcripts were indexed according to themes and an overview of the response to each item was compiled. The findings of this first exploration of the transcripts were presented to ETO so that the needs of the company could be taken into account in the subsequent examination of the material. The marketing department of ETO requested that the research team should consider what supporting material should contain in order to successfully appeal to audiences.

In the 'results' section of this paper, each item is considered in turn. Our analysis gives a full picture of the response to the supporting materials, including contradictory responses. The diversity of participants' views is maintained in our analysis, which means that there is often no simple, overarching consensus on a particular item. However, the analysis does allow us to gain an understanding of how audience members use these materials, and what the materials should contain in order to function successfully.

Chapter 1: Respondents

This summary of our respondents enables readers to find out about the participants of each focus group in turn. The groups are referred to as follows: Young Opera-Goers A and B; Non-Opera-Goers A and B; Regular Opera-Goers A, B and C; Mousetrap Families A and B.² We discuss each group under the following headings:

- (i) General atmosphere
- (ii) Opera habits and knowledge
- (iii) Professional interest or personal connection with opera
- (iv) Internet habits
- (v) Favourite item
- (vi) Using the clips out of season
- (vii) Other points of interest

Young Opera-Goers A

This group consisted of two participants; Vanessa and Giovanni. It was led by Sinéad O'Neill and attended by Karen Wise.

- (i) General atmosphere

The participants chatted politely, easily and fluently. In any of our focus groups with only two participants, the structure of the discussions tended to be based on turn-taking, with one person offering their opinion and then deferring to the other to hear their view. In this group, the participants seemed confident in their opinions and comfortable to disagree and to offer contrary opinions.

- (ii) Opera habits and knowledge

Both participants were frequent attenders. Giovanni attended very frequently, up to twice a week but at least once every couple of weeks, using student discounts and ticket offers. He

² Quotations from respondents are referred to by group title and transcript page number.

often purchased several tickets and offered them to friends. Vanessa was more likely to attend on her own, and to buy expensive tickets as a treat for herself. She attended less frequently than Giovanni, and attended a variety of theatrical forms, trying to see a show once every couple of months. Both participants were very knowledgeable and aware of different companies and venues.

(iii) Professional interest or personal connection with opera

Vanessa had a personal friend who was an opera singer; Giovanni was a musicology graduate.

(iv) Internet habits

Both members of this group used print and online media to prepare for attending a performance. They were on email lists from producing companies and venues, and were in the habit of checking websites for upcoming performances. They were accustomed to watching internet trailers or clips, which they would do on their phone or laptop. They were both Facebook users and one was an Instagram user.

(v) Favourite item

Giovanni's favourite item was the *Hoffman* trailer, followed by the Season Introduction, and Vanessa's was the Season Introduction.

(vi) Using the clips out of season

Vanessa would use the clips to see what was showing or coming up, but not to look back, while Giovanni liked to browse past seasons to get a sense of the company's work.

(vii) Other points of interest

Vanessa was particularly aware of branding and design matters and was critical of any inconsistency in the use of brand-related fonts and colours.

Young Opera-Goers B

This group consisted of three participants, Sara, Alisa and Amy. It was led by Sinéad O'Neill and attended by John Sloboda.

(i) General atmosphere

Participants in this group were talkative and the conversation was fluent. The two more talkative respondents took care to include the quieter respondent and to ask her opinion. All three seemed confident in their own opinions.

(ii) Opera habits and knowledge

One participant (Amy) had only attended opera a couple of times; the other two were frequent attenders, attending once a month or once every couple of months. These two were very knowledgeable and aware of companies and venues. Both of them were motivated to attend based on interest in singers and productions, while Amy was an impulse-buyer and would attend something she had come across if it looked interesting. She saw opera as entertainment and treated it in 'a relaxed way' (p. 23), while Sara and Alisa had more in-depth interest.

All three were likely to watch trailers. All three were taste leaders, deciding what to attend and then inviting friends. They described using supporting materials to encourage their friends to attend. Ticket offers and advertisements (online or on the Tube) influenced their decision-making.

(iii) Professional interest or personal connection with opera
Sara and Alisa were student singers.

(iv) Internet habits
This group was very active online, using Facebook for personal and Twitter for professional activity. Participants reported using email lists receive information, clips, and ticket offers, and would click on links (using phone, laptop or ipad) tweeted by friends or companies. They were in the habit of browsing company websites and following singers and companies through social media.

(v) Favourite item
This group selected several items: the programme, the *Hoffmann* trailer (for 'oooooh' effect (p. 20)), and the two *Werther* videos, in particular if they could be combined into one. They had a strong reaction against the Season Introduction.

(vi) Using the clips out of season
This group was not interested in using the clips out of season. They would use the clips if they were thinking of attending a performance, or if they were interested in finding out more after having seen a show.

Non-Opera Goers A

There were five participants in this group; Francesca, Robert, Carly, Matteo and Dora. It was led by Sinéad O'Neill and attended by John Sloboda.

(i) General atmosphere
This group was talkative and there was a positive atmosphere. Respondents seemed happy to offer their opinions and confident in the discussion. They responded to and discussed each other's views.

(ii) Opera habits and knowledge
Only one member of this group had never attended the opera before. One had been twice and left in the interval, one had been to *Aida* once, and the other two had been 'a few times' (p. 2). The group had limited knowledge about opera or opera companies, and no knowledge of ETO. Some members had heard opera on Radio 3. Participants expected opera to be glamorous, with high quality singing and playing. They thought it would be something special and out of the ordinary. One respondent had negative preconceptions about 'unnatural sounding' voices (p. 2).

Participants in this group had differing ideas about how they would prepare for attending the opera. Some wanted to be familiar with the music and would either attend something they knew or would download the music and listen before going. Some would read the synopsis before seeing the show, but others preferred to understand the story from the stage. Accordingly, these respondents had different needs for the supporting materials. Some would want to use them before seeing the show, while others would turn to them afterwards.

(iii) Professional interest or personal connection with opera
Two respondents had family connections with professional opera singers.

(iv) Internet habits
These respondents were less engaged with the internet than the young opera-goers. They reported that they would respond to email lists, and that they would use the internet to find

out about performers if they saw someone they particularly liked. One respondent would download the music of an opera to familiarize himself with it before attending.

(v) Favourite item
Both *Werther* videos.

(vi) Using the clips out of season
Participants were likely to respond to emails, but would not seek out the material.

(vii) Other points of interest
One respondent suggested that audience members could receive a special offer as a reward for joining the mailing list.

Regular Opera-Goers A

There were four participants in this group; Valerie, Neala, Deborah and Renée. The group was led by Sinéad O'Neill and attended by Karen Wise.

(i) General atmosphere
This group was chatty and friendly. It was the only group where there was noticeable 'talking over' each other and vocal agreement or disagreement with each other. Participants often chipped in on each other's points or finished each other's sentences. There was a feeling of ease between participants.

(ii) Opera habits and knowledge
All participants in this group were frequent attenders (one respondent mentioned attending about twenty times in the past three years, and others had similar histories). They were familiar with a wide range of opera offerings, from 'pub opera,' to large companies, to opera in the cinema, and they were familiar with ETO. These respondents were taste leaders, buying more tickets than they needed and bringing friends, but were also happy to attend on their own.

(iii) Professional interest or personal connection with opera
One respondent had written a Masters dissertation on the subject of adult education in opera, entitled 'Increasing accessibility or maintaining elitism?'

(iv) Internet habits
Participants in this group habitually used the internet to discover upcoming performances, either through email lists or through particular websites (e.g. fringe opera website). They were used to watching trailers and clips, which helped them to find out about a company's work, and which they could use to encourage friends to attend. They used Youtube to listen to something they were thinking of going to see. If directed there by the programme, they would visit a company website to find out more information after a performance. These participants did not use social media or listen to podcasts but they would listen to opera-related material on radio or watch it on television.

(v) Favourite item
'The one with the singing in' (i.e. 'Pourquoi me réveiller') was the universal favourite (p. 22). The *Hoffmann* trailer and the Season Introduction were the least favourite.

(vi) Using the clips out of season

This group found the clips useful for two things; choosing what to attend and finding out how the company does things. The latter is not necessarily season-related, although in practice, it is probably associated with choosing what to attend.

(vii) Other points of interest

One respondent in this group suggested that, although she was aware of ETO, she felt it was not very relevant to her because she lives in London and has so many options, and that ETO was most relevant to people living where there were not so many opera productions available (p. 2).

Regular Opera-Goers B

This 'group' is made up of one participant, Mark. Mark attended a focus group with one other participant, Vince; however, Vince had never been to an opera before and Mark was a highly engaged and long-term opera fan, so we have split them in two for the purposes of analysis. Vince forms the 'group' Non-opera-goers B. It was straightforward to split the analysis in this way because the conversation, as in other groups with two participants, proceeded by turn-taking. The group was led by Sinéad O'Neill, with Karen Wise in attendance.

(i) General atmosphere

The conversation was hampered by the discrepancy in experience between the two candidates. Both participants seemed happy to speak out and share their opinion, but there was little common ground.

(ii) Opera habits and knowledge

Mark was a frequent attender, going to the opera 10-12 times per year. He was knowledgeable about opera, venues, and companies, including ETO, and reported regularly attending ETO at Hackney to support the company and venue. When deciding what to attend, repertoire was more important to him than producer. Mark was a taste leader, bringing people to opera with little or no experience of it. He currently sends them a synopsis to prepare, but would prefer to send a clip if it was good. Mark reported that he attends opera more for the emotional than the intellectual content, and he was irritated by material that made opera seem more intellectual than emotional. He did not want things interpreted for him in advance.

(iii) Professional interest or personal connection with opera

None mentioned, although a professional background in marketing gave Mark particular insight into the supporting material.

(iv) Internet habits

Mark decided what to attend on the basis of fliers and brochures sent directly to him. He would expect to receive any supporting material by email; he would not go to a website to browse.

(v) Favourite item

Hoffmann trailer. Mark did not like any of the other items. He suggested that the clips should demonstrate balance between showing enough to give the viewer a sense of what to expect and not showing a performance 'verbatim.' He felt that the *Hoffmann* clip was the only one that achieved this balance.

(vi) Using the clips out of season

Mark thought it would be useful to get a regular email with material to watch in order to establish and maintain a bond with the company. For example, he suggested that supporting material could give him 'a gradual soft entry into Massenet,' which he would otherwise avoid (p. 14).

Non-Opera-Goers B

This 'group' is made up of one participant, Vince (see Regular Opera-goers B, above).

(i) General atmosphere

See Regular Opera-goers B, above.

(ii) Opera habits and knowledge

Vince had never attended an opera and was at the focus group as a 'stand in' for his friend, who could not come. He had a strong interest in opera and saw the group as a way to find out more. He had no knowledge of any opera companies and had only ever encountered one opera, *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, which he was working on at college (as a student of scenography).

(iii) Professional interest or personal connection with opera

Student of scenography.

(iv) Internet habits

Vince was not in the habit of using the internet to find out about opera because he was not in the habit of attending; however, he reported that he would use videos on the website to help him decide what to attend.

(v) Favourite item

'Pourquoi me réveiller,' 'the one with the singing' (p. 13).

(vi) Using the clips out of season

Response not clear.

Regular Opera-Goers C

This was our largest focus group, with six participants: George, Denise, Martin, Patricia, Samuel and Dan. It was led by Sinéad O'Neill and attended by John Sloboda.

(i) General atmosphere

The atmosphere in this group was tense and cool. Participants were not eager to speak out and seemed nervous of interrupting or disturbing each other. There was an air of suspicion towards the audio-visual material. Conversation was stilted and respondents seemed constrained.

(ii) Opera habits and knowledge

There was a mixed level of experience and knowledge about opera in this group. Two respondents were highly engaged, frequent opera attenders, and the others had diverse levels of experience. This disparity of experience and knowledge seemed to cause the highly engaged participants to hold back somewhat, while the less knowledgeable were perhaps more quiet than they would otherwise have been. There was mixed knowledge of opera companies and of ETO, ranging from one respondent who followed ETO for ten years, to others who were not interested in differentiating between producing companies, but would

attend whatever was on at the Hackney Empire. Participants were familiar with opera in the cinema and attended the Hackney Picturehouse.

There were diverse pathways within the group for deciding what to attend. For the highly engaged respondents, repertoire was important, and they were looking either for unfamiliar works or for operas within a specific area of interest. The other respondents based decisions on the date and price of events at the Hackney Empire.

(iii) Professional interest or personal connection with opera
None reported.

(iv) Internet habits
Most participants in this group reported that they would watch a video if they were sent it via an email list, but they did not spend time browsing on the internet. They saw computers as a tool to carry out tasks, rather than a vehicle for entertainment. However, individuals within the group did sometimes use the internet in association with attending opera, for example by seeking a synopsis before attending an unknown opera. One of the two highly engaged respondents (Martin) used Youtube to watch opera productions from other countries. The second highly-engaged respondent (Samuel) was already familiar with the ETO website and used it to prepare before attending performances (p. 3). A contrary view was put forward by George, who had also watched some of the ETO supporting material recently, and felt that it was self-indulgent and did not make him want to attend (p. 4).

Respondents in this group used print media to keep up with reviews, and one mentioned Kobbé's Opera Book (p. 3).

(v) Favourite item
All of the respondents in this group picked the programme, and after the programme, the following: Season Introduction (x 3); *Werther* in Rehearsal (x 1); *Hoffmann* trailer as 'something to look at, but nothing to do with going to see the opera' (x 1)³; the Podcast (x 1).

(vi) Using the clips out of season
Most respondents would watch a clip if they received it via an email list.

(vii) Other points of interest
One respondent remarked that in some ways, the individual materials are less important than the idea they give that the producing company is competent and professional (p. 25).

The highly-engaged respondents within this group were more skilled in using the internet to support their opera interests than the other group members.

Mousetrap A

Only one respondent attended this focus group; Clara. She was interviewed by Sinéad O'Neill.

(i) General atmosphere
Clara was chatty and seemed confident and at ease. She discussed the aspects of each item that she liked before moving to aspects she did not like, so that even if her overall response to something was negative, it took some time for that to become apparent.

³ Dan, Regular Opera-goers C, p. 23.

(ii) Opera habits and knowledge

Clara became 'smitten' with opera while at university, and reported that she currently attends two or three times a year, which is as often as she can afford. She was familiar with popular repertoire and therefore sought out unusual titles that she had not seen before. In advance of attending a performance, she used the internet to find out about the opera. Clara was generally quite critically aware, in particular with respect to her role as a parent, and she saw opera as part of self-development and education, both for herself and her children. Clara was a taste leader, bringing her sister or her friend who are not familiar with opera, and making an effort to 'educate' the 'boring people at work' (p. 3, 4).

Clara was knowledgeable about the different opera companies in London and familiar with ETO, although she used to mistake ETO for ENO. She likes ETO because of its unusual repertoire, and 'accessible' sets that are not 'weirdo' (p. 15).

(iii) Professional interest or personal connection with opera

None reported.

(iv) Internet habits

Clara used websites to find upcoming performances and relevant material to get her daughter interested. She looked for things that would help her learn about what she was going to see so that she could speak about it intelligently with her daughter and encourage a conversation. She saw every opportunity as a way of imparting something to her daughter (p. 9).

(v) Favourite item

Werther in Rehearsal (because she felt a strong personal connection with the characters), followed by the Season Introduction, followed by 'Pourquoi me Réveiller.' Clara did not like the *Hoffmann* trailer.

(vi) Using the clips out of season

Clara reported that she would not watch the clips out of the context of seeing a particular production.

(vii) Other points of interest

The similarities between Clara and our other Mousetrap respondent, Jennifer, were striking. They were both from ethnic minorities, although only Jennifer mentioned her ethnicity. Both were highly engaged in the education and personal development of their children, and in particular their daughters, and both saw opera as part of that process. They both worked outside the home. They were both in their forties and had been attending opera since their early twenties. They both associated very strongly with the character of Charlotte in *Werther*, and felt that they, like Charlotte, had experience of living their lives against the grain of the expectations of others. They were articulate and considered in their speech. Both were initially positive about all the supporting materials, and gave negative feedback using positive terms. Both were sophisticated in their criticism of the material and able to assess it on numerous levels beyond their personal taste.

Mousetrap B

Only one respondent attended this focus group; Jennifer. She was interviewed by Sinéad O'Neill.

(i) General atmosphere

Jennifer spoke fluently and articulately. She was careful and considered in her speech. Similarly to Clara (Mousetrap A), Jennifer began her discussion of each item by explaining aspects of it that she liked. She tended to express a negative response in positive terms, saying that something else had been 'more effective,' for example, or that it was 'good,' but there was 'something missing' (p. 5).

(ii) Opera habits and knowledge

Jennifer became a habitual attender of opera and musicals when she received complimentary tickets to *Phantom of the Opera* at the age of twenty-one. Since having children, she has been limited by time and money and has relied on Mousetrap Families to draw her attention to upcoming performances and to provide offers. She had habitually been too busy to seek out events but more recently has had more time available and is spending time finding out about upcoming performances. Like Clara (Mousetrap A), Jennifer was highly engaged in her role as a parent. She reported being 'used to' classical music because her children learned instruments and she attended their concerts (p. 4).

(iii) Professional interest or personal connection with opera

None reported.

(iv) Internet habits

Jennifer had not usually watched trailers or clips for opera on the internet, and had not previously had time to research performances. Recently she had been re-evaluating how to spend her time, having more time to herself, so she was starting to do so.

(v) Favourite item

Werther in Rehearsal (because she felt a strong personal resonance with the characters), followed by the *Hoffmann* trailer.

(vi) Using the clips out of season

Not discussed.

(vii) Other points of interest

Striking similarity with our other Mousetrap respondent (see Clara, Mousetrap A).

Chapter 2: *Hoffmann* Trailer

This was the first clip shown to each focus group.

Summary: Positive or Negative?

This clip elicited a mixed response from our participants, as follows:

Positive Response:

Mousetrap B
Regular Opera-goers B
Young Opera-goers B

Neutral Response:

Young Opera-goers A
Mousetrap A

Negative Response:

Non-opera-goers A + B

Regular Opera-goers A + C

The response can be divided into three categories: Function, Tone and Technical.

1) Function

Of all the content we showed, this clip is the most clearly sales-oriented, and it acted in that way for some of our respondents. For those three groups that displayed a positive response, the clip did make them want to attend a performance, and they were also eager to share the clip with other people. For the 'neutral' respondents, the clip made them want to find out more information. For those who had a negative reaction, some were actively put off attending the performance, while others said they would find out more from other sources and would not be put off by the clip. It conveyed mood and style to our viewers, but some respondents had difficulty in relating the mood and style of the clip to the production itself. Except for the three 'positive' groups, the respondents displayed a certain amount of confusion regarding what the clip was about.

In contrast, some respondents did not understand the relationship between the clip and the production:

Q 1 I thought it was a short pacy thing. The cinematography was very nice. Some of the imagery was very nice. But it didn't actually show you anything... it didn't give you much of a clue about what you were actually going to see.

(Robert, Non-opera-goers A, p. 4)

Robert represents the confusion evident in his group as to who the people featured in the clip were. This group was not confident linking the characters and performers in the film to those in the production. Viewers were confused by the word 'Stella,' with some respondents thinking the video was product placement for beer. They also felt that the clip was lacking in glamour and spectacle (which they expected in opera) and that it looked 'miserable' and 'low-budget.'

Q 2 I hope this doesn't come across as rude – but I kind of... it looked a bit low-budget. And I kind of feel like, when I see opera, think of opera, you always think of very glamorous, over-the-top women, and she looked... her make-up... she didn't have any make-up on. I kind of felt she could have been glammed up a bit more and it been a bit more dramatic. It kind of looked like a student [...] had created that film.

(Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 4, 5)

Despite confusion as to what the clip was about, these respondents did relate the style and production values of the clip to those of the opera production, and they were put off by the feeling that the production might be a bit 'dreary' and 'low-budget' (respondent's words), which is how they saw the clip.

Our regular opera-goers were mostly negative about the clip. In some cases they were put off attending by the clip; in others, they said they would attend despite the clip, either because they liked the music or because they wanted to see *Hoffmann* anyway. As with the non-opera-goers, there was some confusion as to what the clip was about and how it related to the production:

Q 3 I would wonder whether it was being made like a black and white film, and think... question mark. (Deborah, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 5)

Q 4 But that clip didn't show whether the opera was going to be set in its traditional period or whether it was going to be set later. (Deborah, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 6)

In these two quotations, Deborah is struggling to understand the parallels between the clip and the production. Our regular opera-goers were interested in finding out what period a production would be set in, and they expected the digital materials to make that clear. Knowing about the setting of a production would help them make a decision about whether or not to attend. There was a mixed response amongst the regular opera-goers as to whether or not the trailer did convey information about the production, and what that information was. Many of our regular opera-goers displayed some resistance to the non-traditional production style featured in the clip, even if they were not always completely confident in their precise interpretation of the clip.

More experienced opera-goers, like Samuel (below), or like our young opera-goers, seemed most confident in relating the clip to the production.

Q 5 I think [the *Hoffmann* trailer is] helpful to maybe know what the kind of production angle is going to be... perhaps only to find out if you really wouldn't want to see a production done like that. (Samuel, Regular Opera-goers C, p. 4)

Jennifer (Mousetrap B) was also confident in interpreting what this clip was about and how it related to the production, as follows:

Q 6 She seems to be like a vixen. You know, one of those coquettish vixens, and, yeah, it sounds like high drama. [...] I think it would be captivating. I think there are no boundaries. Expect the unexpected. And, definitely it will be gripping right from start to end. (Jennifer, Mousetrap B, p. 2)

Jennifer assumed that the performers and characters in the film would feature in the production. She understood that the mood and style of the film represented those of the production. Jennifer was attracted by the female character in the clip and by how she imagined the story would unfold, and she wanted to attend the opera as a result of having seen the clip.

Our young opera-goers reported that their curiosity was aroused by the mood and style of the clip, but that it did not contain enough information about the opera for them to decide whether or not to attend. They found the clip 'intriguing,' but said that there was 'maybe just not enough information to construe what it is and what it's about.'⁴ Another remarked: 'I'm not sure if I'd know what the opera was about if I didn't already know what it was.'⁵ Both groups of young opera-goers said that their next step would be to click on something else to find out more.

In summary, this clip did not always function effectively, with some respondents finding it difficult to interpret.

⁴ Sara, Young Opera-goers B, p. 3; Vanessa, Young Opera-goers A, p. 6.

⁵ Alisa, Young Opera-goers B, p. 3.

2) Tone

Tone refers to how respondents perceived the clip to be directed towards particular audience segments.

Most of our focus groups considered that this clip was aimed at young people (although a contrary view said ‘middle-aged people’ would be more attracted by the silent movie style than young people).⁶ The imagined age-range of the intended audience varied a little, from ‘hipster 21-26-year-olds’ to ‘I’m 42, so it could be to myself and younger people.’⁷ In both these cases, the respondent included themselves in the target age range, and felt that the clip was successful in attracting young people like them.

In contrast to those (above) who suggested that the film was trying to attract their own group, but failing, regular opera-goer Mark was attracted by the clip, though he thought it was aimed at a group other than himself. Mark responded very positively to the clip, saying that it was ‘intriguing’ and ‘good fun,’ with ‘snapshots of bits picked out from the plot.’⁸ He identified the tone as ‘outreach; trying to get to a different audience.’⁹ Respondents frequently made parallel judgements about a clip’s attractiveness to themselves and its potential attractiveness to other people. There is clearly a complex process of group identity involved in the way respondents interpret the tone of the clip. Mark, for example, is a frequent opera-goer and is knowledgeable about opera. He is emotionally engaged in the opera industry’s endeavour to move away from negative stereotypes, which he described as ‘fat man, fat lady, sort of standing there sort of blasting out at you.’¹⁰ He often takes people to the opera who are not familiar with it, and was excited by this clip and how he could use it to encourage people towards opera.

Groups who were less positive about the clip also felt it targeted young people, but did not always believe it to be successful in that aim.

Q 7 I thought, if you’re trying to get the youth in, you’re not going to get the youth in on that. (Dora, Non-opera-goers A, p. 6)

Q 8 My kind of age [*late twenties*] or demographic wouldn’t ... I wouldn’t go to that. (Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 6)

These respondents felt the clip was aimed at ‘opera lovers;’ ‘people who knew what they’d see’ and ‘who knew what it’s about.’¹¹ Equally, regular opera-goers said that while the clip was ‘trying to catch a modern audience,’ it might not succeed, because some young people might be interested in films of the twenties, but many probably would not be.¹²

In summary, it was generally felt that this clip was aimed at young people. However, in the context of our respondents, it was most successful amongst those who were already knowledgeable about and engaged by opera.

3) Technical

⁶ Vince, Non-opera-goers B, p. 3; Neala and Deborah, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 5.

⁷ Alisa, Young Opera-goers B, p. 3; Clara, Mousetrap A, p. 4.

⁸ Regular Opera-goers, p. 3.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Non-opera-goers A, p. 6.

¹² Neala and Deborah, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 5.

Positive responses to the technical aspect of this clip focused on the filmic style. Some respondents enjoyed the cinematographic approach, and used the word 'cinema' as way of expressing approbation of the way it was made, as in the following examples:

Q 9 It's a really cool piece of cinema. (Alisa, Young Opera-goers B, p. 3)

Q 10 I thought it was a short, pacy thing. The cinematography was very nice.
(Robert, Non-opera-goers A, p. 4)

Q 11 It's cut quite slickly. I think it's actually... it's good cinema.
(Mark, Regular Opera-goers B, p. 4)

Respondents who offered negative criticism of the technical side of the film reported a lack of continuity or coherence in the scenes. Vanessa expressed it as 'no flow-through,' Carly as 'disjointed,' Renée as 'confusing.'¹³ The technical standard of the film production was also criticized, as 'amateur' and 'a bit low-budget; [...] like a student had created that film.'¹⁴ For Vanessa, the film seemed amateur because of the disjointed nature of the scenes. For Francesca, it seemed low-budget because it was lacking in the glamour she expected of opera.

Respondents who had a negative view of the technical aspects of the clip carried that view into their expectations of the production itself. Thus, Vanessa felt that 'it seemed like it would be almost like an amateur dramatics level of performance and show.'¹⁵ Francesca thought the performance would be 'a bit down and dreary.'¹⁶

Summary

Our participants displayed some confusion in relation to this clip. Frequent opera-goers seemed to read the clip more easily than others, and some of them responded very positively. Non-opera-goers found it difficult to interpret.

Headline Finding

There was mixed ability to relate the clip to the production. The clip was more attractive to young, highly-engaged opera-goers than to either non-opera-goers (of any age) or older, regular opera-goers.

Chapter 3: *Werther* in Rehearsal

This clip was shown second, after the *Hoffmann* trailer.

Summary: Positive or Negative?

Most groups responded positively to this video, as follows:

Strongly positive response:

Mousetrap A + B

Non-opera-goers A

¹³ Young Opera-goers A, p. 4; Non-opera-goers A, p. 4; Regular Opera-goers A, p. 5.

¹⁴ Vanessa, Young Opera-goers A, p. 4; Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 4, 5.

¹⁵ Vanessa, Young Opera-goers A, p. 5.

¹⁶ Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 6.

Positive response:

Young Opera-goers A + B

Non-opera-goers B

Regular Opera-goers C

Neutral response:

Regular Opera-goers A

Negative response:

Regular Opera-goers B

The response to this video can be divided into four sections: Content, Tone, Function, Technical.

1) Content

Participants' responses to the content of *Werther* in Rehearsal were largely positive. They reported that the clip gave them insight into rehearsal process, plot (including characters), and reduced orchestration. Response to the people featured was also favourable. It was generally remarked that inclusion of music would improve the clip.

Every group apart from the two Mousetrap participants reacted strongly to the absence of music in the clip.

Q 1 I just so wanted to hear the music. [...] That's all I kept thinking. [...] And you can see him playing the piano. [...] That was really interesting, hearing what they had to say, and I found it really informative, hearing about all the different characters, and the situation that they're in, and that was really great, [...] but I was just so desperate to just have some background music. To just hear the piano.

(Sara, Young Opera-goers B, p. 6)

Q 2 The one thing I wasn't so keen on was [...] it was better when the soundtrack was matching what you were seeing, I thought. There was a bit where someone was playing the piano and there was no music. I thought that was a bit odd.

(Carly, Non-opera-goers A, p. 7)

Q 3 I think a bit of the music would help. (George, Regular Opera-goers C, p. 7)

Q 4 That music isn't necessarily to everyone's taste, even though the story may be intriguing [...] but in the absence of any sound, you didn't know actually what that experience would feel like and look like. (Mark, Regular Opera-goers B, p. 5)

Q 5 For me personally I think that it would persuade me to go to see more if there is actually a glimpse of [the] stage or something like that. Or a little bit [of] singing.

(Vince, Non-opera-goers B, p. 9)

For some respondents (represented here by Mark and Sara), the absence of music was a source of frustration, while for others it was simply something they thought would improve the clip. Vince represents a section of respondents who reported that the addition of music would make them more likely to engage further with the production.

Respondents were engaged by seeing what happens 'behind the scenes.' Seeing the process of rehearsal gave people a sense of inclusion in the activity.

Q 6 You could see stage places laid out on the floor and everything. Yeah, you actually felt like you [were]... part of the production. (Robert, Non-opera-goers A, p. 7)

Participants contrasted what they saw of the rehearsal room with their expectation. Its 'normality' was of interest, with some respondents suggesting that it was not what they or other viewers might expect:

Q 7 Obviously, during the rehearsal it's always so, but you don't think so usually – that they wear normal clothes instead of costumes, or for example the director or the conductor don't wear an elegant suit or something similar. [...] Maybe for people who think about opera like something really... aristocratic, this may allow people to have a glimpse of a different reality. (Giovanni, Young Opera-goers A, p. 9)

Q 8 They're all casual, in sort of, you know, rehearsal gear and stuff, which is fine, but it's nice to see people dressed up and all that as well. (Neala, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 8)

Q 9 I like the fact that you see them in rehearsal process and it kind of breaks down the barrier between audience, performers, and that's really nice. [...] It's just nice, I think, to see them in rehearsal in normal clothes being normal people having a chat. (Sara, Young Opera-goers B, p. 6, 7)

Both Neala and Giovanni (above) identify being 'dressed up' as part of what is associated with opera. The clip disrupts their expectation; Giovanni enjoys the 'normal clothes' featured in the clip, while Neala would enjoy seeing something more glamorous. Sara (Q 9) uses slightly different terminology, referring to a 'barrier' between audience and performers, which is dispersed by seeing the performers in an informal setting, in normal clothes. In all cases, the casual dress of the performers challenges the expectation that opera involves a distant or 'other' mode of being. Many respondents found the 'normality' of the clip, and of the production's setting, attractive.

The following two respondents make a similar point about informality and 'normality' to those above, but in this case they refer to the setting, rather than the people in the clip.

Q 10 That's the problem, I think, with all of these, especially... traditional performances. They're sometimes wrapped in times we can't relate, and the ironing board does the job to bring it to us. (Matteo, Non-opera-goers A, p. 8)

Q 11 I think opera does have a kind of snobbery, middle-class-ness to it. Some people might feel they can't really kind of attach themselves to it or get to understand it, but this is kind of basically like a soap, like a family drama, that I think maybe younger people will be able to relate to. (Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 8)

The 'everyday' quality of the production was not what non-opera-goers expected from opera; they used words like 'glamorous', 'dramatic', 'kings and queens' to express their expectations.¹⁷ Non opera-goers found *Werther* in Rehearsal easier to 'read' than the *Hoffmann* trailer, and they were better able to pick up information about the production style. Participants who had more experience in attending opera sometimes felt that *Werther* in Rehearsal was not informative enough about the production style:

¹⁷ Non-opera-goers A, p. 12.

Q 12 I think with the second one [*Werther* in Rehearsal] you get much less of an idea about the style of the production [...] because they're in rehearsal, and you don't see costume... the first one [*Hoffmann* trailer] gave quite a lot of just visual information about what the style of the production might be. (Sara, Young Opera-goers B, p. 9)

Both groups of young opera-goers wanted to see more of the production design in *Werther* in Rehearsal, and many of the regular opera-goers wanted to see something of the final production intercut with the rehearsal material.

Story and characters were important to our participants, and they enjoyed the insight offered by the clip into these matters. Some respondents reported a feeling of strong, personal identification with the characters, while others expressed a warm interest in the story and characters.

Many of our respondents were interested in the reduced orchestration. On one hand, they enjoyed the insight this information gave them into the creative process, and on the other, it helped manage their expectations of what they would encounter if they attended the performance. There was some frustration, however, about not hearing any music in this section of the clip.

In summary, participants enjoyed the content of this clip, but wanted it to contain music. Some respondents also wanted it to contain more imagery from the production design.

2) Tone

A wide range of our respondents felt that this clip was appropriate for them. They indicated this appropriateness by saying either that it was aimed at the general person, or by saying that it seemed to be 'for' them.

Q 13 **Interviewer:** Who do you think this video is aimed at?

Dora: Everyone, really.

Carly: Ordinary people.

(Non-opera-goers A, p. 8)

Q 14 You got the feeling that it was made for you, or me, or whoever.

(George, Regular Opera-goers C, p. 6)

Q 15 I think it's aimed at a lot of people. [...] It's quite open to a lot of people.

(Vanessa, Young Opera-goers A, p. 9)

A converse point of view was put by two respondents who remarked that clip might be seen by some viewers to intellectualize the opera, and that the opera itself might seem too emotionally intense for those looking for light-hearted entertainment.

Q 16 Rather than playing it, it's kind of like, intellectualizing it, which plays to some audiences, but equally other people who just want to go and have a nice evening and relax with some music and all the rest of it, that sounds a bit intense.

(Mark, Regular Opera-goers B, p. 5)

Q 17 Priya [*respondent's daughter*] would be put off because she'd say: 'Yeah, it's all very well, I mean, it's a bit intellectual, isn't it, Mummy?' [...] But she's missed the whole point. It's about emotions!

(Clara, Mousetrap A, p. 5)

In summary, apart from the two comments above, respondents across the range of groups felt included by the tone of this clip and felt it addressed them.

3) Function

For the most part, our viewers regarded this video as informational. Some described it as a documentary, or 'making of.'¹⁸ Others compared it to the material shown during the cinema transmissions of opera.¹⁹ These were positive responses, but they were not directly related to the impulse to buy a ticket.

Q 18 Cinema Live do that a lot, in both the Met and the Royal Opera. [...] But you're there. [...] It's not in that context where they're trying to get you to go to it. [...] I'd prefer to hear some music, actually. I'm not so sure that I want ... I'm happy to have the roles explained, but I prefer it if I'm actually physically there, either at the beginning or in the middle, I think. (Neala, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 8)

Neala needs to hear the music for the clip to have 'sales' value, and the lack of music did seem to have an impact on the clip's function for many of our respondents, across both young opera-goers and regular opera-goers:

Q 19 **Alisa:** It says 'Book now,' and I was thinking, actually, my next step would be to listen to the music, not book.
Sara: Yeah. And I think if I had heard the music in that clip, as well as the speaking, I would've been much more inclined to go and book. (Young Opera-goers B, p. 7)

Q 20 You know, it was more like an informative piece than something that would sell it to me, cos like you said, there's no music in it. So to me it's not an advert. (Vanessa, Young Opera-goers A, p. 6, 7)

For some respondents, however, the clip did act as a sales tool. Three respondents (in three different groups) responded very strongly to the plot of *Werther* as explained in the clip. These three had an enthusiastic reaction to the plot, characters and setting, and identified with the 'real-life' approach of the production. All three stated that they wanted to see the performance as a result of having seen the clip.

Q 21 I would go to that. [...] [because] they explain the story and [...] how it's about everyday people [...] and we saw them, like, using the ironing board, and using the tables. [...] bringing it into real-life situations, everyday kind of family dynamics. (Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 7)

Q 22 This really appealed to me, cos I felt that it was talking to me. I thought, you know, this could be me! That Charlotte could be me! [...] I definitely want to go and see this. (Clara, Mousetrap A, p. 4)

Q 23 I love that plot. That really is appealing to me, because that is my life, really. [...] I would definitely go and see that. (Jennifer, Mousetrap B, p. 4)

For these three respondents, the story and how it is presented act as a sales tool; they are attracted by the prospect of seeing 'everyday life' reflected on the stage.

¹⁸ Young Opera-goers A, p. 7; Young Opera-goers B, p. 9; Non-opera-goers A, p. 7; Regular Opera-goers C, p. 7.

¹⁹ Regular Opera-goers C, p. 6; Regular Opera-goers A, p. 8.

In summary, apart from those who had a strong feeling of identification with the story, respondents wanted to hear the music before deciding whether or not to attend.

4) Technical

There was very little discussion of the technical aspects of this video, which we suggest is an indication that the technical quality met the expectations of the viewers. The duration seemed to be about right, the shots and montage seemed to keep peoples' attention, and the visual and sound quality were not remarked upon.

One respondent was critical of the branding of the videos generally; in this case, identifying the 'Book Now' banner as inconsistent:

Q 24 'Book Now': I didn't like the red with the white [...] cos it doesn't match the beginning, and your colour for opera is purple, is it? Or like a pinky colour? [...] So it doesn't tie in... if I saw that on your website, the beginning bit has your branding and [...] then your end is... well, your font's different and your colour's different.
(Vanessa, Young Opera-goers A, p. 8)

Summary and Headline Finding

This clip was well received, but respondents wanted it to contain music, and the clip was less effective as a sales tool because it did not include music.

Chapter 4: 'Pourquoi me Réveiller'

This clip was the third one shown, after *Werther* in Rehearsal.

Summary: Positive or Negative?

For the most part, responses to this clip were more positive than negative, as follows:

Positive:

Regular Opera-goers A
Non-opera-goers B

Positive, but with specific reservations:

Young Opera-goers A + B
Non-opera-goers A

Neutral:

Regular Opera-goers C
Mousetrap A + B

Negative:

Regular Opera-goers B

The response to this clip can be divided into four categories: Function, Content, Technical, Audience.

1) Function

This clip helped viewers align their expectations of the production. They were able to assess the quality of the singing and the production, and decide whether the music and staging were to their taste. Accordingly, the clip was effective as a sales tool, because

viewers were able to make a confident assessment of whether or not they wanted to attend. We note that our respondents saw this clip immediately after seeing *Werther* in Rehearsal, and therefore the two functioned together. Some respondents remarked on this connection, saying that they would not have responded so positively to this clip if they had not previously seen *Werther* in Rehearsal.

The observation made at the conclusion of one focus group demonstrates the usefulness of showing audience members what to expect from a performance:

Q 1 I think I'd be more likely to go to see *Werther* simply because I know something about what it's going to sound like, what it's going to look like, and I don't know that about either of those two. (Carly, Non-opera-goers A, p. 28)

We know that familiarity (with place, repertoire, performers, style, and so on) plays an important part in audience members' decision-making; in this quotation, Carly shows that the clip has increased her familiarity with the production and therefore made her more likely to attend.²⁰ Seeing a performance excerpt gave our respondents confidence and reassurance:

Q 2 I liked it that there was almost no doubt of what I could expect if I went there. (Matteo, Non-opera-goers A, p. 11)

In the above quotations, Carly and Matteo (both non-opera-goers) identify negative feelings associated with not knowing what to expect: 'I don't know' (Carly) and 'doubt' (Matteo). Expectation management was important for regular opera-goers as well, though they articulated it in slightly different ways. They did not emphasize the negative feelings mentioned by Matteo and Carly, but still described the usefulness of seeing what to expect:

Q 3 And you can immediately say now: 'Do I like that voice? Do I not?' What standard they are. What they think about... their production. That is... certainly might tempt me in. (Renée, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 9)

Q 4 It would be useful, cos you would know both that you weren't going to get some massive lyric tenor, and also that you were going to get very limited orchestration. (Samuel, Regular Opera-goers C, p. 12)

Q 5 Yeah, that's definitely the kind of thing that I would click on and I would be like: 'Yeah, I want to go and see this.' Like, the music speaks for itself and, like, I liked the look of the 1940s kind of style. (Sara, Young Opera-goers B, p. 10)

In the first quotation, Renée is interested in quality, and the clip informs her about it. In the second, Samuel is informed about scale and reduced orchestration, and in the third, Sara finds out if the music and production are to her taste. These three respondents articulate in detail what specific information the clip conveys to them, while the non-opera-goers felt reassured by seeing what the performance would be like, but did not describe what they discovered in precise terms. For each group, the clip shows viewers what to expect from the visual and musical aspects of the production, and that helps them form a judgement about whether or not they would enjoy it.

²⁰ See Pitts, Stephanie E. and Christopher P. Spencer, 'Loyalty and longevity in audience listening: investigating experiences of attendance at a chamber music festival,' *Music and Letters* (2007), Vol. 89, No. 2, pp. 227-238.

By the same token, for some respondents, seeing what the production is like demonstrates to them that they (or people they might bring) would not enjoy it.

Q 6 Well, the two put together seem to be an exercise in limiting expectations, don't they? I mean, they're telling you that it's a small production or whatever. So I suppose that it's aimed at someone who might be disappointed if they went and didn't see a full production. (Dan, Regular Opera-goers C, p. 12)

Q 7 I suppose the good thing about it is what it said: 'This is what you're going to get, guys.' [...] But it didn't entice me, personally. If the music had been more to my taste, [it] would have done, maybe. Or if it had been something that I knew already. (Mark, Regular Opera-goers B, p. 6)

In summary, for people who had both positive and negative responses to it, this clip informed them about the style, scale and quality of the production. Such information has a direct bearing on their likelihood to attend, and enables them to make a decision.

2) Content

Respondents picked out particular aspects of the clip's contents for commentary. Many were pleased to hear music, having found it lacking in the previous clip. In discussing the music, our viewers commented on the quality of the singing and of the diction. The style and scale of the production were points of interest for some, and a number of people mentioned emotion. Some respondents also identified information that they felt was lacking in the clip.

The presence of music was the first point of interest for many respondents:

Q 8 It's nice they had the music properly. You know? You know, even without knowing it, it's still something that affects you immediately. Because you're getting the real thing. (Robert, Non-opera-goers A, p. 11)

Response to the use of music in the clip should be seen in the context of participants' criticism of the other clips, none of which featured any singing or any music performed by ETO (the *Hoffmann* trailer used stock orchestral footage). Participants were consistently frustrated by the absence of music and singing in the other clips, and displayed relief and pleasure at the use of singing in this one. As we have seen in 'Function,' in quotations 3 and 4, for some respondents, hearing the singer allowed them to make conscious qualitative judgments about the performance. Robert (above) represents a section of our respondents that had an enjoyment-based response, although they may also have been making implicit qualitative judgments. Robert talks about enjoying having music in the clip; others made a similar but slightly different point:

Q 9 I liked the music. It sounded quite romantic. (Denise, Regular Opera-goers C, p. 11)

In this quotation, Denise is making a statement about the music itself, rather than its use in the clip. This sentiment ties in with the qualitative judgments identified in 'Function'; respondents are able to decide whether or not they like the music enough to want to attend a performance.

The music in the clip, then, performs different functions. Firstly, for a viewer who likes the music, it makes the clip itself pleasurable to watch (as per Robert, Q 8). Secondly, it allows the viewer to decide whether they want to see the opera.

In the response to this and the other clips, viewers sometimes displayed emotion; they might get enthused or excited by the clips, or they might find them irritating and annoying. Equally, in the clips featuring individuals who present information, our respondents commented on the emotional characteristics of the individuals – whether they came across as passionate, boring, committed, and so on. In *Pourquoi me réveiller*, however, participants talked about the emotional impact of the clip itself, as in the following example:

Q 10 It [the singing] was full of feeling. [...] Very full of feeling, which I... which is what we want. You know, we go there to have our heartstrings tugged. And it was definitely doing that. (Clara, Mousetrap A, p. 7)

Q 11 I could feel the energy. I could feel the sentiment. I could see him being quite tactile, you know, with her. So I could tell it was a love story, in a way. (Jennifer, Mousetrap B, p. 5)

Q 12 It felt like it wasn't something you could just go to and relax. It felt like it was going to be a challenging production. That it was going to be quite emotionally draining, and you would need to really want to engage in it. (Mark, Regular Opera-goers B, p. 8)

All three respondents identify the emotional content of the clip as indicative of the emotional content they would expect in the production, and all three describe their own feelings in response to that emotion. This style of response is quite distinct from the ways emotion features in responses to the other clips. Here, respondents are reacting as though to a live performance. We suggest that using footage from the production enables viewers to sample and to gauge their own potential emotional response to that production.

Some respondents felt the clip was lacking information. In all but two of the groups (Regular Opera-goers B, Mousetrap A) somebody either remarked that they relied on having seen *Werther* in Rehearsal first, or commented that they needed more information.

Q 13 Is it me? Cos I don't really know what the storyline is about? [...] I'm confused. [...] I'm just thinking, what was the story about? (Amy, Young Opera-goers B, p. 10)

Amy displays frustration that the clip does not explain the plot. Other respondents made the same point, but with less emotional engagement.

Q 14 I would have had some sentences like... yes, like in a normal trailer, [that] can explain what you are listening to or what you are watching. (Vanessa, Young Opera-goers A, p. 10)

Francesca, in Q 15 below, thought the storyline was clear from the clip, but would have been confused by the small-scale staging if she hadn't learned about it from *Werther* in Rehearsal:

Q 15 I think the storyline, yes, but I wouldn't really [have] understood why there was, like, a table and chairs. I wouldn't understand that they're bringing it into the

modern-day soap kind of family drama. Because if you think of an opera, you just assume the whole glamorous kings, queens, and everyone being very dramatic.
(Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 12)

Rather than information on the story, Francesca wanted this clip to include more information about the staging decisions.

A further sub-section of our participants felt the clip needed 'context-setting.' Seeing children in the clip, perhaps particularly since children were not mentioned in *Werther in Rehearsal*, confused some respondents:

Q 16 **Denise:** [...] What...were those...was he singing where those children were? Was that all part of the same...

Interviewer: It's all part of the same stage, yeah.

Patricia: I think I would want a bit of context-setting. I mean, I was sitting there thinking: 'What? What's going on?' (Regular Opera-goers C, p. 11)

Q 17 I didn't quite understand the children. What was that? (Jennifer, Mousetrap B, p. 5)

A number of respondents offered suggestions, as Vanessa does in Q 14 above, as to how the desired information could be conveyed. Some proposed that this film could be intercut with the previous one; others shared Vanessa's idea about the use of text to accompany the video. One assumed that this clip was the second part of *Werther in Rehearsal*.

3) Technical

Three of our focus groups commented negatively on the sound quality of this clip. For one respondent, the experience was so negative that he would not want to attend the performance:

Q 18 One thing I didn't like, [...] the audio was of bad quality, I think. So if I hear this, I would probably not go to the opera, because my impression was that it was a very bad performance, even if, I'm sure – and I have read a lot of reviews about [it] [...] I know that it was a very good performance, and so probably it was a problem of capturing the sound. (Giovanni, Young Opera-goers A, p. 10)

Q 19 You asked if... in one of the clips, if you found anything annoying about it. And I thought [...] the strings sounded really close-miked, and quite loud in the mix. And then it sounded like [...] the tenor was miked from ages away. So you could kind of hear that he was, like, in a big room, but then the strings weren't. And then, his diction wasn't very clear, for the same reason. So if you did want to hear the song, you'd be like: 'Rouse me from my what? What?' (Alisa, Young Opera-goers, p. 10, 11)

Other respondents stated an awareness that they would probably be listening to these clips using relatively low quality audio equipment, and that therefore they would make an allowance for poor quality sound. In order to make that allowance, however, viewers of the video would have to understand in what way the actual performance might differ from the sound of the video – a process that one respondent described:

Q 20 Because I've seen in the past trailers, and I know how it is in real life. I've seen orchestras, and you know it's so much better. [...] If you already know about those

things, you shouldn't judge it on that. [...] I don't know if you were completely novice to it, if you heard that, then you would want to go necessarily.

(Vanessa, Young Opera-goers A, p. 10)

Vanessa assumes that the quality of what she chooses to attend will be high, and she retains that assumption even if the sound quality of the clip is flawed. However, she suggests that other audience members might not be equipped to make the distinction she makes between the clip and the performance.

The related question of diction raised by Alisa in quotation 19 came up for other respondents as well:

Q 21 **Dora:** And also I don't think his diction was clear enough. I couldn't...I don't know what words he was saying.

Francesca: Oh, no, I haven't got a clue what he was...words he was saying. But I liked the music.

Carly: Was it in Italian or something?

Dora: I think it was...

Interviewer: It was in English.

Dora: It was in English!

Carly: Was it? Oh!

Dora: Yes.

Francesca: Oh, I thought it was in Italian.

(Non-opera-goers A, p. 12)

Although these respondents did not understand the words, not all of them were put off by that. Francesca (above) represents respondents who did not expect to understand the words in opera, and sought information about what was happening from other sources, such as body language or a synopsis.

In summary, the sound quality of this clip, particularly in relation to the singer, was not optimal.

4) Audience

This clip did not elicit the strong emotional reaction of the *Hoffmann* trailer, which viewers felt was highly targeted. When we asked our focus groups 'Who do you think this is aimed at?' the response was measured and unemotional, and people felt it was aimed quite broadly:

Q 22 **Sara:** It didn't feel like there was a clear target audience.

Alisa: It's selling the opera, as opposed to selling it to you, if you know what I mean. It's more broad.

(Young Opera-goers B, p. 11)

Sara and Alisa's view was widely held, though expressed in different ways: Valerie said that it was aimed at 'us'; Clara felt it was 'just itself'; Vince said it was aimed at 'general people.'²¹ A number of respondents did suggest that it was aimed at people who already knew something about *Werther*, because the clip was hard to understand otherwise.

Summary

²¹ Regular Opera-goers A, p. 10; Mousetrap A, p. 7; Non-opera-goers B, p. 7.

This clip offered respondents an opportunity to test their reactions to the performance itself, and that was useful to them in deciding whether or not to attend. Viewers felt that if they had not already seen *Werther* in Rehearsal, the clip would need substantial contextualisation and additional information.

Headline Finding

This clip functions well, but needs additional contextualisation.

Chapter 5: Season Introduction

This was the fourth clip shown, after 'Pourquoi me Réveiller.'

Summary: Positive or Negative?

This video received a varied response from our participants. Mixed reactions to the clip make it difficult to generalize fully about group response. However, the following broad generalizations are possible:

Positive response:

Young Opera-goers A
Mousetrap A + B

Negative response:

Young Opera-goers B
Regular Opera-goers B
Non-opera-goers B

Mixed response:

Regular Opera-goers A + C
Non-opera-goers A

Response to the Season Introduction can be divided into four categories: Tone, Function, Content, Technical.

1) Tone

In the context of this clip, 'tone' refers to what respondents thought about the way the material was delivered. It is closely related to 'content,' and many reactions to the clip bring tone and content together.

Responses can be divided into positive and negative.

(i) Positive

There was a strong positive response to the perceived passion and enthusiasm of James Conway for his work and for opera. He was considered to be knowledgeable and to speak clearly and fluently:

- Q 1 He was so passionate about it, as well. It was really nice to see that he obviously loves what he does. (Vanessa, Young Opera-goers A, p. 13, 14)
- Q 2 The man speaking sort of seemed very passionate, [...] believing in what he is doing. So with that, he sort of sold the concept. (Clara, Mousetrap A, p. 8)

Q 3 I thought he came over very well. I mean, he's obviously enthusiastic about ETO, as well as those particular productions. Most of it went over my head, really, I think. It wasn't in my 'night out' scenario. (Dan, Regular Opera-goers C, p. 16)

In the first two quotations, the respondents recognized Conway's enthusiasm and felt drawn in by it. In the third, the enthusiasm in the presentation is contrasted with the information conveyed, and a positive reaction to the former does not outweigh the negative reaction to the latter.

A second type of positive response to tone is exemplified by these two quotations:

Q 4 It wasn't too technical or too opera-based. You could understand it as a layman, which I think's really important. (Vanessa, Young Opera-goers A, p. 14)

Q 5 It was very friendly, down to earth language. Simple language, that one could understand, being a layperson. (Jennifer; Mousetrap B, p. 6)

These two respondents, in complete opposition to most of the negative responses, felt that the clip was pitched for the layperson. Jennifer found that, although the ideas and information being delivered were unfamiliar to her as an 'ordinary person' (her words), they were presented in an accessible manner. In our discussion of negative responses, we shall see that other people were put off by either the unfamiliarity to them of the clip's content, or their perception that it would be unfamiliar – and therefore off-putting – to others. Jennifer and Vanessa represent a small set of respondents who did not feel personally knowledgeable about the material discussed in the clip, and who felt it was aimed at people who knew more than they, but who were nevertheless intrigued by the unfamiliar material. These respondents felt they wanted to know more, and approached the clip as a useful learning tool.

Q 6 To be able to understand his thinking, you would have to come from a background which was like yours [*the interviewer*]²², perhaps, [...] rather than, you know, a housewife, or an office worker, who just wants to have a good time. [...] But I mean, it was very helpful to understand the vision, what it is that they're trying to do, why they would have chosen these three titles. (Clara, Mousetrap A, p. 8)

Respondents espousing the usefulness of the clip expressed a desire to learn more about the subjects discussed.

(ii) Negative

The negative response can be subdivided into 'assumption of knowledge,' and 'interpretation.'

Assumption of knowledge

Many respondents felt the speaker assumed the audience shared specific knowledge with him. There were two facets to this response. Firstly, some people were, themselves, put off by a sense that the speaker was speaking to a more knowledgeable audience than they considered themselves to be. Secondly, some people were put off imagining how other audience members might respond to the assumed level of knowledge. It was those in the second category who were most emotional in their negative response, as follows:

²² The interviewer's background did not form part of the conversation, so this reference is based on the respondents' own ideas.

- Q 7 **Sara:** It seemed really, really tailored to a specific audience [...]
Alisa: Yeah, it assumes a prior knowledge that I don't have, and I love opera. [...]
Sara: Yeah. It seems very targeted to people who know a lot about opera already, and even within...I mean, like, if I showed some people that who...who weren't...they'd be like: 'What is he talking about? Who's Goethe? Who's Massenet? I haven't got a clue.' ...it's...yeah, if you don't already know your stuff then I would be really lost.
Alisa: I think even more than that, it...it not only kind of blocks out quite a large amount of people in the content, but also the way it's delivered. Because...you know, it's not simple language he's using. And I'm not saying...I'm not saying that all opera-goers tend to be well-educated, but, like, if...if someone was wanting to get into opera, and were like: 'Sanitising the stage? What? Like bleach? What?' [...]
Sara: Yeah. I just sort of found myself getting a bit...not bored, just irritated cos I was like: 'This is...' I mean, I understand what he was talking about, but [...] if I put this in front of my husband, who isn't musical at all, he would be like: 'What is he going on about? I haven't got a clue.' [...]
Sara: Yeah. It just seems really inaccessible to people who aren't really clued up on...even on, yeah, this specific French opera. (Young Opera-goers B, p. 12, 13)

In this exchange, Alisa states that she does not have as much knowledge as the clip assumes the viewer will have, while Sara says that she does, but is annoyed by how the clip would be received by people of her acquaintance who do not. This response demonstrates participants' desire to use the clips to encourage opera attendance amongst their acquaintances.

Respondents who referred to themselves as less knowledgeable had a more straightforward reaction to the clip:

- Q 8 It's really aimed at someone who has knowledge on it. Like, somebody who is really intellectual. For me, I don't even know what he's talking about.
(Vince, Non-opera-goers B, p. 10)
- Q 9 He kept talking about stories with the presumption that you already knew what he was talking about. And I didn't really understand, because he didn't explain the stories. [...] I wouldn't have understood when he was like: 'Oh, this is written, and it's even more known now in its opera world than it was before.' And I was like: 'I don't really know what you're referring back to.' So I think he's already talking to people who already have an insight or knowledge on opera.
(Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 17)

These respondents felt that the clip was aimed at people with more knowledge than them, they were personally put off by that, but they didn't display the strong irritation felt by the respondents represented by Sara and Alisa.

We suggest that the strong emotional reaction against perceived 'elitism' (Sara's and Alisa's word) in the clip resulted from a high level of emotional involvement with the opera industry. These respondents are already engaged in the cultural debate about perceptions of opera amongst the wider public and the potential attractiveness of the artform to non-opera-goers. Those who felt less familiar with the material discussed in the clip viewed it

with less emotion, either saying 'I don't understand what he's talking about; that's not for me' or 'I don't know much about this sort of thing; I'd like to know more' (paraphrase).

Interpretation

Some respondents displayed irritation when they perceived that the speaker was interpreting the quality of the season on their behalf.

- Q 10 We had 'compelling' a lot. And I thought: 'I don't need to be told about something being compelling. I judge that.' (Deborah, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 12)
- Q 11 I don't want somebody else to interpret something on my behalf [...] Rather than encouraging me into the art, he's standing as a barrier between me and the performance, and that really irritates me. (Mark, Regular Opera-goers B, p. 9)

In summary, response to the tone of this clip was mostly focussed on the level of knowledge assumed by the speaker, which many respondents found off-putting.

2) Function

Some respondents felt the Season Introduction would have made sense of everything else if they had seen it first, while others would turn to it after having seen the production. The responses had common ground in their focus on information, and how the respondent would want to use that information. The video is seen as educational and informative. Some respondents would like to have the information first of all, before moving towards finding out about the individual productions, while others would prefer to access the information after they had seen the performance.

The many strong negative responses to the tone of the clip suggest that this clip might also perform a function to do with group identity. Many respondents felt irritated by the clip, saying that it assumed a certain level of knowledge on the part of the audience, and that this assumption was alienating to them and (they imagined) to other potential audience members. It might be that some audience members (not represented among our respondents) would have a strong positive response to this very feature, which might make them feel included in a desirable group. Amongst our respondents, however, those who were most engaged with opera were most offended by the tone of the clip. It seems that opera-lovers feel that the clip presents an opera identity they do not want to be associated with, because they fear it perpetuates negative stereotypes of opera amongst non-opera-goers.

3) Content

'Content' refers to what the presenter actually says. It is closely tied to 'tone,' and much of what respondents criticized in the section headed 'tone' was to do with content. Response to content can be divided into three: (i) positive response to information presented; (ii) negative response to information presented; (iii) information wanted but not given.

(i) Positive response to information presented

The several respondents who reported that they found the clip informative and interesting also reported their own lack of knowledge:

- Q 12 It made sense of everything. You know, it had these three separate things we see, not really quite understanding what they are. If I had heard that at the beginning, it might have made me feel slightly differently about the *Tales of Hoffmann*.
(Carly, Non-opera-goers A, p. 16)

More knowledgeable respondents either had a negative response to the clip, or said that they would want to hear this sort of information only if it referred to an opera they were already familiar with:

Q 13 If it were an opera that I knew and loved, I'd be interested to hear him speak about it. But the problem with this one is, I think, because I don't know anything about them, it's kind of going over my head, really. (Valerie, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 14)

Respondents found it useful to hear about reduced orchestration and new arrangements, though one person objected to Conway omitting the name of the Belgian composer he refers to.²³

(ii) Negative response to information presented

Negative responses to the information in the clip were closely tied up with responses to tone. Respondents objected that the speaker seemed to assume they would already know the background information to his discussion (as outlined above). We could speculate that they might not object to the information itself, were it more fully explained.

(iii) Information wanted but not given

Many respondents expressed a desire to hear music in this clip. Some suggested it could feature when the name of the opera appeared on screen, others felt the clip could be shortened and combined with musical extracts, and others said, simply: 'Let's hear some music.'²⁴

Respondents who expressed a preference wanted to hear less about the season and more about the productions, including storylines and what they meant to the speaker, and how the production designs had come about.²⁵

4) Technical

'Technical' covers response to the clip as an audio-visual artefact.

We assume that not commenting on any technical aspect of the clip is equivalent to a positive response to it. For example, there were no remarks about the sound or image quality. We suggest that respondents expected the clips to be of a high quality, and only noticed technical aspects that disrupted this expectation.

It was generally felt that to have one person, in one location, talking for the whole duration of the clip was not optimal. Respondents wanted to see the presenter in different locations, to see other people, to have music intercut, and to have shorter shots. The response to the technical aspect of the clip is summarised by one regular opera-goer: 'Break it up a bit.'²⁶

Season Introduction Summary

We encountered a very mixed response to this clip. Some people quite liked it; many had a strong negative reaction to it. In a qualitative study with a small sample, no statistical conclusion can be drawn from the balance of positive-negative reactions. It may be that other audience members, not represented in our sample, would have opposing opinions to

²³ Alisa, Young Opera-goers B, p. 13.

²⁴ Renée, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 11.

²⁵ Young Opera-goers B, p. 2; Regular Opera-goers B, p. 9.

²⁶ George, Regular Opera-goers C, p. 17.

our respondents. Therefore, our analysis does not offer black and white answers to whether the clip is successful. It is successful for some people, in some respects, and it is off-putting for others.

The most straightforward aspect of the response is viewers' desire to have more variety in the shots and content, including some music, and to have the content split across a number of videos of shorter duration.

The clip was perceived to be an educational tool which could inform audience members' understanding of individual productions, of the season, and of the company. Opinion was divided as to whether it was best viewed before or after attending a performance. Different respondents had different desires with respect to preparing for and following on from attendance, and would accordingly either seek out or avoid background information at different stages of their engagement.

The question of tone is clearly important. Although some respondents found the tone accessible and 'friendly,' the presenter's assumption of knowledge on the part of the viewer was off-putting for many. Amongst our respondents, it seemed to be particularly problematic for viewers who did, in fact, have the knowledge in question, because they felt the clip played into stereotypes of exclusivity and elitism associated with opera. Amongst those viewers who did not have the knowledge in question, they either wanted to acquire it, or felt that the clip was not for them.

It is difficult to separate the response to content from the response to tone. Many viewers in our groups responded negatively to the content, because they felt it was delivered as though they already knew much of the background. It may be that they would have felt more positive about the content if they had felt it was fully explained. There was a clear negative response to the presenter's interpretation of quality ('It's going to be compelling') and of his own desires with respect to programming ('I've wanted ETO to do x for a long time'). There was interest in the reduced orchestration and new arrangements. Some respondents indicated that they would like to hear more about the productions themselves, including style of settings and hearing from other members of production teams.

It was not possible to predict, using previous opera-going habits, age and background as indicators, what opinion our participants would form of this clip. It is possible that patterns might emerge if a quantitative study were performed of a larger sample size. With the information at our disposal, however, we might venture a theory that the group a viewer belongs to (young opera-goers, non-opera goers, etc.) is less significant a predictor of their response than what they are looking for from the clip, which does not seem to correlate with our groupings. For example, some respondents wanted as much information as possible before attending a performance, including dramaturgical material to do with how the season was put together; for others, it was anathema to be exposed to such material before seeing a performance, but they were quite open to seeing it afterwards. It may be that directing particular groups towards or away from this clip might be a less effective strategy than ensuring the clip is carefully contextualized so that viewers can decide if it is appropriate for them.

Headline Finding

Respondents did want to hear from the General Director, but they mostly wanted to hear different things, and in a different format, and they wanted to hear some music.

Chapter 6: Podcast (*Pelléas* section only)

This was the penultimate item discussed, after the Season Introduction. We played an excerpt from the podcast, consisting of the section on *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and excluding James Conway's contribution, which we left out because of its similarity to the Season Introduction.

Summary: Positive or Negative?

Most of our focus group participants reacted in quite a neutral way to this clip. It is difficult to generalize about a positive or negative reaction from each group, because the response was less emotional than responses to the other clips.

The most positive response was from Francesca, who reported enjoying the clip, because it was like Radio 4 and she is a habitual Radio 4 listener.²⁷ The most negative response was from Mark, who reported being put off going to the ETO website by the idea that it was populated with 'this sort of stuff.' Mark said it was 'criminal' that there was no music, and criticized the technical production values.²⁸

The other participants did not engage with the podcast in such emotional terms. Many commented on the information conveyed, and appreciated that it might be something they or other audience members would seek out if they were particularly interested in it. Generally, the response was neutral, with some participants displaying a neutral to positive response, and others neutral to negative.

The response can be divided into four categories: Content, Function, Audience Habits, and Technical.

1) Content

Although our respondents were not enthusiastic about the podcast, many did report some interest in the content, and some suggested additional content they would have liked to encounter. Response to content can be divided into the following categories: (i) conductor contribution, (ii) plot and character, (iii) soprano contribution, and (iv) music.

(i) Conductor contribution

Respondents seemed to find the information that 'Debussy hated Massenet' interesting and entertaining.²⁹ Three individual respondents had a specific, negative reaction to the conductor's discussion of orchestration, finding it either too 'technical,' too 'intellectual,' or just not 'particularly interesting.'³⁰ However, at least as many people expressed interest in the orchestration.³¹ One non-opera goer singled out this specialist knowledge as offering something to listen out for if he went to the opera:

Q 1 Then I have something tangible that I can then get [my] hands around, [rather] than some foggy, you know: 'Oh, it's just a wonderful experience...'

(Matteo, Non-opera-goers A, p. 20)

²⁷ Non-opera-goers A, p. 18.

²⁸ Regular Opera-goers B, p. 11, 12.

²⁹ Young Opera-goers B, p. 17; Regular Opera-goers C, p. 18.

³⁰ Clara, Mousetrap A, p. 11; Vince, Non-opera-goers B, p. 11; Carly, Non-opera-goers A, p. 19.

³¹ Young Opera-goers B; Non-opera-goers A; Mousetrap B.

More knowledgeable listeners found the same thing interesting, for the same reason, although they expressed it in more specific terms:

Q 2 His idea of it being an orchestrated piano version would inform my listening if I went to see it. (Alisa, Young Opera-goers B, p. 16)

Reaction to the explanation of orchestration demonstrates that participants with a diverse range of opera experience were interested in specialist knowledge if it was specific and clearly explained.

(ii) Plot and Character

Many groups identified insight into the story of the opera and its characters as a positive feature:

Q 3 I think I could understand the story better [*having listened to the podcast*], and they kind of explain the characters, and they gave them a kind of... it sounds a bit weird, but they gave character to the characters, if that makes sense. They kind of explain their personality a bit, and so I enjoyed that. (Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 19)

In some cases, the story itself is an enticement to attend:

Q 4 **Interviewer:** Did it [*the podcast*] make you want to see it [*Pelléas*]?
Amy: Yes. Quite a bit. Especially when she was talking about what the story is, about how she fell in love with her half-brother or something like that. I was like: 'Oh, interesting storyline, I want to see it.' Yeah. (Young Opera-goers B, p. 17)

For other respondents, finding out about the story was interesting, but did not necessarily make them want to attend; rather, it performed an educational function. The educational function might inform their experience of the production, or it might be something they sought out afterwards.

Q 5 When the girl was speaking, that was quite useful. You know, about the very quick plot of what was happening. That might be appealing to somebody, if you were listening at school and trying to get an educational sort of thing out of it. (Clara, Mousetrap A, p. 10)

(iii) Soprano contribution

Our participants were interested in hearing from people involved in the production. On the one hand, they enjoyed following a young professional at the start of their career and watching them progress, and on the other, they were interested in the performer's insights into her character.

Respondents from the groups Mousetrap B, Regular Opera-goers A, and Young Opera-goers B all displayed interest in the soprano herself, and her professional progress:

Q 6 I think if it was just a narrator alone, I probably wouldn't have seen [the show]. I think just hearing from one of the key players, and listening to her, and ... what was attractive was they talk us through her background, so she's a new graduate and, you know, she took upon this role which is quite deep and complex. Yes, so it would be nice to see how she fares. (Jennifer, Mousetrap B, p. 8)

The respondents who displayed an interest in the soprano's career and character insights were sometimes frustrated by other aspects of her contribution:

Q 7 Okay, so she's learned a lot and she's really been excited to sing it, but I'm not sure that that tells me anything about it. (Valerie, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 15)

Valerie represents respondents who were irritated by artists offering their opinion of the value or quality of ETO's work. Young opera-goers expressed the same point somewhat differently. They had been interested in hearing from the soprano but were disappointed by her contribution, which they found lacking in content and 'wishy-washy.'³²

Some respondents compared the podcast with Met Opera Live contributions from singers, and with singers talking about their roles on Radio Three. Participants said they were interested in hearing from the singers about their roles, but not about 'what they had for breakfast and all that nonsense.'³³

We conclude that our listeners were interested in hearing from performers about their character and about particular aspects of their work, but were resistant to generalized or unspecific statements about whether the performer found their work enjoyable, rewarding, interesting, demanding, etc.

(iv) Music

The strongest response to the lack of music in the clip came from Mark:

Q 8 In the whole fifteen minutes, is there any music? [...] I mean, he said [...] 'What's amazing about this...' and 'this wonderful arrangement,' and you didn't hear a squeak apart from his chair at one stage! And that was it! I mean, that's criminal! (Mark, Regular Opera-goers B, p. 11)

Mark displayed a strong emotional reaction to the lack of music in the clip; he was annoyed by it. Other groups also wanted the clip to feature music, but none were as engaged with the idea as Mark.

Q 9 It should definitely have some music, at least. [...] I saw the production: it was wonderful, and the music is just gorgeous, so I think it's a real missed opportunity. (Samuel, Regular Opera-goers C, p. 18)

2) Function

Our respondents identified the podcast as an informational and educational tool. One said it made her want to attend, though paradoxically she did not like the podcast itself, but was attracted by the story of the opera.³⁴ For the most part, however, the podcast was not received as an advertising tool. Some of our participants were interested in how the podcast could inform their listening when they attended a performance, and others felt it was something they would be interested in only after they had seen the show.

For the former group, they wanted to absorb the information before seeing a performance, but only once they had committed to attending:

³² Sara, Young Opera-goers B, p. 17.

³³ Deborah, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 17.

³⁴ Amy, Young opera-goers 9, p. 17.

- Q 10 Maybe I might listen to something like that if I've booked tickets already to go and see a production, and I'm like: 'Actually, I want to be really clued up before I go.'
(Sara, Young Opera-goers B, p. 17, 18)

A similar point obtained for the respondent who compared the podcast to the Met Live interval material. In this case, the supporting material is encountered as part of the performance, rather than before or after attending:

- Q 11 I'm happy to listen to singers talking at the intervals, something like that. That's normally in Met Opera Live or something like that, and there... you know, it's a sort of a perk for the audience, isn't it?
(Neala, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 17)

Other respondents would want to access the material after having seen the performance:

- Q 12 If you'd been to see it, it would be really interesting to listen to afterwards. But if you weren't going to see it, I think it would be too long.
(Renée, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 15)

In all three cases, the experience offered by the podcast is attractive in the context of attending the opera. It does not make listeners want to go, but if they are already committed to going, it enhances their experience.

There was also some interest in the podcast as an educational tool separate from a particular production. Clara felt that it would be useful 'at school,' while Amy reported that it was a new way for her to research a specific opera.³⁵ Robert felt that the podcast was 'for aficionados,' who already knew about opera and wanted to find out in more detail about this particular opera.³⁶

3) Audience Habits

In our focus groups, listening to the podcast engendered discussion of audience habits, since our respondents wondered about, or commented on, the likelihood of themselves or other people listening to a podcast in the first place. Some respondents did not know what a podcast was; some were habitual listeners to podcasts and could compare the ETO podcast to others; some were aware of podcasts but unlikely to listen to them. Most of our participants fell into the latter category, which might explain their relative lack of engagement. They were able to say what they liked and disliked about the podcast, but there was an underlying feeling that since they (or their peers) would not have listened to it in other circumstances, the criticism had a hypothetical aspect to it.

Our respondents recognized that it took some effort to listen to a podcast, and that it was more difficult to engage attention without the visual aspect.

- Q 13 I think if you are a visual learner, it might take some time to stay focused and listen. You know, it works well for somebody who is an auditory learner. Yeah. So it appeals to just one audience.
(Jennifer, Mousetrap B, p. 7)
- Q 14 But that would be great if it's got a video with it, I think. Yeah. Maybe, like having some music at the start that would catch the audience attention [...].
(Amy, Young Opera-goers B, p. 16)

³⁵ Clara, Mousetrap A, p. 10; Amy, Young Opera-goers 9, p. 16.

³⁶ Robert, Non-opera-goers A, p. 20.

Q 15 I do listen to podcasts, so it's not an unfamiliar form. But with something like opera, which for me is as much a visual as an auditory thing to see, I just want to know what I'm going to be expecting. (Alisa, Young Opera-goers B, p. 16)

Listeners who were familiar with podcasts used specific points of contrast to criticize this one. The skill and manner of the speakers was one point of contrast:

Q 16 But, again, they [*the podcasts he listens to*] are radio programmes with speakers who are speaking live, even if the podcast isn't live, obviously, and you feel this. This was more like an audio guide. The thing you use in a museum, and I would never listen to it. (Giovanni, Young Opera-goers A, p. 16)

The 'neutral' (Giovanni's word) tone of the narrator and the feeling that she is reading a script were negatively received by a number of our participants:

Q 17 I thought it was unbelievably boring. I thought the voice of the link person was... sounded like she was reading from a script. (Carly, Non-opera-goers A, p. 19)

Even respondents who enjoyed the podcast agreed that it did not compare favourably to Radio 4, which acted as a benchmark for their expectations of quality:

Q 18 Maybe the sound quality could have been better as well. Cos you listen to a range of them. You listen to a Radio 4 podcast and you get... you know, high, professional quality. This was like [a] BBC History Magazine podcast, and it's like people being interviewed on the telephone and stuff. So it doesn't have that richness. (Robert, Non-opera-goers A, p. 20)

Thus, amongst our respondents, people who were unfamiliar with podcasts were unlikely to listen to one, and people who were familiar with them tended to compare the ETO podcast, often unfavourably, with Radio 4.

However, some respondents did enjoy the podcast:

Q 19 I liked the podcast. Cos it's the sort of thing that I do put on and then get on with something else. Cos it's just like switching the radio on. And... podcasts for Barbican productions are really pretty good. You know, twenty minutes, you get the full info. (Martin, Regular Opera-goers C, p. 23)

In this quotation, Martin's existing habits of listening to radio and to podcasts are a factor in his positive response. He already has a way of engaging with a podcast, and in particular, with one giving information about a theatrical production. Other respondents who liked the podcast also had an existing habit of listening to the radio and to podcasts.

4) Technical

Response to the technical aspects of the podcast can be divided in two: (i) the skill of the people featured, and (ii) the technical quality. Most of the criticism falls into the former category.

The skill of the speakers in presenting material for radio was a point of much interest for our respondents. In particular, many pointed out that the narrator's contribution was

scripted, and that she sounded like she was reading. Respondents compared this contribution to radio programmes where the speakers seemed more spontaneous:

Q 20 She reads very well, obviously. But it's too mechanical, and you don't feel the life in... in her words. (Giovanni, Young Opera-goers A, p. 15)

Q 21 The voice is boring, the woman's voice, and I think if you're going to do... I'm just thinking of, like, Radio 4, like, *Woman's Hour*, Jenni Murray, her voice is very dynamic. (Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 20)

Criticism of the narrator's skill led respondents to make judgments of the overall production values of the clip:

Q 22 It did sound like a schoolchild production. Or a children's production. (Robert, Non-opera-goers A, p. 19)

Q 23 There's so little context [in a podcast] other than the verbal, and so that has to be really hot. And I don't think it was a particularly good quality production, or a very slick presentation either. So it really didn't do it. You know, podcasts, I think they need to be very, very crisp in order to be able to generate interest. (Mark, Regular Opera-goers B, p. 12)

In talking about the other two contributors (the soprano and conductor), our respondents focused on content, rather than the technique of speaking for radio. We might conclude, then, that an obviously scripted contribution is less attractive to listeners than an apparently spontaneous one.

Summary

Respondents generally found the podcast less accessible than audio-visual material. Those who did enjoy podcasts were critical of its quality. Spontaneity and dynamism were valued in speakers, and the podcast was criticised for lacking these qualities.

Headline Finding

This item was the least engaging for our respondents.

Chapter 7: Paper Programme

This was the final item considered.

Summary: Positive or Negative?

All groups responded positively to the programme. Within each group, there were some respondents who habitually buy programmes, some who never do, and some who buy them occasionally. Each of these subgroups had a positive response to the programme, and in some cases, 'non-buyers' reported that they would buy this programme. For others, they liked it but would not buy it. Response to the programme is discussed in two categories: (1) Habits and expectations; (2) ETO Programme.

1) Habits and Expectations

Amongst those respondents who habitually buy a programme, there were three reasons for their purchase; for information, as a memento, or to have something to do during the

interval (for those who attended on their own). Those buying the programme as a memento would only do so for a show they considered to be special and memorable. For example, one respondent kept, and 'treasured,' all his Glyndebourne programmes, but did not usually buy other programmes.³⁷ Another respondent would not normally buy programmes but would do so for something that she really liked, so that she could keep it.³⁸

Those seeking information were aware that they could find it on the internet, and some information-seekers would not buy a programme but would research what they wanted online.³⁹ A number of regular opera-goers used the Barbican downloadable programmes.⁴⁰

Respondents who bought programmes for information used them in diverse ways. Some wanted to read the synopsis before seeing the show; others wanted to read biographies on the way home; some wanted to dip in and out of essay material at home. Respondents were looking for diverse things from a programme: cast lists and biographies; synopses; insight into story and character; essays. Two respondents mentioned wanting to know when the interval was.⁴¹

Those who did not habitually buy programmes were motivated by various reasons: space-saving; money-saving; dislike of excessive advertising; getting information elsewhere.

Our respondents were price sensitive. Some made a conscious trade-off between buying a programme and having a glass of wine or an ice-cream.⁴² Some wanted a free alternative: stapled sheets with good presentation and key information.⁴³ There were also some suggestions that the programme itself should be free. Vanessa saw the ETO programme as a season brochure, which she would expect members to receive in the post as a taster.⁴⁴ Patricia mentioned 'grand opera houses' in Europe where a wonderful 'catalogue' would be given to audience members for free, whereas it might cost £10 in London.⁴⁵ Matteo felt it was 'incongruous' that programmes were not offered to the public for free.⁴⁶ Both groups of young opera-goers felt that £4 was inexpensive. Non-opera-goers felt that £4 was too expensive. Regular opera-goers considered £4 to be the cut-off price.

2) ETO Programme

We asked respondents to spend five minutes looking through the ETO programme and to give us feedback on anything they liked or disliked. There was very little negative feedback. The programme fulfilled the needs of those looking for information and supporting material, and exceeded their expectations. There was less advertising and more content than they expected. It was considered to be comprehensive.

Respondents tended to pick out pages that featured either images or large, striking fonts, and favoured pages towards the front of the programme. On one hand, those tendencies may have been to do with the limited time we had for browsing, but on the other, similar conditions may obtain in audience members' actual usage of programmes. Clarity was

³⁷ Mark, Regular Opera-goers B, p. 12.

³⁸ Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 22.

³⁹ Neala, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 20; Mark, Regular Opera-goers B, p. 20; Jennifer, Mousetrap B, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Regular Opera-goers C, p. 19.

⁴¹ Jennifer, Mousetrap B, p. 8; Robert, Non-opera-goers A, p. 23.

⁴² Patricia, Regular Opera-goers C, p. 19; Clara, Mousetrap A, p. 11.

⁴³ Matteo, Non-opera-goers A, p. 26; Valerie, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 18.

⁴⁴ Young Opera-goers A, p. 18.

⁴⁵ Regular Opera-goers C, p. 18.

⁴⁶ Non-opera-goers A, p. 22.

important to our participants, and they responded well to the colour-coding of pages and to large titles. A lack of clarity on specific pages elicited negative responses. For example, Robert found it confusing that on 'Synopsis' pages, the opera title is not shown, but is shown on the next page.⁴⁷ Amy found page 20 ('From the Tragical in Daily Life') confusing and did not understand where the text came from.⁴⁸

Each type of material featured in the programme was positively received: illustrated essays; cast lists; biographies; rehearsal insight and photographs; information about ETO. The balance between different types of material and the length of items seemed to be about right for our respondents. The programme appealed to participants across the full range of previous experience and knowledge of opera.

Francesca had an immediate, positive reaction to page 7, because the image of a black performer was not what she expected from opera, and made her want to engage with the company:

Q 1 Page 7. There's a black person on there, and in opera you never see anyone of an ethnic minority, and if they're performing in Hackney, and to tap into that kind of demographic, you need to start having people of ethnic minority on there. I think that would definitely make such an impact. [...] I would go to watch that even without reading it just because it's got a black cast.

(Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 22)

Other participants picked out pages in line with their own personal lives and interests, for example Clara was very interested in page 29 (Children's Chorus), and wanted to know how the children got selected, and wondered whether her own children would have wanted to do something like that when they were younger.⁴⁹

Our non-opera-goers were confused and somewhat shocked by the inside back cover: 'Support Opera that Moves:'

Q 2 At the very end, when you get to this bit in the end, you start realizing the kind of clientele that you may not be part of. (Laughs) (Matteo, Non-opera-goers A, p. 24)

Q 3 Yeah, I'm sorry, I'm confused by this. Are we actually... so... someone will just give money just to support them? [...] Yeah, if this is in Hackney, I just personally think this is the wrong [...] demographic. [...] Five pounds a month! That's a lot for some people.

(Francesca, Non-opera-goers A, p. 24)

No other group singled out this page, and when we asked about it, no other group had a negative reaction. Regular opera-goers thought it was useful to have the information, and both Mousetrap respondents thought it was interesting, but had not previously considered that an opera company might be a charity, or why it might choose charitable status.⁵⁰ Jennifer wondered what the benefits to the donor would be, and compared it to the Art Fund card, with discounts and special events.

⁴⁷ Robert, Non-opera-goers A, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Young Opera-goers B, p. 19.

⁴⁹ Mousetrap A, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Regular Opera-goers A, p. 19; Mousetrap A, p. 13, 14; Mousetrap B, p. 9, 10.

Participants responded positively to the programme's layout. Apart from two negative comments about text colour (in reference to pink font on pages 20 and 23), the colour scheme and fonts were well received and were considered easy to read. The fact that the paper was not shiny was considered to help readability in theatre lighting, although one group thought the paper seemed 'cheap,' so that the price should not be too expensive.⁵¹ The physical size of the programme was good for handbags.⁵²

The programme is clearly in competition with internet sources. Many respondents preferred to get their information for free on the internet, and some wanted to be able to download material, for free, from the company's website.

Summary

The programme was the most positively received of all the materials we shared with our groups. Both its format and its content appealed to participants across a diverse range of knowledge and experience. The relative lack of advertising drew particular comment. However, even after perusing the programme, it seemed that respondents who did not habitually buy programmes would still not have bought it, despite liking it (because they made the decision based on saving space, for example), or would not have bought it because of an expectation that it would be full of advertising and lacking in content.

Headline Finding

This item was well received, but not all respondents would pay for it.

Conclusion: Discussion and Business Implications

At the outset of this research project, we were interested in finding out how successful individual clips were at attracting different audience segments. The diversity of response suggests that this question would need to be asked on a much larger scale in order to gain a statistically useful result. Given the discursive nature of our research data, and the small sample size, it is not possible to draw statistical conclusions regarding what proportion of respondents in any given audience segment are likely to have a particular response. Rather, our data gives us an opportunity to explore how people use supporting materials, and what functions the materials perform.

We conclude that the primary function of supporting materials is in developing audience members' familiarity with the company's work, at the same time as aligning their expectations of a particular performance. Brown and Novak (2007) assessed the hypothesis that 'readiness to receive' a performance affects the intrinsic impacts an audience member will enjoy, and concluded that 'the expectation of an enjoyable experience is the single best predictor of a satisfying experience on the night.'⁵³ This conclusion is supported by later research, including by Walmsley (2013), who reported that: 'audience members with the deepest expectations reaped the highest value from their

⁵¹ Carly, Non-opera-goers A, p. 25.

⁵² Deborah, Regular Opera-goers A, p. 22.

⁵³ Brown, Alan S. and Jennifer L. Novak, 'Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance,' WolfBrown, January 2007, p. 11 [<http://wolfbrown.com/component/content/article/42-books-and-reports/400-assessing-the-intrinsic-impacts-of-a-live-performance> (accessed 5 April 2016)].

experience'.⁵⁴ In Brown and Novak's study, anticipation was found to be more significant than either knowledge and experience, or familiarity and comfort with the performance situation. High levels of anticipation seem to magnify intrinsic impact, and Brown and Novak suggest that 'presenters should focus more on pre-performance engagement strategies in order to create higher levels of anticipation before the performance.'⁵⁵

We propose that the supporting materials examined in this study perform two, high-level functions for viewers: they provide viewers with a short-cut to familiarity, and they help viewers to align their expectations. According to the research cited above, both these functions will enable the possibility of increased intrinsic impact from attending a performance. Both functions operate on numerous levels: in our findings, we observe the clips providing the viewer with familiarity and managing viewer expectations in the following areas:

- (i) The quality and standard of ETO as a company
- (ii) The style of production and music for a given performance
- (iii) The standard of production and music for a given performance
- (iv) Story and character
- (v) Insight into the creative process

Supporting materials help audience members form an understanding of the company itself. The very fact that the materials exist indicates to viewers that the company is of a relatively large size and is of high quality, in comparison to smaller organisations. Accordingly, viewers expect the quality of clips to be high. The technical production values of clips are an indicator, to viewers, of the production values of the company as a whole. If the sound quality of a clip is poor, viewers make negative associations with the quality of a performance. If the editing does not appear slick and professional, the same expectation transfers to the performances. The technical standard of clips is a significant sales tool.

We found that supporting materials help viewers know what to expect if they attend a performance, with respect to the scale, style, and quality of both production and music. In order to perform this function, each clip needs to have a straightforward and easily understood relationship to the stage production. Amongst the materials we considered, the simplest pathway to this function was to reproduce footage from a production, as in 'Pourquoi me Réveiller.' Of the two clips that attempted to fulfill the same function, but were made before there was stage footage to film (the *Hoffmann* trailer and *Werther* in Rehearsal), the latter was more successful than the former, although neither succeeded in giving viewers a taste of the music as performed in the ETO production.

Clips give viewers information that enhances their experience of seeing a performance. Our respondents wanted to gain insight into the stories and characters of an opera they were thinking of attending. They were interested in information that would inform their listening, for example about reduced orchestration. They were intrigued by insight into the creative process and felt drawn in by rehearsal footage.

We found that audience members differ regarding when they would like to find out information about a production. Some are interested in discovering as much as possible before they attend. Others prefer to access supporting material after they have seen a

⁵⁴ Walmsley, Ben, "A big part of my life": a qualitative study of the impact of theatre,' *Arts Marketing: An International Journal*, 2013, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 73-87; p. 81.

⁵⁵ Brown and Novak (2007), p. 20.

performance. We have seen from Brown and Novak's and Walmsley's research that high levels of anticipation are associated with high levels of impact, and our report shows that the supporting materials can increase and align viewers' anticipation. Those audience members who are already highly engaged with opera may be likely to have higher levels of anticipation, given the importance of opera to them and their existing knowledge about what to expect. This group may have less need for the expectation management offered by digital materials; however, as we have seen amongst the respondents in this study, highly engaged audience members are likely to share clips as a way of encouraging others to attend. They may also use the clips as a means to facilitate reflection and on-going engagement after a performance. The producing company cannot know, in advance, which audience members want to engage with the materials before, and which after attending; viewers need to be enabled to make that decision themselves. In order to manage the diverse needs of viewers, a clip should be contextualized with enough information so that viewers can decide whether or not they want to watch it, and when they might prefer to do so.

Finally, we return to ETO's questions:

1. Do audiences engage with ETO's additional content as it stands?

Very few of our respondents did.

2. Did they know that this content existed?

As above.

3. If they did engage, how did they discover this content?

Those respondents who did engage had discovered the content through browsing the ETO website.

4. If not, why not?

Most respondents were not in the habit of browsing websites, but wanted to receive the material directly through email lists, or in some cases through Twitter or Facebook.

5. What kind of material would different audiences find engaging?

Existing habits are significant here. All of our respondents enjoyed the paper programme, and were confident in using it. People who already listened to radio and podcasts were most positive about the podcast, while others could not imagine engaging with it. Respondents who were least conversant with using the internet for entertainment were least likely to enjoy any of the videos, while those who were most used to the medium found the videos easier to interpret.

6. What media would they like to receive them through?

The older, regular opera-goers were more interested in using paper items (for example, Kobbé's Opera Book) to research operas, while younger participants or those more familiar with using the internet for entertainment wanted to receive the clips through email lists.

7. What should the tone be?

There are two main findings relating to tone: (i) our participants were resistant to presenters interpreting quality on their behalf; (ii) presenters should not assume knowledge on the part of their audience.

8. Can ETO monetise some of the content?

Our respondents were price sensitive and were unlikely to pay for any of the items, except the programme.

9. Is there something ETO is missing?

ETO has changed its practice as a result of the research findings, as outlined below.

The report has practical implications in three areas of ETO's business practice: (i) content production; (ii) delivery system; (iii) wider media engagement.

As regards content production, the ETO marketing department has revised the number of clips produced and the way they are produced. For the Spring 2016 tour, the podcast and Season Introduction have been discontinued. A professional crew has been commissioned to film *Don Giovanni*, in order to tackle the video/audio-quality issues that focus groups participants pointed out when watching the 'Pourquoi me réveiller' video. Music has been introduced into the trailers, despite the technical and copyright challenges involved. The new cinematic trailer, in comparison to the *Hoffmann* trailer discussed in the focus groups, was made more accessible to viewers that were not familiar with the plot of the opera.

Comparing the period of 1 August-1 October 2015 (pre-Autumn '15 opening) to 4 January-4 March 2016 (pre-Spring '16 opening), the *Don Giovanni* trailer has been viewed 14,860 times on Youtube and an additional 32,094 on Facebook, while the *Hoffmann* trailer had been viewed 1,039 on Youtube, plus 18,647 on Facebook. The *Don Giovanni* trailer is already the most watched video ETO has ever made (the second most watched is the trailer for the 2011 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with 9,502 lifetime views). There have also been higher views for the rehearsal trailers: '*Pia de' Tolomei* in Rehearsal' has been watched 1,074 times, compared to '*Werther* in Rehearsal,' which had 402 views.

Regarding delivery, the ETO team was interested to discover how many people do not engage with the online content because they did not know about it, or because they prefer to have it delivered directly to their email inbox or social media feeds. ETO is using the remainder of the BOOST grant to prototype an app that will deliver content directly to audience members' phones. The app will be tested during the Autumn 2016 season.

Regarding wider media engagement, the research findings made company members aware that audience members respond more positively to information, rather than qualitative judgment. Accordingly, General Director James Conway has changed his approach to discussing the company's work in media interviews.

In conclusion, the research findings have changed the practice of the company in engaging with the public outside the performance space. Initial viewing figures from the Spring 2016 tour (see above) indicate that this change in strategy has been highly successful.