

ABSTRACT

In the 2022-23 year, the Royal Opera House (ROH) is the most subsidised arts company in the UK, by more than £5 million. Opera companies account for three of the top ten most funded arts institutions in the UK.

Given its overwhelming government support in the UK, one might assume that opera has widespread popularity amongst the general public.

According to data from the Audience Agency:

- 4% of people surveyed attended opera pre-pandemic
- 3% attended during or post-pandemic.¹

Opera can also be seen as a “bridge” where **“a larger organization brings together a number of different partners to make meaningful work in a particular community”**.²

The ROH does this work in an economically deprived area of Essex called Thurrock, where it has a direct positive effect from its production-making base.

OBJECTIVES & METHODS

OBJECTIVES

To understand and compare what opera professionals and opera audiences perceive about opera as an artform, especially seeking to understand attitudes around elitism, exclusivity, accessibility, and diversity.

METHODS

Surveying patrons at the Royal Opera House to understand how audiences feel about:

- Elitism in opera
- Accessibility
- Diversity
- Comfortability
- Public funding

Interviewing industry professionals working in management at:

- The Royal Opera House (ROH)
- English National Opera (ENO)
- Opera Rara
- The Grange Festival (TGF)

RESULTS

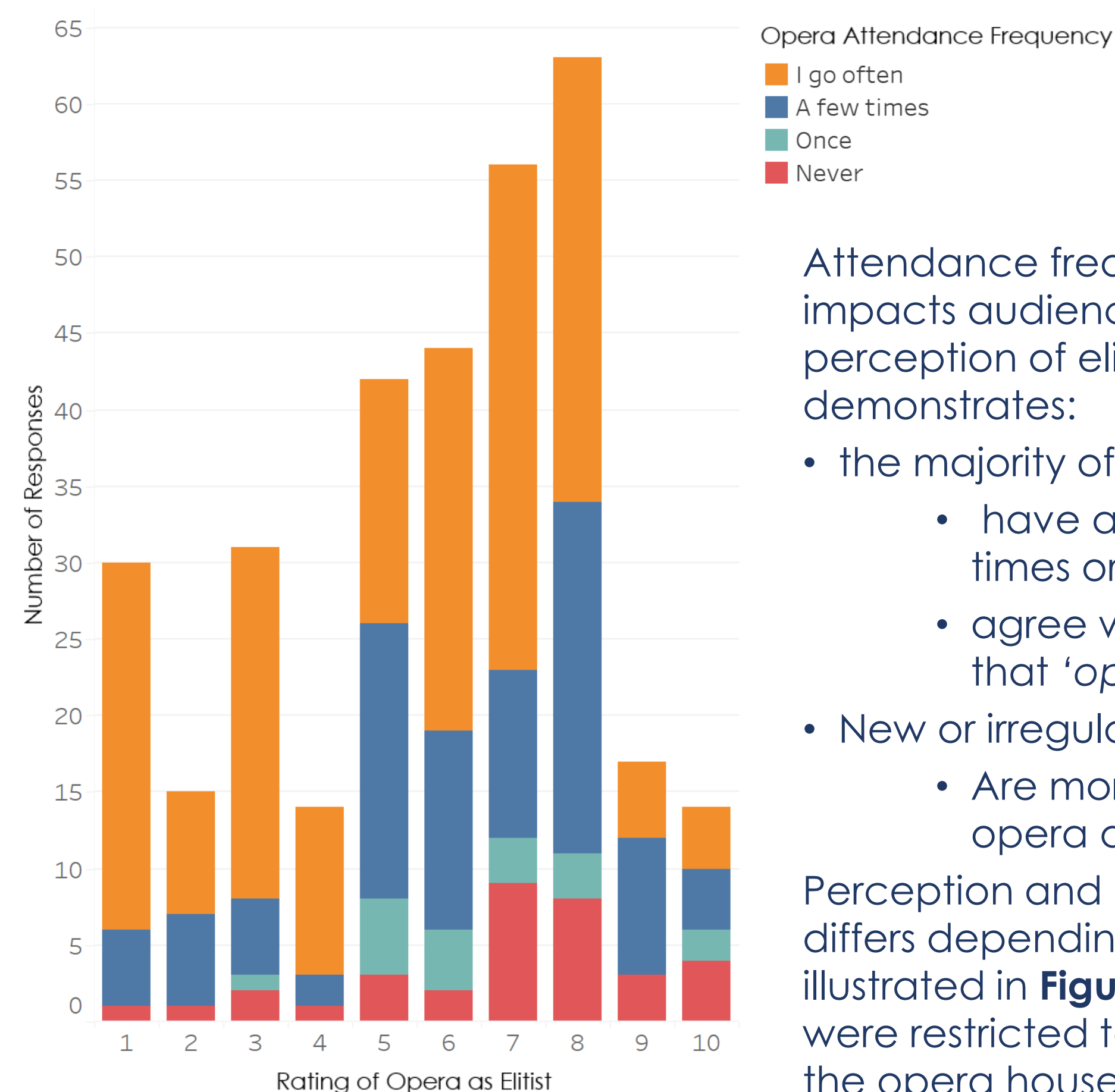


Fig. 1 – Opera Elitism rating by number of responses, separated by attendance

Attendance frequency heavily impacts audience members' perception of elitism. As **Figure 1** demonstrates:

- the majority of ROH audiences:
 - have attended a few times or attend regularly
 - agree with the statement that ‘opera is elitist’
- New or irregular attendees:
 - Are more likely to perceive opera as elitist

Perception and attendance also differs depending on ticket price, as illustrated in **Figure 2** where surveys were restricted to specific areas of the opera house.

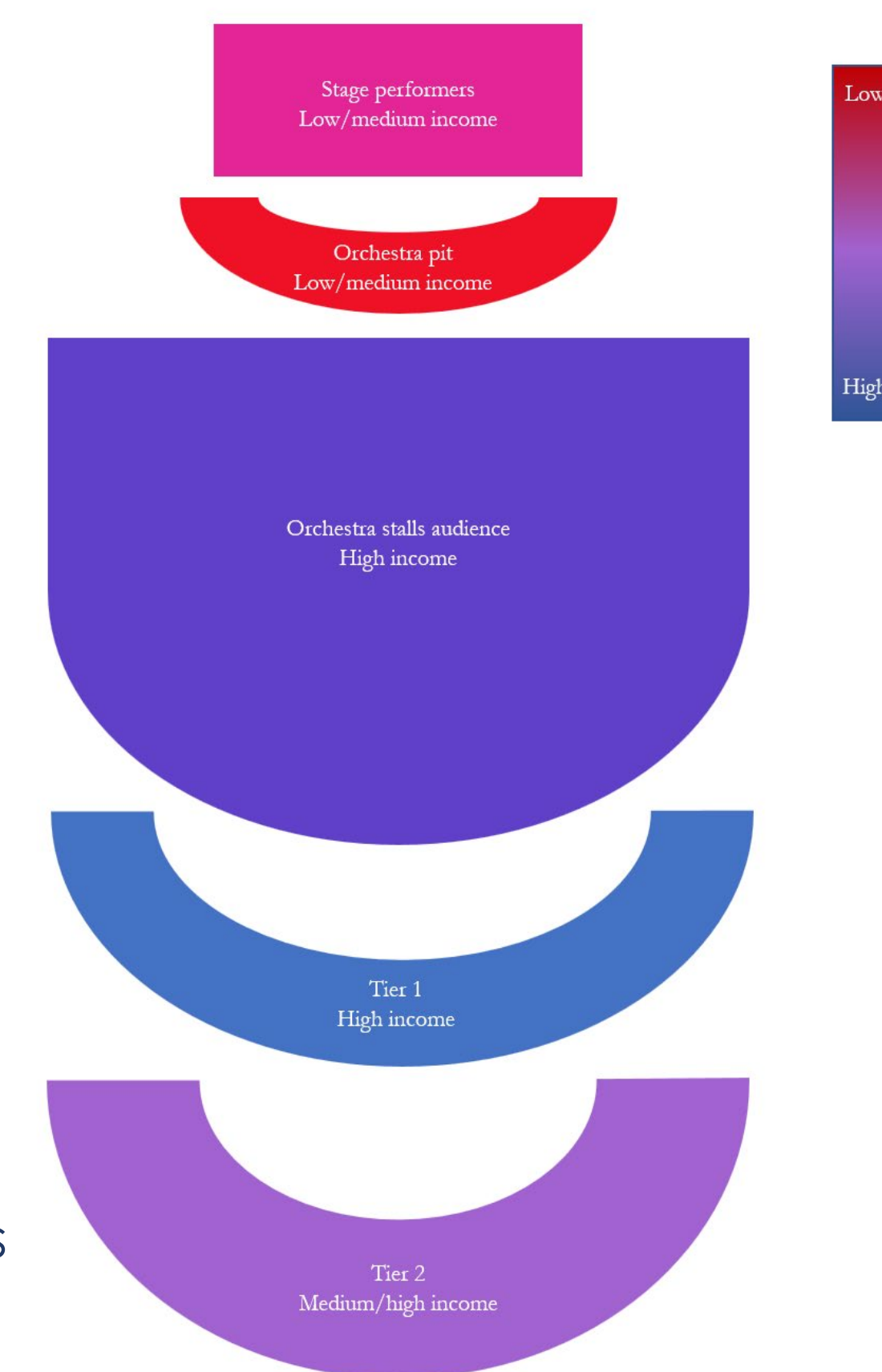


Fig. 2 – a hypothesised map of the socio-economic arrangement of an opera house (my own figure).

CONCLUSIONS

Given the nature of the survey, the data set of this study is a rich source for many conclusions to be drawn. The main conclusions suggest:

- **Audience members tend to believe opera is more elitist than not**, although audience members avoided an absolute rating of 9 or 10.
- **Perception of accessibility is mixed**, with 73% of respondents answering either “somewhat” or “not particularly”
- **Perception of diversity is mixed**, with 78% of respondents answering either “somewhat” or “not particularly”
- For **price justification, audience answers correlate strongly with ticket price**, where higher ticket prices believe the price is less justified
- White respondents were far **more likely to say they attend opera** regularly than non-white respondents.
- Over **90% of respondents believe that public funding at its current rate is justified**, which is interesting given elitism ratings, but not surprising given a bias for attendees to support state subsidy.
- **No Asian or Black attendees reported feeling uncomfortable at the opera**, with only a small percentage of white attendees finding the environment uncomfortable.

MATERIALS



Fig. 3 & 4 – Images of the Royal Opera House's interior

REFERENCES

- ¹Sectors: Performing arts. The Audience Agency., <https://www.theaudienceagency.org/evidence/sectors/performing-arts>
- ²Little, H. (2023, August 7). Online Zoom Interview. other, London, UK.
- ³Bereson, R. (2013). The operatic state: Cultural policy and the Opera House. Routledge.

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