

Seminars: Conceptual Discussion Seminars

Alan Brown, Principal, WolfBrown ***Measuring the intrinsic impact of the arts***

Alan Brown is principal of WolfBrown and a leading researcher and management consultant in the arts industry. From 2005 to 2007 he directed a groundbreaking study of the values and motivations driving attendance and donations for a consortium of fifteen major university presenters. Recently, he has been writing and speaking about the value system surrounding arts experiences, with his essay *An Architecture of Value* appearing in the spring 2006 edition of *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader*. Prior to his consulting career, Alan served for five years as executive director of the Ann Arbor Summer Festival. He holds three degrees from the University of Michigan and makes his home in San Francisco with a Labrador retriever called Golden Brown.

This was the first of two seminars from Alan Brown. It looked at what really happens when the visitors enter the exhibition or the lights go down and the curtain rises. Aside from the buzz in the foyer, is it possible to define – and even measure – how audiences and visitors are transformed? If you had this information, what would you do with it? Alan Brown provided a summary of his recent study with delegates being invited to debate the findings.

Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance

Last year, delegates learned about a newly developed framework of values and benefits of the arts, a basic conceptual space in which all the benefits of arts experiences can be placed. Most importantly, it illustrates how all benefits emanate from the experience itself. (2007 conference report: http://www.a-m-a.org.uk/publications_detail.asp?id=147 file one).

The matrix showed that the most important factor is the quality of the experience for the individual at that moment. If we want to talk about economic impact, civic pride, and the other instrumental benefits of arts experiences, then we have to care about the quality of the experience.

This session is about the ‘imprint’ of the arts experience, so-called because we can see something has happened, but we do not fully understand it (like a footprint in the sand). Essentially, how are people changed when after experiencing an arts event?

Genesis of the Imprint Study

The thought process that inspired this study:

- Tendency to define success in terms of revenue and attendance
- Industry-wide debate over intrinsic vs. instrumental benefits
- Anecdotal evidence of intrinsic impact is abundant
- Lack of good metrics for mission-driven non-financial outcomes
- Decision to focus on ‘imprint’ of the arts experience
 - ✓ Impact at the personal, microcosmic level

The inspiration for this extended study came from a comment by a researcher: 'If you can describe something, you can measure it.' It took a long time to work out that no matter how abstract something is, if it can be described, then questions can be drafted that would elicit responses to offer an insight into the process.

This study explored how people are changed at the end of an arts experience. We have abundant anecdotal evidence of the effects, but we have found it difficult to put numbers on it so far. At the moment, we tend to focus on revenue and attendance, but the way that art works on people is inherently complex and mysterious. However, that does not mean that we should not try to understand and assess it.

Lead Partners in the Study

The study was self-funded by a group of promoters, which freed the project from funders' agendas, as they could design the research programme they wanted. Effectively the researchers had 14 clients, and although it was hard work, it was also very stimulating. Collaborative research like this is highly recommended and made the study more robust.

- Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland
- University of Florida Performing Arts, Gainesville
- University Musical Society, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- Lied Center for Performing Arts, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- ASU Gammage, Arizona State University, Tempe
- Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts, UC-Davis

Associate Partners

- Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, UPenn
- Cal Performances, UC-Berkeley
- Center for the Performing Arts, Penn State University
- Hancher Auditorium, University of Iowa
- Hopkins Center for the Arts, Dartmouth College
- Krannert Center for the Perf. Arts, Univ. of Illinois
- Lied Center of Kansas, University of Kansas-Lawrence
- Stanford Lively Arts, Stanford University
- Ontario Presenters Network

Impact Survey – Research Questions & Methods

Hypotheses & Research Questions

Hypothesis 1. Can intrinsic impacts be measured?

- How should we talk about intrinsic impact? What is the vocabulary?

Hypothesis 2. Can we see how different performances generate different impacts?

- Are variations in impact intuitive?

Hypothesis 3. Does an individual's 'readiness to receive' influence the nature and extent of impact?

- How does readiness affect impact?
- How can impact be intensified?

The basic hypothesis is: ***can we measure how people are changed?*** This is also a vocabulary issue. Part of the problem is that we have not developed a vernacular for talking about the intrinsic impact of the arts on people; that is why we talk about attendance rather than how people feel.

An individual's preparedness to encounter the art is what is meant by 'readiness to receive'. This takes account of the fact that every person attending an event is in a different space that evening, depending on their circumstance. The researchers did not know how an individual's readiness to receive might influence the impact of the experience at the outset, although it became clear that readiness to receive *does* influence impact.

Hypothesis 3: a formula to understand it:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{'Readiness to Receive'} \\ & + \text{The Performance Experience} \\ & = \text{Intrinsic Impact} \end{aligned}$$

Protocol Design

- Protocol design was the central challenge of the study
 - ✓ How to deconstruct intrinsic impacts into discrete questions that can be easily answered?
- Collaborative, iterative design process
 - ✓ Design builds on thinking about intrinsic impacts in RAND's *Gifts of the Muse* and other research
- Two questionnaires were designed
 - ✓ Part 1 to be completed in respondent's seat before the performance
 - ✓ Part 2 to be taken home and mailed back within 24 hours

The protocol design: it was very difficult to write questions which would be attractive enough for attenders to answer.

Protocol Design: Key Constructs

Part 1

- Situational Factors
 - ✓ Purchase Behaviour
 - ✓ Social Construction
 - ✓ Reasons for Attending

Part One of the survey was made up of questions such as how and when the tickets were bought, who the person had come with, etc. This adds to the richness of the social context, which in itself is worthy of study. People were then asked about their motivations, ultimately to see if their impact aligned with their motivations. Then we went into the three readiness concepts.

- Readiness Constructs
 - ✓ Context - how much do you know about what you're going to see (neutral value)?
 - ✓ Relevance - do you usually go to this kind of thing? We particularly wanted to identify audiences that didn't usually attend
 - ✓ Anticipation – the emotional state of readiness

Pre-test conducted at UFPA in September 2005 at a performance by the King's Singers

Part 2

- Impact Constructs
 - ✓ Captivation or 'Flow'
 - ✓ Intellectual Stimulation
 - ✓ Emotional Resonance
 - ✓ Spiritual Value
 - ✓ Aesthetic Growth
 - ✓ Social Bonding
- Satisfaction Levels
- Demographics
- Constructs = key dimensions of intrinsic impact that we try to capture
- These constructs stemmed from a series of interviews and are based on previous research.
- The impact constructs are not necessarily mutually exclusive, e.g. emotional resonance and spiritual value.

Data Collection

- 19 performances were sampled between January and May 2006, encompassing a range of music, dance and theatre
- 200 survey packages were pre-set at each performance

Presenter	Artist/ Attraction	Discipline	Genre
Lied (UNL)	Royal Winnipeg Ballet	Dance	Ballet
UFPA	Alivn Ailey	Dance	Modern Dance
UMD	Joe Goode Performance Group	Dance	Modern Dance
ASU	Ronald K. Brown/Evidence	Dance	Modern Dance
Mondavi (UCD)	Grupo Corpo	Dance	Modern Dance
ASU	Daniel Bernard Roumain	Music	Contemp. Music
Lied (UNL)	Jake Shimabukuro	Music	Contemp. Music
UFPA	Soweto Gospel Choir	Music	Ethnic Music
UMS	Soweto Gospel Choir	Music	Ethnic Music
UMD	Opera Lafayette	Music	Opera
Mondavi (UCD)	London Philharmonic	Music	Orchestra
UMS	Kirov Orchestra	Music	Orchestra
Mondavi (UCD)	Macbeth (The Acting Company)	Stage Play	Classical Drama
Lied (UNL)	Aquila Theatre Co. - Hamlet	Stage Play	Classical Drama
UFPA	LA Theatre Works <i>Monkey Trial</i>	Stage Play	Contemp. Drama
UMD	LA Theatre Works <i>Monkey Trial</i>	Stage Play	Contemp. Drama
ASU	<i>Voices of Valor</i> , by James Garcia	Stage Play	Contemp. Drama
UMS	Pappa Tarahumara	Multi-Disc.	Performance Art
ASU	Mamma Mia!	Musical Theater	Musical Theater

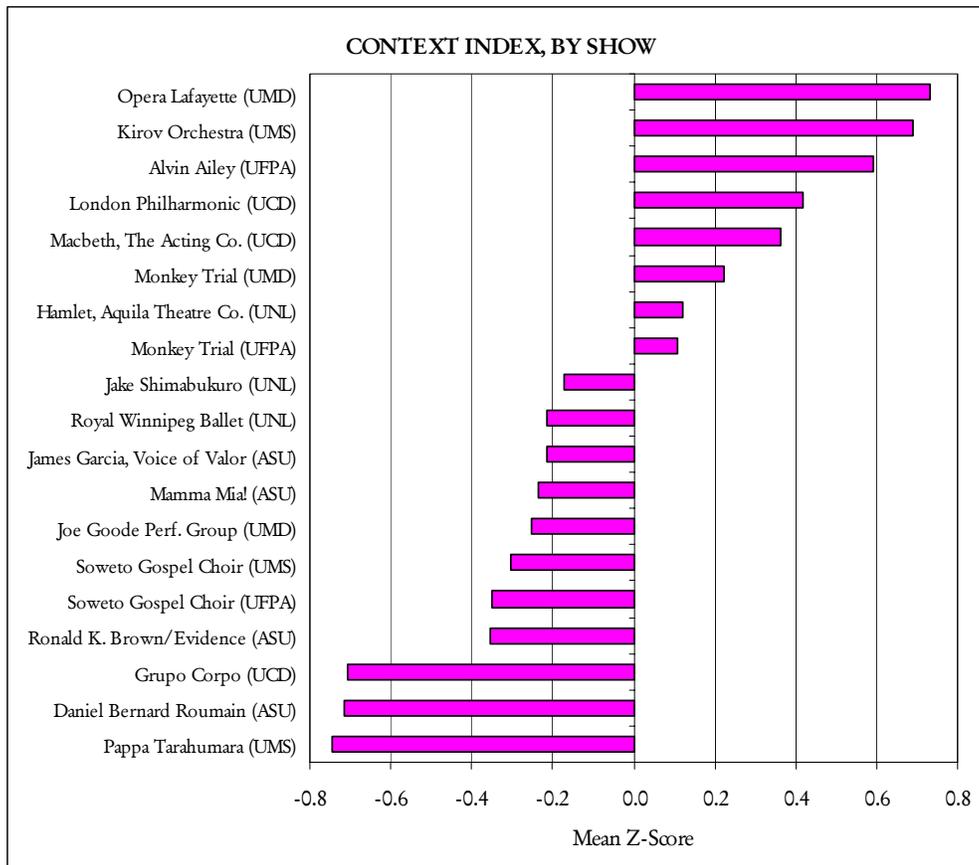
- ✓ Survey packages were taped to every Nth seat
- ✓ Each package included a two-part survey, return envelope & pencil
- Overall response rates
 - ✓ Part 1: 74%
 - ✓ Part 2: 61%
 - ✓ Total yield: 46% of all survey packages were completed

In addition to 200 pre-set packages, there was also focused sampling of pre-performance enhancement events on which separate analysis was undertaken. In order to help people fill in the questionnaire before the performance, there were survey workers on hand, the house lights stayed up and the curtain held for a few moments.

Results: Readiness Constructs

Context Index: How much background do they have on what they're about to see?

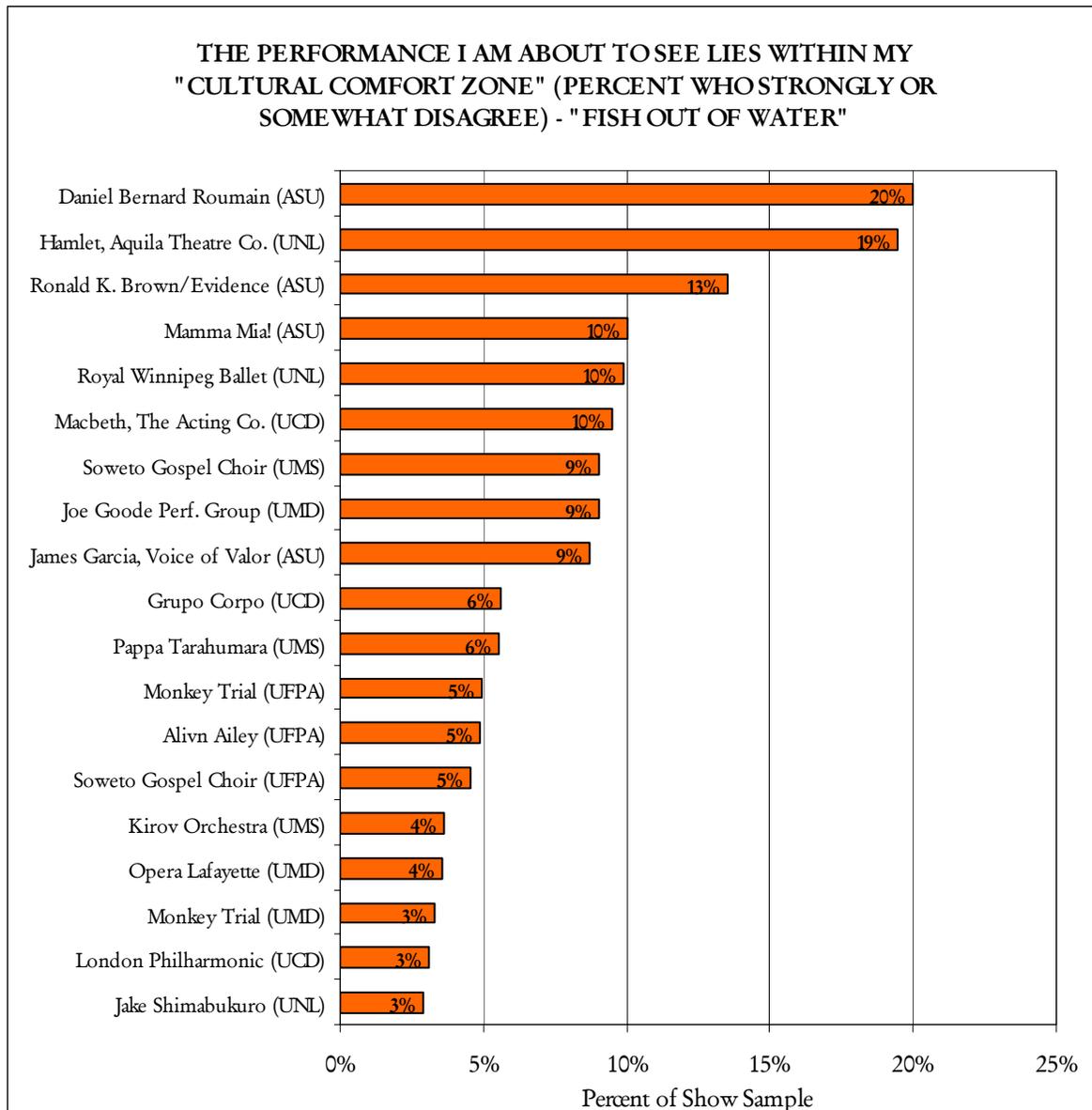
- How familiar are you with the [artist] that will be performing?
- Have you previously attended a performance by [artist]?
- How familiar are you with the [repertoire/pieces]?
- Indicate your level of familiarity, generally, with [genre]
- Have you had any training or performance experience in [genre]?
- Prior to arriving here, did you seek out any information about the performance that prepared you for the experience?



We found that many people are preparing in one way or another and also that repeat visits by companies and associated education work are very effective for helping audiences with this. The attractions at the bottom of the table: people just didn't know very much about them.

Relevance Index: How 'comfortable' are they in their seat?

- Apart from tonight's performance, I am likely to attend [performance type].
- Going to live performances (of any type) is a regular part of my life.
- The people I normally socialize with attend performances like this.
- The performance I am about to see lies within my cultural 'comfort zone.'

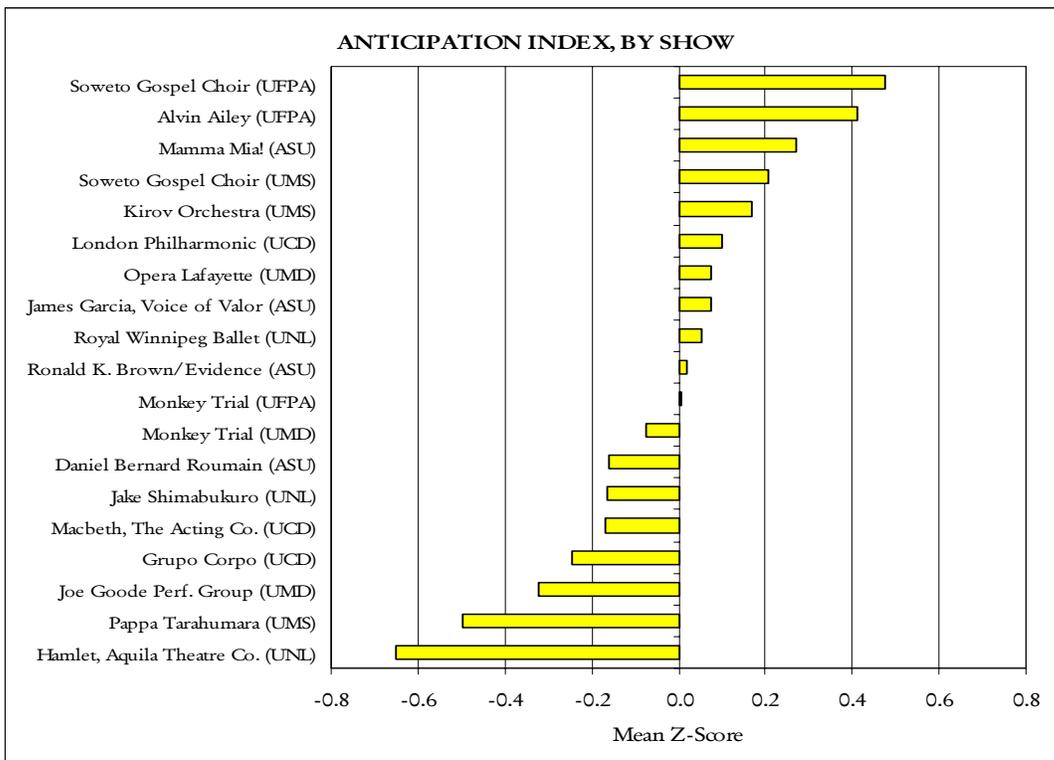
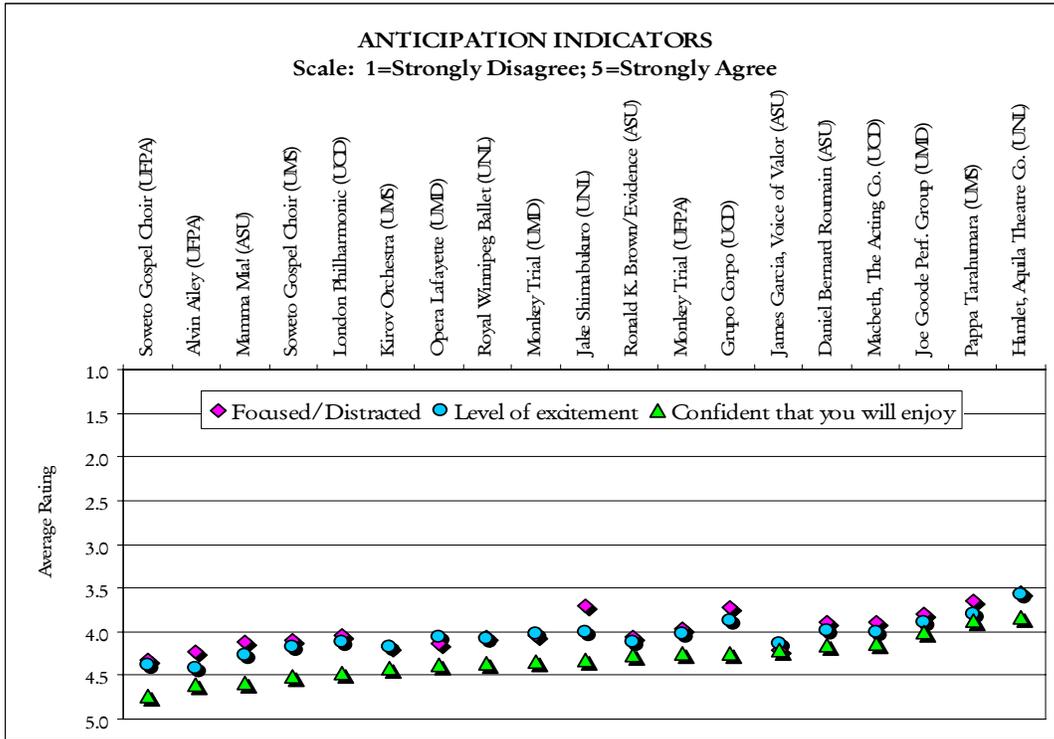


For the most part, people were well within their comfort zone; the exception, *Hamlet*, was explained by the fact that a lot of students attended. This was not a surprising result, as most people buy tickets to validate their natural preferences; people do not often intentionally go outside their comfort zone.

Anticipation

- Generally, how do you feel tonight? 1 = Distracted, 5 = Focused
- What is your level of excitement for tonight's performance? 1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High
- How confident are you that you will enjoy the performance? 1 = Not At All, 5 = Very

Range of possible points: 3-15

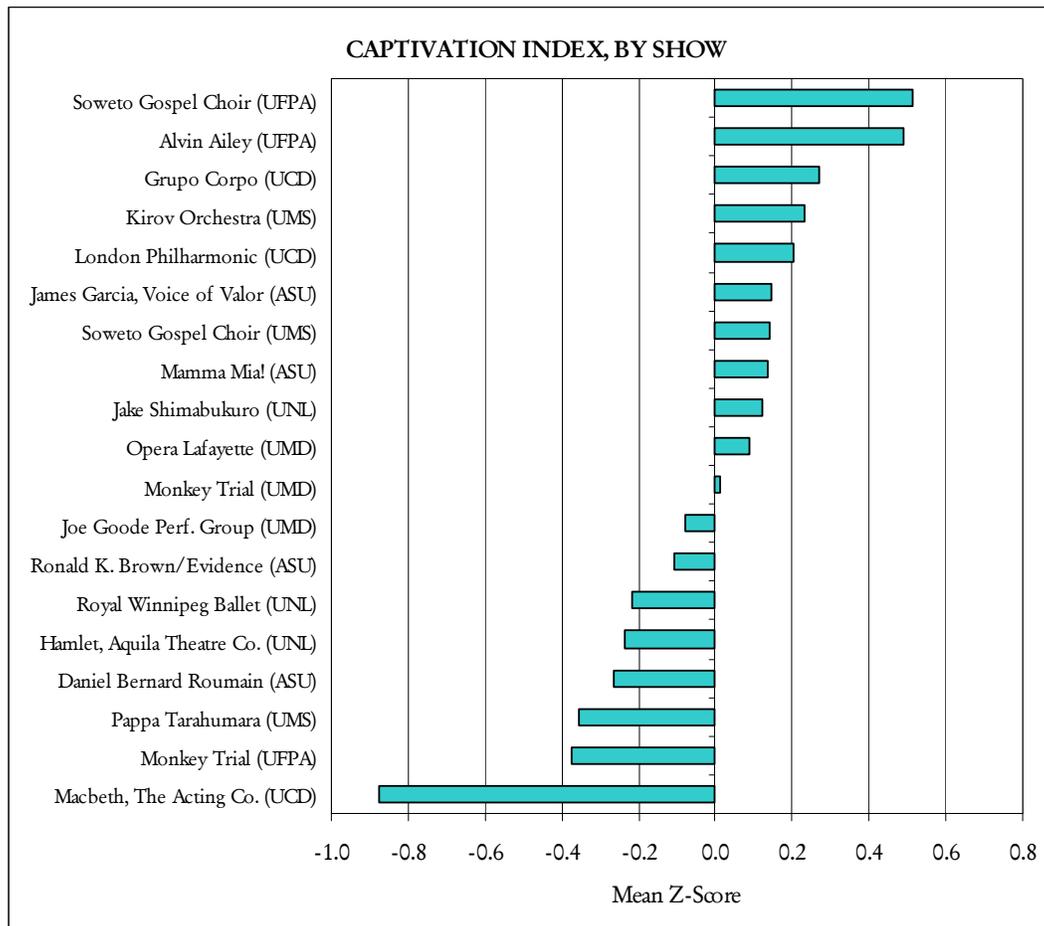


Anticipation was a straightforward question and we found that people in general who are looking forward to a show, tend to enjoy it more. We want to be excited, not disappointed.

Results: Impact Constructs (From Part 2 of survey)

Captivation or 'Flow'

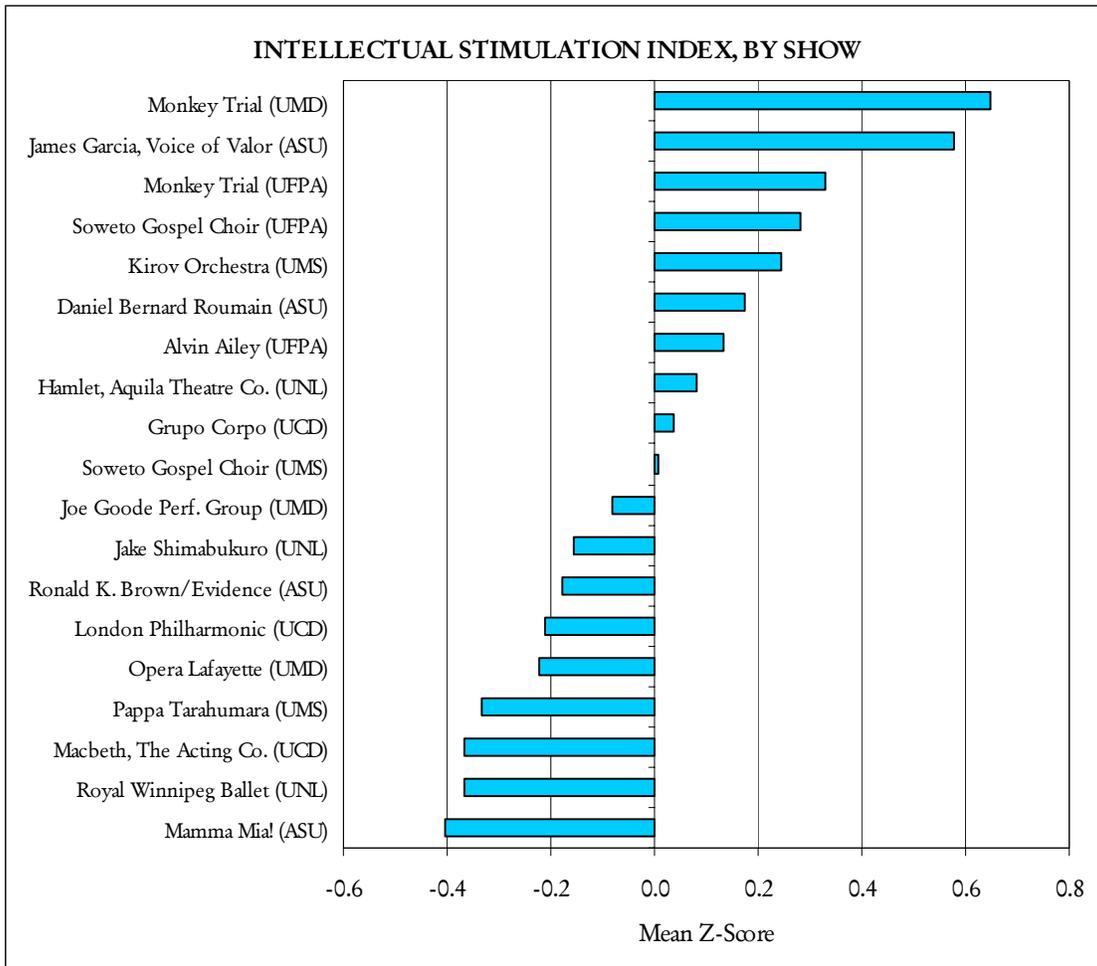
- To what degree were you absorbed in the performance?
- To what extent did you inhabit the world of the performers, lose track of time and forget about everything else?



Someone's state of captivation or 'flow' is very important as a pre-condition of the other impacts. Subconsciously, achieving a state of flow is one of the main reasons why people attend arts events; we want to escape from this world and go to an imaginary place, in the way that people seeing The Sultan's Elephant were transported. Essentially, being rooted in whatever you are involved in doing is to be happy. What can we do to maximise the possibility that audiences will achieve their state of flow? It is not just the art that shoulder that responsibility, it is the ushers, the lighting, the way the people are greeted, and the temperature in the room: many things.

Intellectual Stimulation

- How much did the performance engage you on an intellectual level?
- How much were you provoked or challenged by an idea or message?
- To what extent did the performance cause you to reflect on your own opinions or beliefs?
- To what extent do you feel that you understood the program and 'got' what the artists were trying to convey?

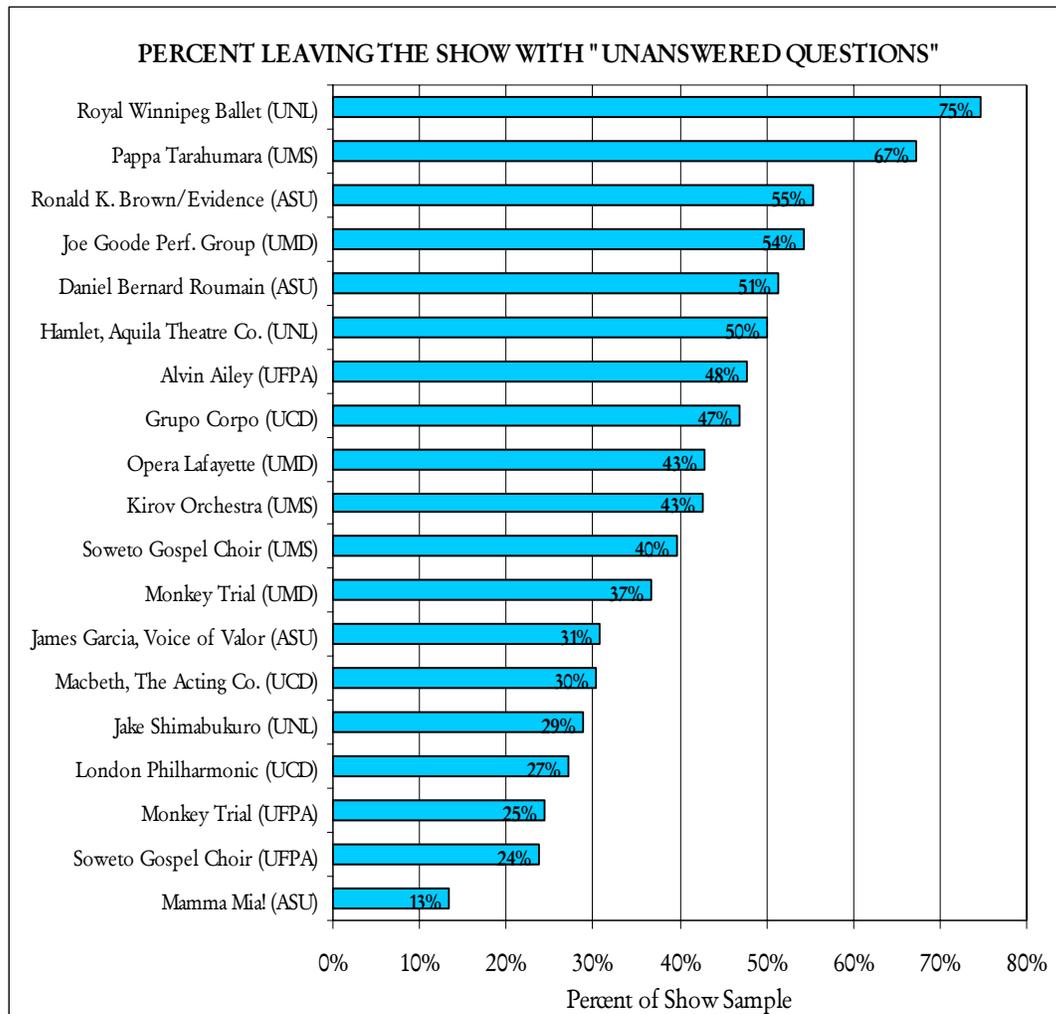


This is something that artistic colleagues prize highly; theatrical performances, not surprisingly, scored highly, although the context is important. We must qualify these results carefully, as we wouldn't expect a show like *Mamma Mia* to offer intellectual stimulation.

Discussion

- Afterwards, did you discuss the meaning or merits of the performance with others who attended?
 - ✓ 13% - 'No'
 - ✓ 68% - 'A casual exchange'
 - ✓ 19% - '**An intense exchange**'
- Do you recall leaving the performance with unanswered questions that you would like to ask the performers or creators of the work?
 - ✓ 42% 'Yes'

Range of possible points: 5-25

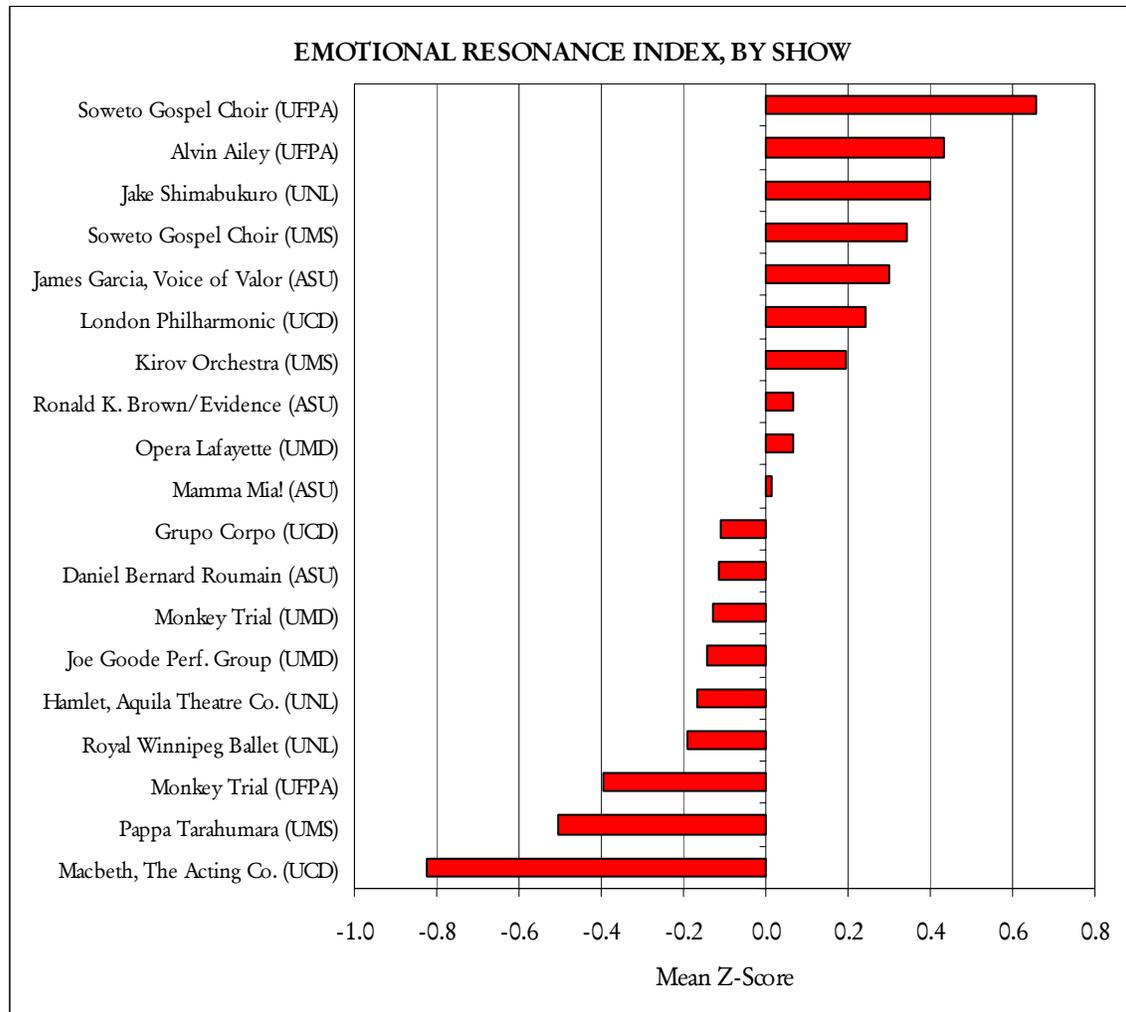


These questions tended to correlate better to theatre performances. As our main goal is to engage with audiences, this could be a key outcome indicator for the arts. We have to be careful about whether unanswered questions are 'good' or 'bad': it can be good because it is a sign of engagement, but we need to find ways to allow people to get these questions answered. This represents an opportunity for us to engage further with our audiences.

Emotional Resonance

- How would you characterize your emotional response to the performance?
1 = Weak, 5 = Strong
- To what extent did you relate to, or feel bonded with, one or more of the performers?
1 = Not At All, 5 = A Great Deal
- To what extent was the performance therapeutic for you in an emotional sense?
1 = Not At All, 5 = A Great Deal

Range: 3-15



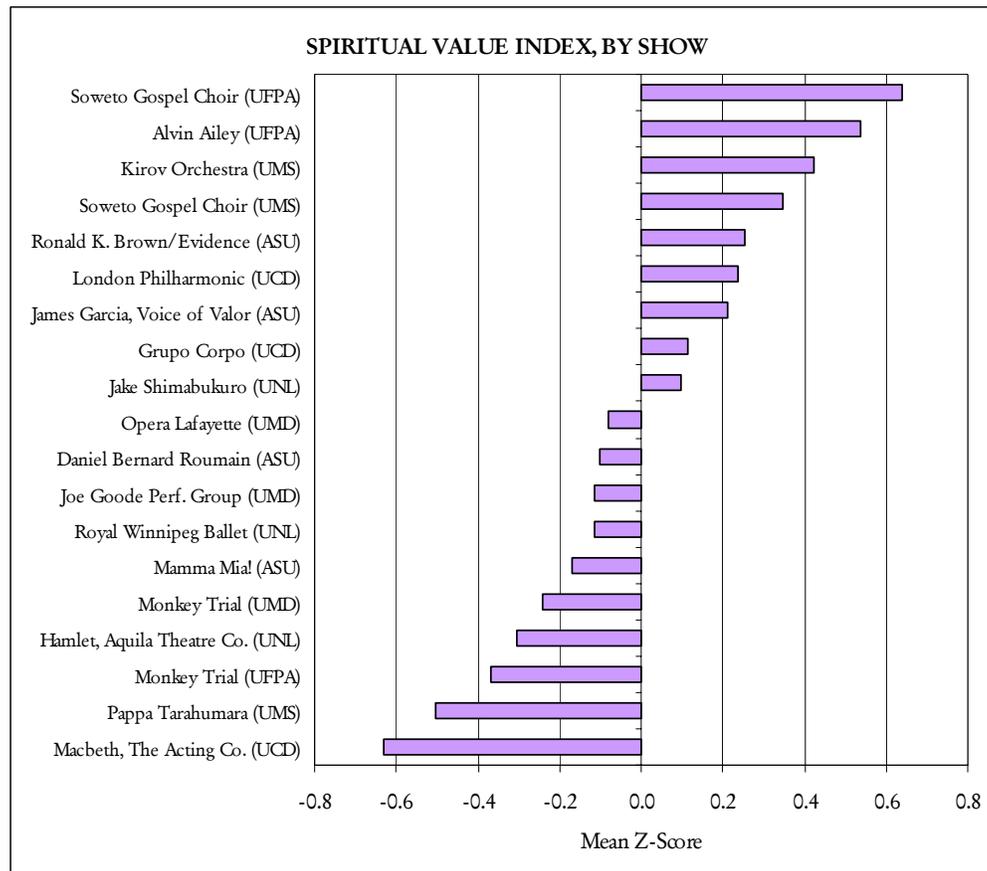
Music also has some interesting results, where people bond with the artists or use music to almost have a therapeutic experience.

Spiritual Value

- How much did the performance leave you feeling uplifted or inspired in a spiritual sense?
- To what degree was it a transcendent experience for you, in the sense of passing into a different state of consciousness for a period of time?
- To what extent did the performance leave you feeling empowered?

Spiritual value (the emotional response) is very hard to tease out: we had to be careful not to value negative emotions more than positive. This was about the strength of the response, no matter what flavour. The quality of the performance probably has a direct impact on the quality of the emotional response. Although it was a challenge to write suitable questions for self-reporting, we knew from focus groups that it was a significant reason for people to attend events.

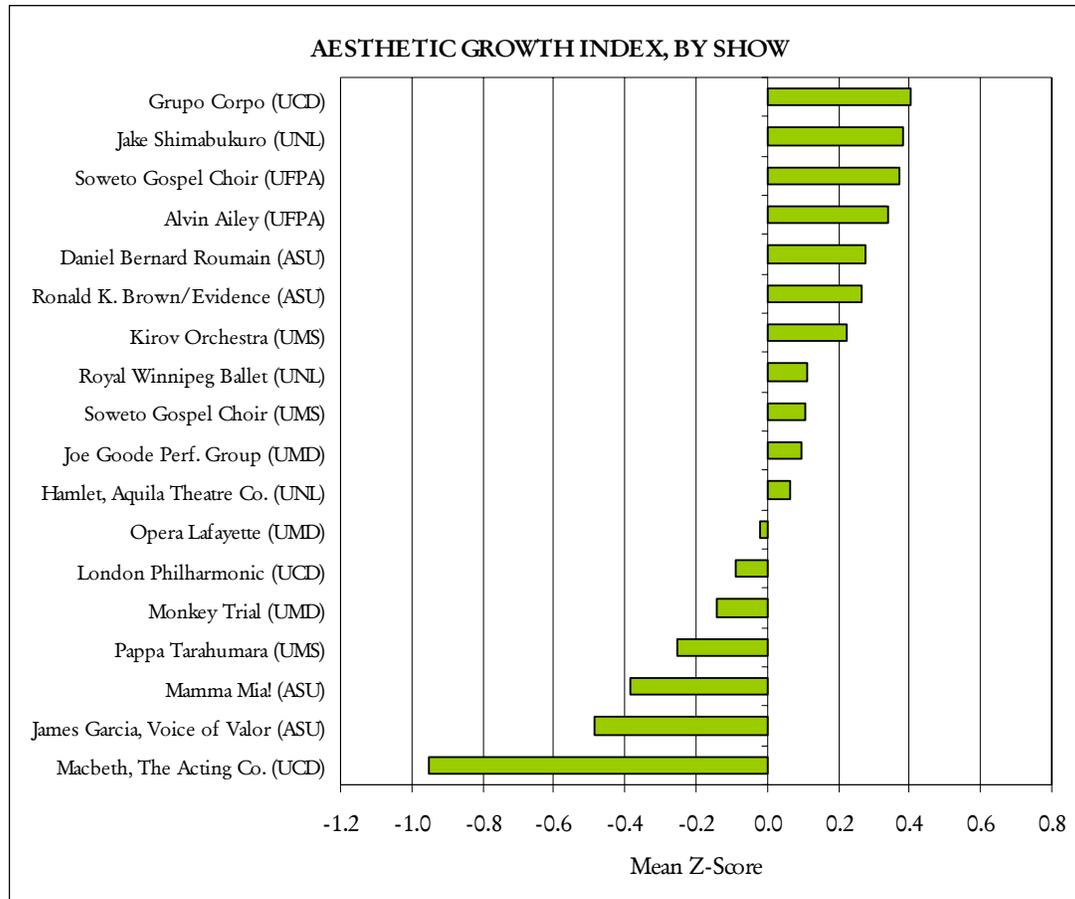
Transcendence: (we were very lucky to be talking to college educated audiences, so we could use complex words, we would have to work on a simpler form of words for wider groups) this is largely the same, but there is more divergence than the spiritual value.



Aesthetic Growth

- Did this performance expose you to a style or type of [dance/music/theatre] with which you were previously unfamiliar?
- How much did this performance change your feelings about the type or style of [dance/music/theatre] performed?
- Are you any more or less likely than you were before the performance to follow the work of [the artist] in the future?
- To what extent do you think your attendance at this performance will cause you to be more creative in your life, work or artistic endeavours?
- As a result of this performance, do you feel any better equipped to appreciate [music/dance/theatre] in the future?

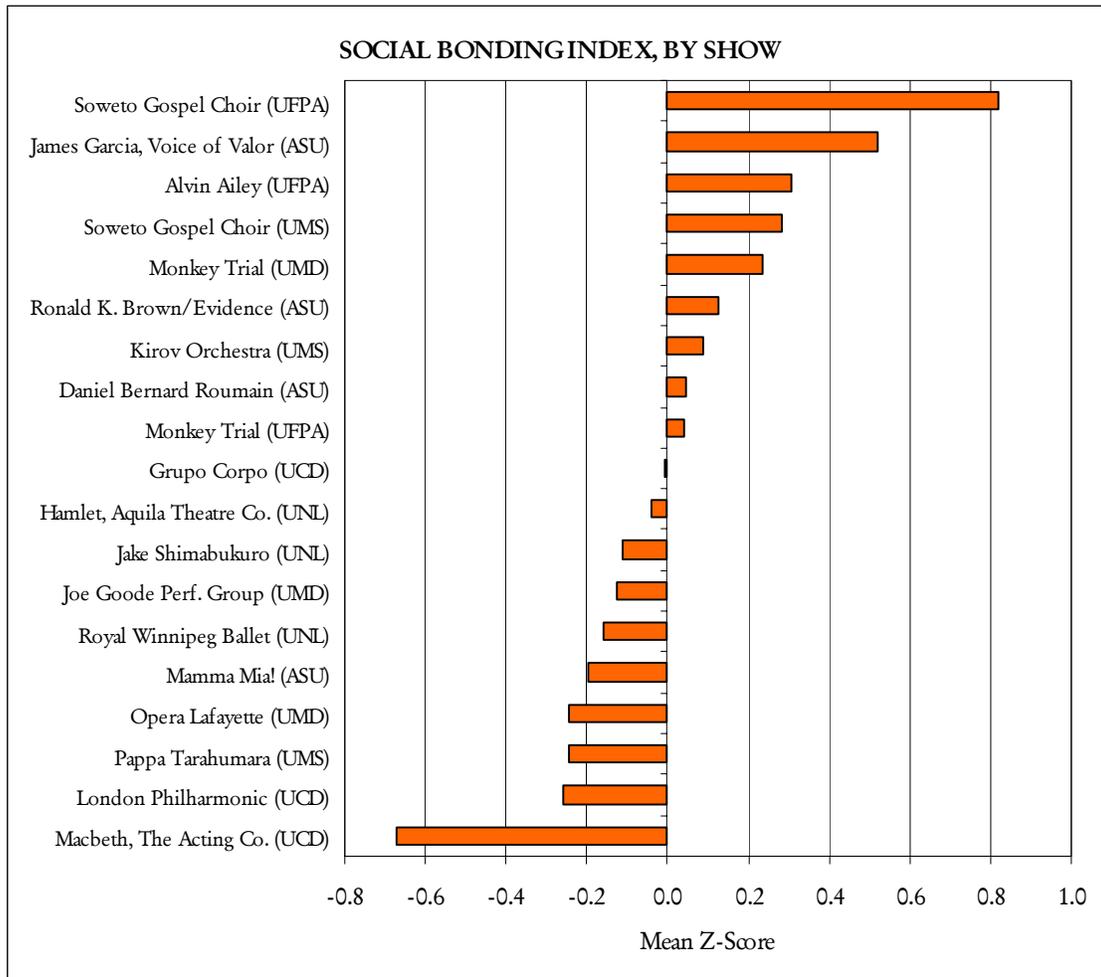
Range: 5-25



Aesthetic growth: artistic directors inevitably prize this outcome. We all want to stretch people, but we have to be realistic. We can challenge experienced audiences with sophisticated and contemporary work, but we also have to do stretch people who may not have experienced anything at all, in which case Beethoven's 9th could be just as challenging.

Social Bonding

- To what extent did you feel a sense of belonging or connectedness with the rest of the audience?
- To what extent did the performance serve to celebrate and sustain your own cultural heritage?
- To what extent did the performance expose you to one or more cultures outside of your own life experience?
- Did the performance leave you with new insight on human relations or social issues, or a perspective that you didn't have before?



Social bonding: this is not about going out after the show. It was about trying to get to the social benefits that are intrinsic to the art. The sense of connectedness with an audience is intangible, but we can see it. We should not assume that people should go out of their culture, and that they are less worthwhile if they don't, it is very dangerous way of thinking.

Relationship between Readiness & Impact

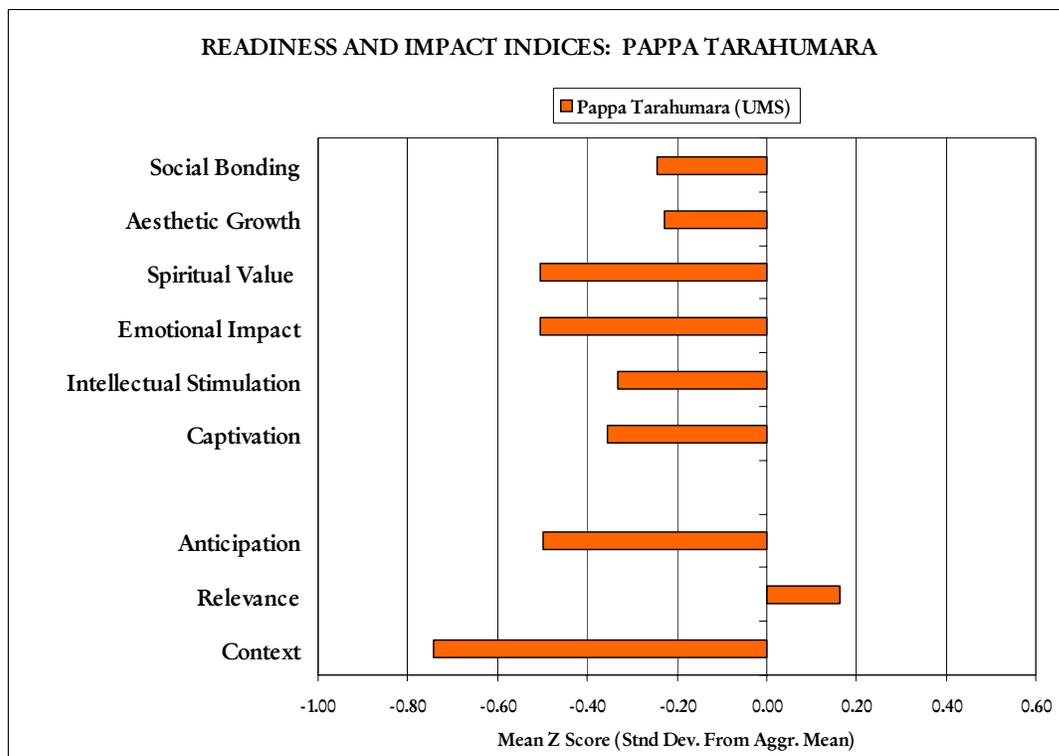
Quadrant Analysis

Impact	High	Low Readiness, High Impact	High Readiness, High Impact
	Low	Low Readiness, Low Impact	High Readiness, Low Impact
		Low	High
		Readiness to Receive	

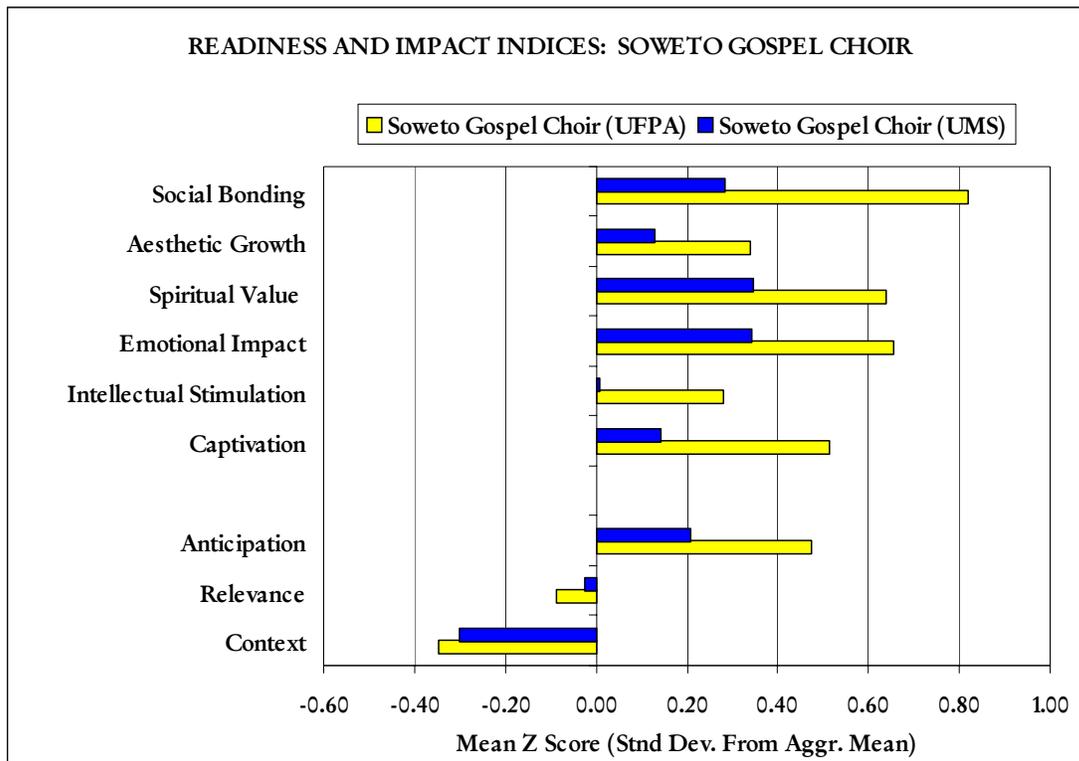
The survey showed performances in all four quadrants. This can inform programming decisions, as we see the situational impacts. It is a unique happening between that audience, that artist and that venue. Therein lies the central challenge: it is inherently situational. The marketing approach can have a huge impact in terms of people's anticipation because for many people, the only information, or context is the marketing information. This is why marketing is so strategic. This is why messaging accurately about the emotional impact and not exaggerating is important. It is important for us to go out and see the performances, so that we can accurately message.

Education is another good way of ensuring a high level of anticipation; we think we made progress with writing questions that allow people to tell us about their experience, although it was hard work. We had to write a protocol that was germane to music, theatre and dance performances. Now we could go back and write a short protocol that was appropriate to other programmes. We also learned that different performances have different impacts; and repeat performances can have magnifying impacts in a venue leading to higher anticipation levels.

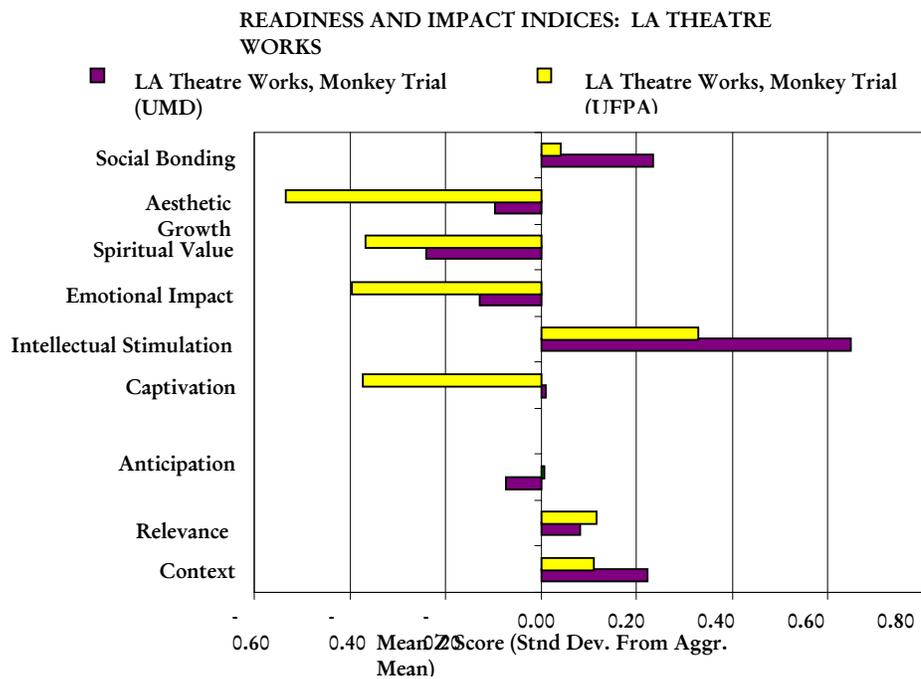
Low Readiness, Low Impact



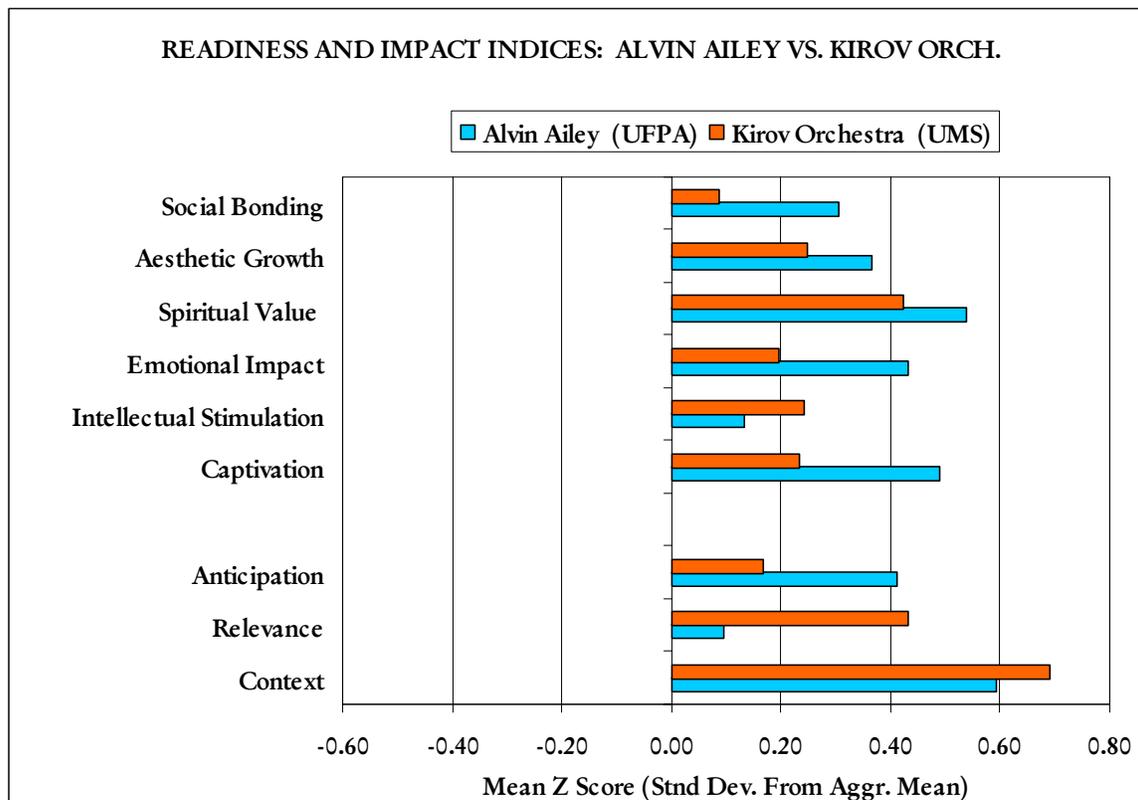
Low Readiness, High Impact



High Readiness, Low Impact



High Readiness, High Impact



Summary observations

H3: An individual's 'readiness to receive' influences the nature and extent of benefits

- H1: Intrinsic impacts can be measured...
 - Although they cannot be fully untangled from each other
- H2: Different performances create different impacts
 - Repeat engagements seem to be associated with higher impact levels
- H3: An individual's 'readiness to receive' influences the nature and extent of benefits
 - ✓ Anticipation has predictive power over all impacts
 - ✓ Higher levels of Context are positively associated with 4 of the 6 impacts

Explaining H3: Higher levels of Context are positively associated with:

1. captivation,
2. intellectual stimulation
3. emotional resonance
4. spiritual value

Readiness to receive: it does influence the impacts, but only if the art works. Anticipation can be elevated and can be influenced by context. When the anticipation is higher, captivation is higher, again underlining the significant role of the marketing message and strategy.

Higher levels of Relevance are positively associated with:

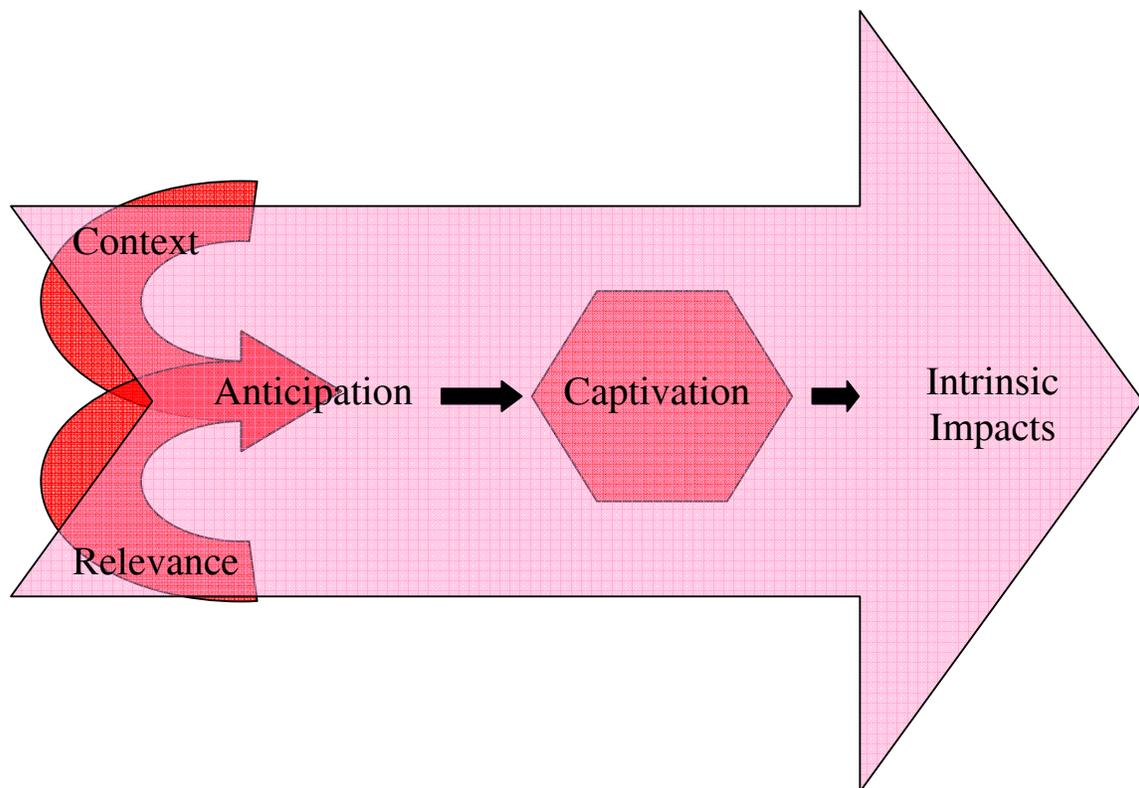
1. Intellectual Stimulation
2. Aesthetic Growth

While the data indicate that the overall concept of our simple guiding equation is correct, they also indicate that there exists a more nuanced relationship between different readiness constructs and impacts.

Aesthetic Growth can be achieved in two ways:

- New or challenging work for a sophisticated audience
- Attracting new or infrequent audiences to artists and works that are unfamiliar to them

Hypothesis #3: Readiness vs. Impact



Implications for Arts Organizations

- Focus on pre-performance context-building and engagement strategies
- Re-evaluate the audience experience
 - ✓ Maximize audience's likelihood of achieving 'Flow'
- Messaging effectively to create anticipation
 - ✓ Often, the marketing message is the only context that audiences have
- Suggests more involved relationships with artists
- Potential for regular assessment of intrinsic impacts
 - ✓ Pare down and customize the questionnaire
 - ✓ Need to move beyond satisfaction measurement
- Paradigm shift: curate impacts through artists

The study has been seen as provocative by some UK bloggers; but we like strong critical reaction: it drives the debate forward. Some people (particularly artists) are concerned that the impact data will be used to water down programming; we have sympathy with that and

therefore it is important to say that we need to be very careful about qualifying the information. We have to think hard about why we would use it. However, we can also see that the questionnaire we give to our audiences therefore becomes a way of having a conversation with them. We leave the question for you: who are the stakeholders of this information?

Access more information at www.wolfbrown.com/mup

Questions for Reflection

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of trying to measure intrinsic impacts?
- How does one reconcile the curatorial role of the presenter with data on impact? What are the limitations of impact data?
- Could this information be useful to artists, or is it an affront to their artistic license?
- Do you envision a time when impact measurement is a regular part of presenting?
- How might you incorporate this information into your organizational thinking?

Questions and observations

Regarding the results for the Macbeth performances: the speaker has seen warmly received productions of Macbeth on the East Coast of the States, so was the difference in reaction to do with different cultures/attitudes on the East/West Coast?

The Californian performance was promoted as a traditional interpretation, but in fact it was not. Therefore people were expecting a traditional production, but had a very contemporary interpretation, and people objected to that.

It was pointed out that although some may have found the implications of the results threatening in terms of the implications for programming, curation, the fact is that this sort of audience testing/reaction is a common feature in other industries, eg film (test screenings, etc).

The speaker agreed that other industries are ahead of the live arts sector in terms of measuring impact; in the museum world, there is much more formative evaluation, but that doesn't seem to happen as much in the performing arts.

*Customer retention: there are quite low customer retention rates across the board in the UK; research has discovered that most organisations can't identify what makes people come back again. We can identify what makes people **not** come back (mainly common hygiene factors). We could use this type of study to identify positive reasons why audiences really attend.*

This is a great hypothesis which needs to be tested. The researchers did ask people for their frequency of attendance so we could go back and look at that. The context might be correlated with repeat attendance. Satisfaction measures are useful for the extrinsic aspects of the performance (bar, toilets, etc) but if you really want to get to grips with the satisfaction of the performance, we have to look at the *intrinsic* factors.

Did you give equal weighting to each of the component questions under the different sections of the protocol?

Yes, for this study, but if individual organisations design their own protocol, then they should develop their own local context. Some questions did not work as well as others, whilst others were very salient measurements. A high percentage of the respondents said that they had a heated debate after the performance, yet a lot of venues are very keen to get audiences out of the door as soon as the performance is over, leaving audiences with their questions unanswered: this is a missed opportunity to allow our audiences to deepen their experience.

It's important to understand that different people want different amounts of information: some people are preparing a lot; some come with a completely blank slate to allow for the element of surprise. We have to value both approaches. Similarly afterwards, there are people who want to talk about the experience immediately afterwards, and others who prefer to go away and reflect quietly on their own. It's certainly clear that people are asking for more assistance in processing the experience, so in the States we are seeing increased attendance at post-performance talks, but on the whole we tell people to go home straight away: not just ushers, but the whole organisation; we are keen to shut up the venue and get home. We believe this is a huge problem for the sector.

Is it possible that the answers were skewed by the questions?

Question design: any research can suffer from this, so we must be very careful that we get outcomes through the design of our questions.

Is it possible that respondents gave the answers they thought the researchers wanted to hear or because of how they want to be perceived?

We call that acquiescent response; we work hard to avoid it but we can never really know the extent to which it exists in the data set. For most of the questions we got pretty good distributions. We tried to make it as objective as we could, but it is a constant struggle.

We are all coping with the impact of the McMaster review on excellence. Going back to the Macbeth: although the impacts were negative for these performances, is it not possible that other performances might have measured positively, but decisions would be made on the basis of the negative ones?

There is a terrible danger of this tool being misused. The whole notion of excellence is both a slippery slope and another session. It is possible that those who hide behind 'excellence' are also those organisations or artists that are not relevant to their communities. Download this research, work at the questions that you want to use and start working on it for your own organisation. Questions to ask: why would we start measuring impact? What would we do with it? A few of these universities have taken this research further, using shorter questionnaires, and now, instead of simply reporting that x number of people attended a performance, they can report that x number of people reported y impacts.

Some view this work as threatening, but would you say that in fact it highlights the role of marketing?

Yes: thinking about the *Macbeth* results, this research shows the strategic importance of the marketing message. It's important to point out that some programmers have positively received this data.

How do you think the college audience sample would compare with a 'normal' sample audience?

Most arts audiences tend to have a very high proportion of highly educated audiences, so it is easier to ask questions like the ones we developed. However if we are to take this research and hypotheses to the next level, we need to make the questions as simple as possible and target other groups. We would like to design a protocol that children could use.

Observation: Morris Hargreaves McIntyre have been undertaking similar research which also casts light on the earlier question about understanding why people come back again. We already know why people come back: we know this from thousands of individuals in focus groups, and it is about the intrinsic value of the experience. However, we are coy about communicating those deep benefits in our marketing material.

This research is exciting for programmers, prompting four comments:

Each individual requires/desires different amounts of information. For example, when we hosted a street festival, one person needed to know every detail of the procession schedule, whereas others were happy to turn up and take pot luck.

Anticipation: does asking that question heighten the individual's participation, by bringing it to the fore?

Social bonding: it's disturbing to think that a negative experience of a performance (say, quality of the work) could have a negative impact on social bonding.

Polarisation of views: the research focuses on average, but sometimes the limits of the spectrum can be illuminating, too. Does your data show what happens at opposite ends of the spectrum?

We have to give people enough context to make the sale from a marketing point of view. So we have to give them *some* context, but beyond that, a lot of people don't need or want any. It doesn't lessen the experience, but we have to accept that different people have different appetites. Therefore we need to provide them with layers of information that they can access according to their appetite. 'If you want to learn more, go to the website, listen to this, read that'.

One aspect of that is the role of education. At the moment we give away education, and it is possible that people would pay for it. There is enormous value in going the last 10% to help people understand what they have experienced (if they want that). Workshops, talks, post-performance events work well with theatre and dance. Our research suggests that people would pay between £15 to £20 for a briefing by a human being about what they're about to see; they are willing to pay for that because they have already made a huge investment (in time as well as money) to buy the tickets.

Social bonding: With reference to the *Macbeth* production, it is possible that the audience was so angry about it that they may never attend another Shakespeare production, which would be a tragedy, indeed.