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## Effects of *The Met: Live in HD* on the Democratization of Opera in America

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EFFECTS OF *THE MET: LIVE IN HD*  
ON THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF OPERA IN AMERICA

by

Anna K. Wigtil

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
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EFFECTS OF *THE MET: LIVE IN HD*  
ON THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF OPERA IN AMERICA

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University of Nebraska, 2020

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*The Met: Live in HD* satellite broadcasts of live opera performances began in 2006 and have since become popular with audiences around the world. While this could be an excellent avenue to democratize opera and make it available to new audiences, the available data indicates that most *Live in HD* viewers are already opera enthusiasts and have previously attended live opera performances. This thesis examines the history of the Metropolitan Opera's broadcasting efforts, the demographics of American opera audiences, trends in *Live in HD*'s repertoire, and strategies to increase *Live in HD*'s appeal to a broader, more diverse audience that can revitalize opera's popularity in the United States.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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And finally, those who unknowingly helped me fall in love with opera – composers Giacomo Puccini and Gaetano Donizetti, and singers Juan Diego Flórez and Natalie Dessay.

## PREFACE

Gathering information for this thesis presented several difficulties. First, I was unable to make contact with anyone at the Metropolitan Opera who would answer my questions or allow me to interview them. I tried several times to contact the Met's main email account, their press email account, and their archives, each time receiving either no response or a cursory response. Once, I was told that my questions would be forwarded to *Live in HD* staff, and another time, I was told they would be forwarded to the Met's press department, but I never heard back from either department. I was hoping that someone at the Met could provide me with the number of tickets sold for individual *Live in HD* operas, since the annual reports on the Met's website only provide ticket sales information for each season as a whole. I also contacted several people at By Experience, the company that distributes *Live in HD* programming in the United States, but did not receive a response from any of them, either.

I was also hoping to learn whether the Met knew of any large *Live in HD* audience surveys (or if they had done their own survey) since the Opera America survey in 2008. Since I did not find any more recent surveys similar to the Opera America survey, it is impossible to say whether the demographics of *Live in HD* audiences have significantly changed over the past twelve years.

Instead of interviewing someone from the Met, I was able to take some quotes from Daniela Smolov Levy's 2014 dissertation, in which she shares information from an interview with Elena Park (Supervising Producer for *Live in HD*). Still, I was unable to discover the answers to some of my questions, such as who ultimately decides which operas will be included in each *Live in HD* season.

Since I was unable to get national/international attendance data for each *Live in HD* broadcast, I reached out to my local theater, the Mary Riepma Ross Media Arts Center in Lincoln, Nebraska. Their staff graciously provided me with attendance data for individual operas from the past few *Live in HD* seasons. I discuss this data in Chapter 3, but I know that such a small sample cannot be understood to represent attendance patterns at the national or international level. I had also hoped to survey local *Live in HD* attendees to gather demographic information, but the Met's March 2020 decision to cancel future performances due to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented me from doing so.

If I had had more time to research, I would have contacted theaters in other locations to inquire about attendance data for individual *Live in HD* broadcasts. I would then have a larger dataset from which to draw conclusions about the relative popularity of each *Live in HD* broadcast. If it were not for the Met's pandemic shutdown, I would have also attempted to survey Ross Media Arts Center attendees at a few *Live in HD* broadcasts in spring and/or fall of 2020.

Despite these roadblocks, I hope that my research presented in this thesis is a good starting point to examine *The Met: Live in HD*'s successes and failures in bringing opera to a wider American audience.

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## CHAPTER 1: HISTORY AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

*Opera fans are as fanatical about opera as baseball fans are about baseball. We want to make the Met as available electronically to its followers as the Yankees are to theirs.<sup>1</sup>*

– Peter Gelb, General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera

### Introduction

Live video broadcasts of operas into movie theaters via satellite have regularly taken place since 2006. The first, most well-known, and longest-lasting of these broadcast series is the Metropolitan Opera's *The Met: Live in HD*. While the broadcasting of operas to the public is not a new idea (television and radio opera broadcasts have taken place since the early twentieth century), the concept of bringing live events to viewers in a movie theater via a live video feed is still fairly new. *The Met: Live in HD* has been well-received, and it has inspired other opera and theater companies to gain larger audiences via broadcasting live performances into movie theaters. It has also become a substantial income source for the Metropolitan Opera, with recordings of the live performances being further distributed via DVD sales, satellite radio, public television, and internet streaming.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Blum, "Met Announces Plan to Simulcast Opera," *Associated Press Online*, September 7, 2006, accessed October 23, 2019, Nexis Uni.

Opera has long held a reputation as a form of entertainment for the wealthy and elite. While millions of tickets have been sold to *The Met: Live in HD* and similar broadcasts from other opera companies, who is actually attending? Are many of the attendees complete newcomers to opera, or are the majority of viewers already opera enthusiasts? How do the demographics of *Live in HD* viewers compare to those of live opera? The availability of opera and other performing arts events in movie theaters could benefit people who cannot easily access live, professional classical music and theater performances due to distance or expense. While there are only a few hundred opera companies in the United States,<sup>2</sup> movie theaters are more widespread and attract a much wider audience. Additionally, the American opera audience is overwhelmingly white and over age 65, necessitating the development of younger and more diverse opera enthusiasts to financially support the art form over the next few decades and beyond. This thesis aims to expand on the existing literature regarding opera broadcasting and attendance demographics, to determine the intended and actual audiences for *The Met: Live in HD*, and to suggest ways that the Metropolitan Opera and other performing arts organizations can broaden their appeal to attract and retain new and diverse audiences.

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<sup>2</sup> “United States,” OperaBase, accessed September 28, 2020, <https://www.operabase.com/companies/united-states/en>. This page lists 240 opera companies, but it may not be an exhaustive list.

### A Note on Terminology

There is not currently a single, standard term used to describe live satellite broadcasts of performing arts events shown in movie theaters. Some media coverage of *The Met: Live in HD* uses the term “simulcasts,” but this is a misnomer, as it refers to an event being broadcast simultaneously via more than one medium (for example, via both radio and television).<sup>3</sup> At times, the Metropolitan Opera *does* simulcast an opera via both *Live in HD* and radio broadcast, but it is incorrect to call the satellite transmission itself a simulcast.

Paul Heyer coined the term “digital broadcast cinema” and provided the following narrow definition:

*the broadcast into movie theatres, either live or recorded (some Met broadcasts are repeated as encores), of various arts and entertainment productions that, like cinema, have a narrative format. Besides opera, this would include ballet, musicals, and theatrical productions; it would exclude sports, concerts, and newsworthy public events.*<sup>4</sup>

It is unclear why Heyer restricts his definition of “digital broadcast cinema” to performing arts events when other types of events can be digitally broadcast into theaters. Daniela Mueser and Peter Vlachos suggest a more specific term for this particular subset of genres: “live-streaming theatre.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Dictionary.com*, s.v. “simulcast,” accessed August 22, 2020, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/simulcast>.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Heyer, “Live from the Met: Digital Broadcast Cinema, Medium Theory, and Opera for the Masses,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 33 (2008): 593, emphasis in original.

<sup>5</sup> Daniela Mueser and Peter Vlachos, “Almost Like Being There? A Conceptualisation of Live-Streaming Theatre,” *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 9, no. 2 (2018): 183-203, accessed October 22, 2020, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f2df/3c6f7631a38b9e326e78378bca7b1566d5c4.pdf>.

Two broader terms that are already established in the entertainment industry are “event cinema” and “alternative content”; these can refer to a wide range of nontraditional movie theater programming, ranging from museum tours to rock concerts to sports.<sup>6</sup> Martin Barker, who has written the only book on this type of entertainment thus far, explains that he has “chosen henceforth to refer to these events as ‘livecasts,’ because it is short, and sort of descriptive.”<sup>7</sup>

The Metropolitan Opera refers to their *Live in HD* events as “live transmissions,” whereas the UK’s National Theatre Live uses “broadcasts,” and the Royal Opera House uses both “broadcasts” and “screenings.”<sup>8</sup> I am not sure why the Met has chosen to solely use the term “live transmission” – it could be part of its branding strategy to emphasize the broadcasts’ “liveness” and set *Live in HD* apart from similar cinema broadcast events. I will mainly be using the term “broadcast” throughout this paper since it is easily understood and a commonly used term in both scholarly and popular media coverage of *The Met: Live in HD*.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Cookson, “Alternative Content at Cinemas Draws in the Masses,” *Financial Times*, June 14, 2013, accessed September 23, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/f83bef68-d410-11e2-a464-00144feab7de>.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Barker, *Live to Your Local Cinema: The Remarkable Rise of Livecasting* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> “The Met: Live in HD,” The Metropolitan Opera, accessed August 22, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/season/in-cinemas/>; “About Us,” National Theatre Live, accessed August 22, 2020, <http://ntlive.nationaltheatre.org.uk/about-us>; “What’s On,” Royal Opera House, accessed August 22, 2020, <https://www.roh.org.uk/tickets-and-events>.

Existing Scholarship on *The Met: Live in HD*

*The Met: Live in HD* has been widely covered in newspapers, with a few articles in music-, entertainment-, and culture-related magazines and trade publications. However, relatively few scholarly works have covered it thus far. The following paragraphs summarize several of the major scholarly contributions to this subject.

A 2011 master's thesis by Stephan van Eeden surveyed opera attendees to determine whether the local availability of *Live in HD* negatively impacted attendance at live opera performances in Vancouver, British Columbia.<sup>9</sup> The conclusion was that *Live in HD* broadcasts did not negatively affect audiences' interest in local live opera. However, the accuracy of this finding is questionable because the surveys had a very low response rate (3%-9% depending on the performance location where surveys were distributed, for a total of 166 respondents) and survey respondents self-selected into the study.

"Democratizing Opera in America, 1895 to the Present," a 2014 doctoral dissertation by Daniela Smolov Levy, examines various "democratizing initiatives" in American opera, placing *Live in HD* as the latest iteration of these efforts.<sup>10</sup> Levy discusses the many ways in which the Metropolitan Opera values and creates a sense of

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<sup>9</sup> Stephan van Eeden, "The Impact of *The Met: Live in HD* on Local Opera Attendance" (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 2011), accessed November 14, 2019, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0071678>.

<sup>10</sup> Daniela Smolov Levy, "Democratizing Opera in America, 1895 to the Present" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2014), accessed October 23, 2019, <https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:ys875gk2432/Dissertation%20Complete%20Final%20Corrected-augmented.pdf>.

authenticity for their satellite audiences. For example, *Live in HD* audiences are shown exactly the same performance that is shown to the live opera house audience; the operas are usually sung in their original languages and generally performed in their entirety with no cuts. Other methods of providing authenticity to the cinema audience include the spontaneity of the performance they see onscreen – there is no post-production editing done before the broadcast reaches the viewer – and the opportunity for the audience to see behind the scenes via interviews with Met artists and staff during intermissions. While the Met has embraced new technologies to create and distribute *Live in HD*, Levy suggests that its emphasis on providing an “authentic” operagoing experience does not do much to remove the elitist and highbrow reputation of opera that may dissuade potential new audience members.

“The Spell of Live Performance: HD Opera and Liveness Today,” a 2016 doctoral dissertation by Mihaela Irina, describes the history of opera broadcasting via radio, television, and cinema, all of which have been used to bring opera to a wider audience at little or no cost to the listener/viewer.<sup>11</sup> Irina then discusses how *Live in HD* builds upon these prior democratization methods and how it interacts with other modern phenomena, such as the internet. She concludes that *Live in HD*’s immersive visuals and cinema environment allow its viewers to feel more connected with both the singers onstage and

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<sup>11</sup> Mihaela Irina, “The Spell of Live Performance: HD Opera and Liveness Today” (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2016), accessed November 14, 2019, <https://curve.carleton.ca/9098f60d-cfc5-4f0e-8902-e1defa7bab47>.

the audience around them: “HD opera was an unexpected medium that revived the relationship between opera and its audience with its accessibility.”<sup>12</sup>

James Steichen summarizes the Met’s goals for *Live in HD*, emphasizing Peter Gelb’s efforts to not only reinvigorate the genre of opera itself, but to bring greater awareness to the Metropolitan Opera as an institution.<sup>13</sup> The three goals Steichen identifies are “to deploy new media to update the opera experience,” “to reinfuse opera with theatricality,” and “to produce a wider renewal of opera as an art form and a social institution.”<sup>14</sup> Steichen maintains throughout his article that the Met’s constant self-promotion through *Live in HD* makes “the Met” almost synonymous with opera itself.

Several writers have examined the concept of “liveness” in the context of a live opera broadcast. Bernadette Cochrane and Frances Bonner list several ways that liveness is emphasized in *Live in HD* performances (for example, the camera often follows singers as they exit the stage and engage in a brief interview with a Met presenter), while acknowledging the advantages and disadvantages between attending in a movie theater and attending the opera in-person. For example, close-ups allow *Live in HD* viewers to see the performers’ costumes and gestures in greater detail than the in-person audience

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<sup>12</sup> Irina, “The Spell of Live Performance,” 113.

<sup>13</sup> James Steichen, “The Metropolitan Opera Goes Public: Peter Gelb and the Institutional Dramaturgy of *The Met: Live in HD*,” *Music and the Moving Image* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2009), accessed October 23, 2019, RILM.

<sup>14</sup> Steichen, “Metropolitan Opera Goes Public,” 25.

does, while injudicious use of camera techniques such as dissolves and split-screens can alienate the viewers from the liveness of the performance.<sup>15</sup>

Kay Armatage, a self-described “opera novice,” has written several papers on her experiences with *The Met: Live in HD*. The first describes her personal experiences attending *Live in HD* broadcasts, the differences she has observed between *Live in HD* and a typical movie theater experience, and her perceptions of a culture clash between seasoned opera fans and the typical movie theater environment.<sup>16</sup> The other two focus on the cinematic style of Barbara Willis Sweete, who has directed many of the *Live in HD* broadcasts.<sup>17</sup>

*Live to Your Local Cinema: The Remarkable Rise of Livecasting*, a short book by film scholar Martin Barker, provides a brief history of how digital broadcasting technology led to the rise of what he calls “Alternative Content” – i.e., showing nontraditional content in movie theaters – and more specifically “livecasting,” where live video of an event is presented to the cinema audience. Barker begins by using *The Met: Live in HD* and *National Theatre Live* as case studies, then goes on to discuss more broadly the impact of livecasting on the concept of “liveness,” how livecasting fits into

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<sup>15</sup> Bernadette Cochrane and Frances Bonner, “Screening from the Met, the NT, or the House: What Changes with the Live Relay,” *Adaptation* 7, no. 2 (August 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Kay Armatage, “Operatic Cinematics: A New View from the Stalls,” in *Audiences*, ed. Ian Christie (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 218-224.

<sup>17</sup> Kay Armatage, “Barbara Willis Sweete: Queen of HD Transmissions,” in *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 244-255; Kay Armatage, “Cinematic Operatics: Barbara Willis Sweete Directs Metropolitan Opera HD Transmissions,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 909-927.



the field of adaptation studies, and the potential impacts of livecasting on audiences, aesthetics, and economics.<sup>18</sup>

Several audience surveys and demographic studies have been done regarding *Live in HD* and similar events. The largest of these is a 2008 survey, commissioned by Opera America, of *Live in HD* attendees at theaters in thirty-two major metropolitan areas in the United States and Canada.<sup>19</sup> The 5,306 survey respondents were not very diverse, and the vast majority were already opera enthusiasts – 94% were white, 93% were age 45 and older, 83% were college graduates, and their mean income was \$103,740. Five percent of respondents had never previously attended a live opera. Seventy-three percent of respondents said “they love opera and want to see as much as possible.”<sup>20</sup>

A survey of twenty-five *Live in HD* and *National Theatre Live* attendees from Austria, Canada, and Romania found that all respondents enjoyed the broadcasts. Their viewpoints about the programs they attended fell into four categories: avant-garde, classical, worthwhile, and grateful.<sup>21</sup> *Avant-garde* viewers perceived their experience as something new and unusual, making them feel part of the “leading edge of cultural consumption.” *Classical* viewers “value conventional operatic or theatrical excellence”;

<sup>18</sup> Martin Barker, *Live to Your Local Cinema*.

<sup>19</sup> Shugoll Research, *Metropolitan Opera Live in HD Survey* (June 2008), accessed May 30, 2020, <http://web.archive.org/web/20200531011516/http://www.shugollresearch.com/uploads/file/Metropolitan%20Opera%20Live%20in%20HD%20Survey%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Shugoll Research, *Metropolitan Opera Live in HD Survey*, 37.

<sup>21</sup> Florin Vladica and Charles H. Davis, “Value Propositions of Opera and Theater Live in Cinema” (paper presented at the 70th annual meeting of the World Media Economics & Management Conference, Thessaloniki, Greece, May 23-27, 2012), 10, accessed October 22, 2020, <https://people.ryerson.ca/c5davis/publications/Vladica-Davis%20-%20value%20propositions%20of%20live%20cinema%20-%20201%20May%202013.pdf>.

they perceived the broadcasts as immersive to the point that they felt like applauding for the on-screen performers. *Worthwhile* viewers enjoyed the opportunity to attend a cultural event in their local cinemas and felt that the broadcasts were worth their time and money. Finally, *grateful* viewers appreciated that these cinema broadcasts are available to the general public, but felt that not being at the performance in-person made the experience “incomplete.” Though the sample size was small and not necessarily representative of the larger audience, the audience demographics were similar to those found in the Opera America survey. Most of the respondents were college graduates with high incomes who attended *Live in HD* or *National Theatre Live* multiple times per year.<sup>22</sup>

The National Endowment for the Arts regularly surveys the American public through its Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.<sup>23</sup> While this survey does not ask respondents about cinematic events such as *Live in HD*, it provides demographic information about live opera attendees that is useful for comparison. This data will be examined in detail in Chapter 2.

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<sup>22</sup> Vlatica and Davis, 15.

<sup>23</sup> “National Endowment for the Arts Releases Latest Survey of Public Participation in the Arts,” National Endowment for the Arts, January 22, 2020, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://www.arts.gov/about/news/2020/national-endowment-arts-releases-latest-survey-public-participation-arts>.

## History of Opera Broadcasting in the United States

Experimental radio broadcasts of opera began as early as 1910, when radio pioneer Lee de Forest broadcast *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* from the Metropolitan Opera House. However, this radio transmission was “heard by only a few hobbyists and reporters”<sup>24</sup> and “attracted relatively little attention.”<sup>25</sup> De Forest championed the idea of making highbrow music easily accessible to the general public, “to send this form of inspiring music to every corner of the land.”<sup>26</sup> He predicted that sharing performances over the airwaves would be profitable for opera companies:

The musical organizations which give freely of their product will suffer no loss; on the contrary, they will earn the grateful interest of multitudes who would otherwise never learn of this superb art. And from these ranks will flock new patrons, new recruits, new lovers of music who will next seek to hear and to know their newfound friends face to face.<sup>27</sup>

The first opera broadcast available to a wide audience came via a one-time, experimental broadcast from the Chicago Grand Opera Company in 1919. Just two years later, a series of grand opera broadcasts from the Chicago Grand Opera Company was heavily publicized and reached over fifty thousand listeners. Two Chicago department stores even installed radios to allow more people to hear these broadcasts.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Christina L. Baade and James Deaville, eds., *Music and the Broadcast Experience: Performance, Production, and Audiences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 73.

<sup>25</sup> Heyer, “Live from the Met,” 592.

<sup>26</sup> Baade and Deaville, *Music and the Broadcast Experience*, 74.

<sup>27</sup> Baade and Deaville, *Music and the Broadcast Experience*, 74.

<sup>28</sup> Baade and Deaville, *Music and the Broadcast Experience*, 79.

Even at this time, opera was seen as an elitist institution, especially at the Metropolitan Opera House. In 1922, *Radio Digest* quoted an editor at the *Omaha World*, who shared his opinion on the potential of live radio broadcasts to dispel such notions:

Operas are criticized mostly by people who have never heard them; by those who have never had the opportunity to appreciate them. Most of these look upon them with displeasure – the opera as a place where only the elite go to display the gorgeous gowns and dresses they wear, but once the strains of the opera singer’s voice or from the symphony orchestra go floating on the ether into the homes in every village...opinions may be changed.<sup>29</sup>

The Met was uncertain about whether the public actually wanted to hear opera over the radio, but the company began to broadcast portions of operas during the 1920s. Because the limitations of early audio mixing technology made it difficult to equalize the volume of multiple singers on one stage, Met performances were not broadcast “live from the stage” until 1931. The *New York Times* hailed this as a huge breakthrough: “The Metropolitan Opera is going on the air Saturday afternoons...the broadcasters feel that the final barrier has been passed in opposition to the broadcasting of fine music.”<sup>30</sup> Paul D. Cravath, president of the Metropolitan Opera Company, believed that radio broadcasts would lead to higher attendance at the Met’s live performances:

I believe that interest in the opera will be so stimulated by broadcasting that listeners will flock in such numbers to the opera house – where they can see opera as well as hear it – that we will have to build a new and bigger opera home to hold them...Let me assure the millions of my listeners...the grand opera you will see

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<sup>29</sup> Baade and Deaville, *Music and the Broadcast Experience*, 80.

<sup>30</sup> Baade and Deaville, *Music and the Broadcast Experience*, 83.

and hear [at the Metropolitan Opera House] surpasses the music you hear over the radio, perfect as it is.<sup>31</sup>

The Metropolitan Opera still regularly broadcasts performances over the radio, meaning that opera has been reaching listeners over the airwaves for over a century. However, though opera broadcasts certainly played an important role in popularizing home radios and improving radio technology, it is difficult to say how well radio succeeded in bringing a greater awareness of opera to the general public. In a 1924 survey of radio listeners' programming preferences, 1.7% of respondents specifically mentioned "grand opera, though 24.7% mentioned the broader category of "classical music."<sup>32</sup>

Opera first reached the television screen with the BBC broadcast of selections from *Mr. Pickwick* in 1936.<sup>33</sup> In the late 1940s and early 1950s, television stations pondered the importance of broadcasting classical music programs, noting that many television owners were in higher income/education brackets and therefore more likely to enjoy opera and other "quality cultural programming." Between 1948-1950, ABC aired a

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<sup>31</sup> Baade and Deaville, *Music and the Broadcast Experience*, 84.

<sup>32</sup> Baade and Deaville, *Music and the Broadcast Experience*, 72; E. F. McDonald, Jr., "What We Think the Public Wants," *Radio Broadcast* 4, no. 5 (March 1924): 383, accessed December 4, 2020. <http://www.vacuumtubeera.net/RadioBroadcast-Vol-04-1924-03.pdf>. Upon examination of McDonald's original article, which was cited by Baade and Deaville, it appears that this was an open-ended question, since many of the responses overlap. The top three responses were "popular music" (29%), "classical music" (24.7%), and "jazz" (18.4%), but smaller percentages of respondents used more specific terminology, such as "orchestra," "symphony music," or "vocal selections." Therefore, it is hard to say how many people enjoyed opera but included it in the category of "classical music" or "vocal selections."

<sup>33</sup> Marcia J. Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 42; "First Public Presentation of Excerpts from 'Mr. Pickwick,'" *Radio Times* 53, no. 684 (November 6, 1936): 91, accessed December 4, 2020. <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/fe8762dc7dd24696ba2b40f070102ba5>.

series of Metropolitan Opera opening night broadcasts. The first of these, Verdi's *Otello*, attracted the viewership of approximately 500,000 American households – quite a large number, given that only about 1.2 million television sets were in use in the United States by the end of 1948. Though “hailed as a major achievement,” this first broadcast was criticized for its cinematography and lighting (making it harder for viewers to enjoy the performance visually), and high production costs for the network led to the end of the series.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, as more Americans were able to afford television sets and the television audience represented a broader swath of society, classical music programming did not receive much viewership.

Still, other networks continued to broadcast opera in various forms. *NBC Opera Theatre* ran from 1949 to 1964 and premiered Gian Carlo Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, the first opera written specifically to be performed on television, in 1951. Aside from *Amahl*, which attracted sponsors, the cost of these opera productions fell mainly on the network itself. Works performed on *NBC Opera Theatre* included both original productions as well as standard operas that were abridged to fit into an hourlong timeslot.<sup>35</sup> The new compositions commissioned by NBC included *Labyrinth* and *Maria Golovín* by Gian Carlo Menotti, *The Trial at Rouen* by Norman Dello Joio, and *Deseret* by Leonard Kastle, among others.<sup>36</sup> The changing priorities of advertisers and television

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<sup>34</sup> Marcia J. Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 43; number of televisions taken from “Postwar American Television: Estimated U.S. TV Sets and Stations,” Early Television Museum, accessed December 2, 2020, [http://earlytelevision.org/us\\_tv\\_sets.html](http://earlytelevision.org/us_tv_sets.html).

<sup>35</sup> Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 43-44.

<sup>36</sup> Danielle Ward-Griffin, “As Seen on TV: Putting the NBC Opera on Stage,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 71, no. 3 (2018): 641-647.

networks led to musical programming shifting from the “big three” networks over to public television stations.<sup>37</sup> According to Levy, the transition of opera to public television “provided an opportunity to present high culture in ways that did not necessarily have to make a special effort to appeal to mass audiences,” while “[s]ome producers and directors did, however, continue efforts to attract broad audiences and to that end staged opera that was specially adapted to television and that could appeal to audiences new to the genre.”<sup>38</sup> An example Levy provides is the National Educational Television (NET) Opera, directed by Peter Herman Adler, who had previously worked with *NBC Opera Theatre*.<sup>39</sup> Adler’s programming contained operas meant to appeal to the general public, as well as more avant-garde works. The program “was thus able to focus on a niche audience, seemingly with the hope that a broader public would, through exposure, come to acquire the elite tastes of the original minority audience.”<sup>40</sup>

On December 11, 1952, fifty-four years before the debut of *Live in HD*, the Met experimented with broadcasting a live performance of Bizet’s *Carmen* into thirty-one movie theaters in twenty-six American cities via closed-circuit television.<sup>41</sup> The Met returned to television in 1977 as part of the PBS *Great Performances* series. In many ways, these broadcasts foreshadowed *Live in HD*: they were often broadcast live, used

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<sup>37</sup> Levy, “Democratizing Opera,” 266-267.

<sup>38</sup> Levy, “Democratizing Opera,” 267-268.

<sup>39</sup> Levy, “Democratizing Opera,” 268.

<sup>40</sup> Levy, “Democratizing Opera,” 268.

<sup>41</sup> “Carmen (1952),” IMDb, accessed September 26, 2020, <https://m.imdb.com/title/tt0330121/>; Heyer, “Live from the Met,” 592. Heyer was the only scholarly source I found that mentions this broadcast, but erroneously describes the broadcast as taking place in 1951.

multiple camera angles, and attracted viewers with opera stars such as Luciano Pavarotti and Plácido Domingo.<sup>42</sup> These were authentic opera performances filmed onstage at the Metropolitan Opera House, not written or adapted for television like many of the NBC and NET opera performances.<sup>43</sup> The invention of surtitles (also known as supertitles) by the Canadian Opera Company for live opera performances in the 1980s also provided a way for opera to become more accessible to the average viewer – they were described as a “device that finally makes it possible for ordinary people to understand what’s going on onstage.”<sup>44</sup>

#### Peter Gelb and the Creation of *Live in HD*

Peter Gelb was hired as the General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera in 2005, “in part, to shake things up at the 132-year-old institution.”<sup>45</sup> In Gelb’s view, the Met was “detached from the cultural life of New Yorkers” and “needed to regain some kind of footing in mainstream culture.”<sup>46</sup> In the mid-2000s, ticket sales were falling and the Met was “artistically stagnant.” This decline spurred Gelb to find ways to revitalize not only the Met’s audience, but also opera itself: “[Without making changes] the Met would gradually collapse of its own weight, because like any art form, opera has to be renewed

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<sup>42</sup> Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 47-49.

<sup>43</sup> Levy, “Democratizing Opera,” 269-270.

<sup>44</sup> “The Canadian Opera Company Launches Surtitles,” Danny Finkleman, aired March 27, 1983, on CBC Radio, <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/the-coc-launches-surtitles>.

<sup>45</sup> Tim Greiving, “Highbrow Opera for the Masses,” *Variety* 329, no. 7 (August 24, 2015): 65, accessed October 23, 2019, MasterFILE Complete.

<sup>46</sup> Greiving, “Highbrow Opera for the Masses,” 65.



in order to be relevant and to attract new audiences. So the trick, of course, at the Met has been to not alienate the older audience, while at the same time trying to bring in a new audience, because this is the challenge of any aging institution.”<sup>47</sup> Gelb has emphasized the need for opera to be comprehensible to the average audience member; the cast members must not only be excellent singers, but also convincing actors. He has also brought in new directors for many of the Met’s productions, often coming from the world of Broadway. Gelb intends these directors to infuse new creativity into opera productions, without making them too avant-garde. The number of new productions per season has doubled during Gelb’s tenure, as he seeks to attract the attention of audiences both old and new.<sup>48</sup>

Gelb states that low ticket prices “make it worthwhile to experience opera...we want to hook people and get them interested.”<sup>49</sup> “An effort to democratize our ticket pricing,”<sup>50</sup> the Met’s rush ticket initiative began in 2006, allowing unsold tickets anywhere in the house to be purchased online for just \$25 the day of the performance. Standing room tickets are also available, sometimes as low as \$20.<sup>51</sup> Gelb also began a

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<sup>47</sup> Peter Gelb, interview by Jim Zirin, “Has Peter Gelb Saved the Metropolitan Opera? | Conversations in the Digital Age” (video), CUNY TV, December 15, 2014, accessed August 22, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_EMObhG7O4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_EMObhG7O4).

<sup>48</sup> Peter Gelb, interview by Susan Haskins and Michael Riedel, “Theater Talk: Peter Gelb of The Metropolitan Opera” (video), CUNY TV, January 28, 2011, accessed August 22, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBKrfwjgZe4>.

<sup>49</sup> Gelb, interview by Jim Zirin.

<sup>50</sup> Gelb, interview by Jim Zirin.

<sup>51</sup> “Support Met Rush Tickets,” The Metropolitan Opera, accessed August 22, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/support/make-a-gift/support-met-rush-tickets/>; “Standing Room Ticket Information,” The Metropolitan Opera, accessed August 22, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/about/faq/standing-room-ticket-information/>.

tradition of broadcasting the opening night of each season to numerous outdoor screens in Time Square, as well as providing free admission to the Met's dress rehearsals.<sup>52</sup> However, low ticket prices can only go so far. Though the Metropolitan Opera House is quite large, like any building, it has limited seating capacity, and it is still inaccessible to anyone unable to travel to New York City.

Gelb clearly values getting more of the general public interested in opera:

It's essential that opera be in the public interest, otherwise the public would lose interest in it, so I'm determined...to keep opera and the Met somewhere within the broader boundaries of the cultural mainstream. It's never going to be pop music or have that appeal, but we have to keep trying to inject it into the public's imagination through the productions we present on the stage and the way we connect with the larger public outside of the opera house as well.<sup>53</sup>

This need to expand beyond the boundaries of the opera house led to Gelb's vision for *The Met: Live in HD*.

#### History of *Live in HD*

Gelb created the *Live in HD* satellite transmissions in partnership with director Gary Halvorson.<sup>54</sup> The beginning of Gelb's tenure at the Met serendipitously coincided with technological advances that made *Live in HD* possible; small, lightweight HD cameras and high-end microphones were on the market, and cinemas had recently

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<sup>52</sup> Nina Munk, "The Met's Grand Gamble," *Vanity Fair*, March 30, 2010, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2010/05/metropolitan-opera-201005>; Daniel J. Wakin, "Puccini for the People: The Met's Free Lunch," *New York Times*, September 23, 2006, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/23/arts/music/23open.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Gelb, interview by Jim Zirin.

<sup>54</sup> Greiving, "Highbrow Opera for the Masses," 65.

adopted digital projection systems that could receive broadcasts of “alternative content.”<sup>55</sup> The first *Live in HD* performance took place December 30, 2006 – an abridged performance, in English translation, of Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*. It would be followed by five more broadcasts that season, including the premiere of Tan Dun’s *The First Emperor* and a new production of Puccini’s *Il trittico*.<sup>56</sup>

Early press coverage praised the innovative idea of bringing opera to a wider audience via movie theaters. A *Chicago Daily Herald* article quotes several local opera enthusiasts, including Lyric Opera of Chicago general director William Mason: “I’m interested in the [HD broadcasts], and I will be fascinated to see what becomes of it – how successful it is and whether or not it will bring in people” to see local live opera performances.<sup>57</sup> Mary Robins, a member of a Chicago Lyric Opera chapter, expressed the hope that *Live in HD* would attract “uninitiated opera audiences” due to the relatively low ticket price and the easily-accessible, less-intimidating, informal movie theater venue – while noting that she did not consider it a replacement for live opera.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, a music critic at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* expressed some doubts about how well live opera would translate to the big screen and surround-sound systems: “How will notoriously fussy opera connoisseurs take to sound levels they can’t adjust? Illusions cast

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<sup>55</sup> Barker, *Live to Your Local Cinema*, 4-7; Andrew Fuhrmann, “Designed for Camera Operators: Theatre on Screen,” *Metro* 176 (Autumn 2013): 94-96, accessed August 29, 2020, MasterFILE Complete.

<sup>56</sup> Scott C. Morgan, “The Met Goes to the Movies: New York’s Metropolitan Opera Brings Live Opera Simulcasts to Suburban Multiplexes,” *Chicago Daily Herald*, December 22, 2006, accessed October 23, 2019, Nexis Uni.

<sup>57</sup> Morgan, “The Met Goes to the Movies.”

<sup>58</sup> Morgan, “The Met Goes to the Movies.”

by some productions onstage may show their seams on the large screen.” Still, he noted that local broadcasts of *The Magic Flute* sold out in advance.<sup>59</sup>

While *Live in HD* gained attention for its novelty and potential ability to bring in new audiences, it was just part of Peter Gelb’s effort to expand the Met’s revenue streams. From the beginning, Gelb planned to re-release *Live in HD* audio and video recordings as PBS television programming, CDs, DVDs, streaming video, and digital downloads, while at the same time making archived recordings available for online streaming. The Met’s long-running public radio matinees would continue, but they would now serve an additional role as an opportunity to market *Live in HD* to opera fans.<sup>60</sup> Gelb also expanded the Met’s audio programming to Sirius Satellite Radio.<sup>61</sup>

#### Awards, Attendance, and Financial Success

*The Met: Live in HD* won four awards early in its history: in 2009, a special Emmy for “advancing technology through ongoing, live, global transmission of high-definition programming to movie theaters”; a Peabody award for its “vividly designed, smartly annotated productions of *Hansel and Gretel*, *Doctor Atomic*, *Peter Grimes* and other operas [using] state-of-the-art digital technology to reinvent presentation of a classic art form”; the IBC (International Broadcasting Convention) International Honour

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<sup>59</sup> David P. Stearns, “Opera on the Big Screen: Productions by the Met Will Be Simulcast in This Area and Elsewhere, and They Will Be in High Definition,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 27, 2006, accessed September 5, 2019, Nexis Uni.

<sup>60</sup> Blum, “Met Announces Plan to Simulcast Opera.”

<sup>61</sup> Morgan, “The Met Goes to the Movies.”

for Excellence for “outstanding contribution to the creative, commercial, or technical advance of the electronic media industry, on a global scale”; and in 2010, an Emmy for “Outstanding Technical Direction, Camerawork, Video Control for a Miniseries, Movie or a Special” (for *Don Pasquale*).<sup>62</sup>

The estimated total *Live in HD* attendance went from 325,000 in the 2006-07 season (about 54,000 per broadcast) to 2.3 million in the 2016-17 season (about 230,000 per broadcast).<sup>63</sup> The attendance has actually stayed fairly steady in recent years – the estimated *Live in HD* attendance has stayed between 2.3 million and 2.6 million for each season, from 2010-11 to 2016-17.<sup>64</sup> The total box office/*Live in HD* revenue for 2016-17 (the most recent year for which an annual report is available on the Met’s website) was \$111 million.<sup>65</sup> Although Gelb initially hoped to just break even on the *Live in HD* project, by 2015 it was producing an annual profit of around \$17 million.<sup>66</sup>

#### Audience Responses to *Live in HD*

While *Live in HD* has certainly been a financial success for the Met, and audiences continue to attend year after year, it is interesting to see the reactions of

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<sup>62</sup> Metropolitan Opera, *The Met: Live in HD Press Fact Sheet 2012-2013* (New York: Metropolitan Opera, 2012), 2, accessed July 25, 2020, [http://www.metopera.org/globalassets/about/annual-reports/fy17\\_annual\\_report.pdf](http://www.metopera.org/globalassets/about/annual-reports/fy17_annual_report.pdf).

<sup>63</sup> Metropolitan Opera, *Annual Report 2016-17* (New York: Metropolitan Opera, 2017), 4, accessed August 30, 2020, [https://www.metopera.org/globalassets/about/annual-reports/fy17\\_annual\\_report.pdf](https://www.metopera.org/globalassets/about/annual-reports/fy17_annual_report.pdf).

<sup>64</sup> Attendance numbers taken from respective annual reports. “Annual Reports and Financial Information,” The Metropolitan Opera, accessed August 30, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/about/annual-reports/>.

<sup>65</sup> Metropolitan Opera, *Annual Report 2016-17*, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Greiving, “Highbrow Opera for the Masses,” 65.

individual audience members, whether published by critics, cited in news media, or commented directly on news websites.

John Wyver, a film scholar in the UK, expressed his enjoyment of the *Live in HD* performance he attended, and even mentioned the possibility that *Live in HD* could bring in audiences who are new to the genre of opera:

The HD pictures projected onto a movie screen are exceptional and, apart from an occasional problem with the synchronisation, the sound is excellent. I love the sense of sharing the occasion not only with 200-odd others in the cinema but also the Met audience and company across the Atlantic.... And they help draw in a new audience, as we found when my 11-year-old daughter went to *Manon Lescaut* and, despite her scepticism, was entranced.<sup>67</sup>

Tim Ashley, a music critic for *The Guardian*, concurred:

[T]he sheer enormity of a movie screen confers tremendous immediacy on the proceedings. The whole thing was quite staggeringly filmed, with strategically placed cameras and ceaseless tracking shots drawing us in to the production rather than allowing us to watch it from a discreet distance. On more than one occasion there was a sense of eyeball-to-eyeball contact with the performers that you rarely find even in the smallest opera houses, and certainly not in a vast auditorium like the Met... The problem is not insuperable, however, and the benefits of the whole enterprise far outweigh its occasional flaws. Many of us don't have the opportunity to travel outside the UK to hear opera on a regular basis, so a cine-cast allows us to see live performances that we won't otherwise experience first hand... The potential for drawing new listeners to opera is, of course, enormous, though the ticket prices – it currently costs £25 to get in – should perhaps be cheaper, if that is the intention.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> John Wyver, "Who Needs Opera Glasses? The Met's Screen Revolution," *Guardian*, March 27, 2008, accessed August 22, 2020,

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2008/mar/27/whoneedsoperaglassesthem>.

<sup>68</sup> Tim Ashley, "A Bit of New York Beamed Live into South London," *Guardian*, March 26, 2007, accessed August 22, 2020,

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2007/mar/26/abitofnewyorkbeamedlive>.

Ashley's sole criticism was that a cinema cannot adequately replicate the acoustics of the concert hall: "The sound quality, in this instance, proved to be the principal drawback. It was, I should point out, admirably clear and very spacious, but what it didn't always replicate is the genuine balance between stage and pit that you can only fully experience in an opera house."<sup>69</sup>

*New York Times* music critic Anthony Tommasini also critiqued the sound, even stating that "opera is not opera" unless it is heard live in the concert hall:

Those young people who see their first operas in HD broadcasts might easily conclude that they get what opera is all about. It might be a hard sell to convince these newcomers that no matter what they thought about seeing "Parsifal" in a movie theater, opera is not opera unless you hear those amazing voices live in a house with splendid natural acoustics, like the Met. I remember as an adolescent sitting in the stratosphere of the Met where the beautiful sound of Leontyne Price's pianissimo high notes as Aida would float up and surround me. You cannot have such an experience in a cinema. It makes sense that a majority of those attending HD broadcasts are already hooked on opera. They know how to enjoy the special qualities of the video broadcasts because they know what the real thing is.<sup>70</sup>

But what about the average *Live in HD* attendee, someone who is not a journalist or critic? The comments on the online version of Tommasini's article provide a selection of audience members' thoughts. Some acknowledged the differences in a live, in-person

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<sup>69</sup> Ashley, "A Bit of New York."

<sup>70</sup> Anthony Tommasini, "A Success in HD, but at What Cost?" *New York Times*, March 14, 2013, accessed August 22, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/15/arts/music/mets-hd-broadcasts-success-but-at-what-cost.html>.

performance as opposed to the *Live in HD* version, while also noting that *Live in HD* was still overall a positive experience for them, for example: “The broadcasts are just different from live theater and I value the differences and am grateful that the HD performances exist.”<sup>71</sup> Some even prefer *Live in HD* to an in-person performance: “Perhaps audience members are aware that the experience they have at the HD telecast is likely to be more satisfying than what they encounter in the actual live performance in the house itself. In the movie theatre, they are ‘closer’ to the action and can both see and hear better than they would in that huge auditorium.”<sup>72</sup> Other commenters made it clear that they saw *Live in HD* as a lesser experience: “I saw the live performance last year of Manon and also the HD version. In the live performance as in the HD version, the singing was glorious but sitting in the audience at the Met, you got the whole encompassing effect of the music, the scenery and the costumes that the opera is meant to give you. In the HD version, I, at least became distracted by the close-ups.”<sup>73</sup>

Many of the online comments disagreed with Tommasini’s fear that *Live in HD* would cause declining box office sales at the Met. One commenter acknowledged that attending a *Live in HD* transmission is cheaper and more accessible than a live Met performance: “It’s a false problem to say that HD broadcasts can lead to declining audience at the Met. The real problem is price and access and the Met should focus on these issues, not on the HD broadcasts, which are such a blessing for people who can’t go

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<sup>71</sup> Riki Turofsky, comment, March 18, 2013, on Tommasini, “A Success in HD.”

<sup>72</sup> David Walsh, comment, March 18, 2013, on Tommasini, “A Success in HD.”

<sup>73</sup> pete the cat, comment, March 18, 2013, on Tommasini, “A Success in HD.”



to the Met, for one reason or another.”<sup>74</sup> Another emphasized that *Live in HD* was in no way a replacement for the “real thing”:

I want Mr. Gelb to know that the broadcasts didn't cannibalize my attendance at the house; [they] increased it. I love them both...Being able to hear Joan Sutherland in Kansas was a pretty amazing experience. Thank you to the Met for the many ways I have the opportunity to visualize, listen to, watch and attend such wonderful events.<sup>75</sup>

*The Met: Live in HD* has certainly increased the Metropolitan Opera's audience – now, hundreds of thousands of people can attend a performance at the same time, instead of the Metropolitan Opera House's maximum capacity of four thousand. *Live in HD* also began to turn a profit soon after it was introduced; with so many more people buying tickets, the Met has been able to recoup more than it spends on producing its HD broadcasts.<sup>76</sup>

*Live in HD* could be an incredible form of outreach to attract new opera audiences in the United States. It certainly makes opera more accessible to the general public, since the broadcasts are shown in so many movie theaters throughout the country, and the Met's ten to twelve HD broadcasts per year provide more opportunities for attendance than smaller, regional opera companies do. The theaters also provide a less intimidating environment for people who are unlikely to attend events in a traditional concert hall setting. This greater accessibility could broaden the reach of opera and lead to increased

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<sup>74</sup> Marina Ranga, comment, March 18, 2013, on Tommasini, “A Success in HD.”

<sup>75</sup> Beth Mastro, comment, March 16, 2013, on Tommasini, “A Success in HD.”

<sup>76</sup> Maria Nockin, “Met Live in HD Begins to Pay Dividends,” *Classical Singer* 27, no. 3 (March 2014): 6.

diversity of audiences. But has *Live in HD* brought in many viewers who are new to opera, or does it mainly cater to those who were already opera enthusiasts?

CHAPTER 2: CURRENT TRENDS IN U.S. AUDIENCE  
BEHAVIOR AND DEMOGRAPHICS

*Is American opera as a whole in a terminal condition?*

– Terry Teachout, *Commentary* magazine<sup>77</sup>

*If there isn't an audience there's no point.*

– Peter Gelb, speaking of classical music in general<sup>78</sup>

Opera in a Changing Culture

Many music critics have bemoaned what they believe to be the slow, inevitable death of opera. “The truth is that grand opera as we know it may be headed for extinction,” says soprano and researcher Caitlin Vincent.<sup>79</sup> Or, as dramatically stated in *The Guardian*, “Grand opera is dying along with its increasingly ancient audience.”<sup>80</sup> Audiences for live opera are dwindling despite prior democratizing efforts, such as the mid-twentieth-century phenomenon of operas adapted for or even written for television

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<sup>77</sup> Terry Teachout, “The Fat Lady Is Singing,” *Commentary*, October 2018, accessed July 22, 2020, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/terry-teachout/fat-lady-singing/>.

<sup>78</sup> Munk, “The Met’s Grand Gamble.”

<sup>79</sup> Caitlin Vincent, “The Incredible Shrinking Opera Audience,” *OperaPulse*, (n.d. [2011?]), accessed July 22, 2020. <http://web.archive.org/web/20190111164527/http://www.operapulse.com/explore-opera/features/the-incredible-shrinking-opera-audience>.

<sup>80</sup> Tom Service and Maev Kennedy, “New York’s Met Opera House on Edge of Precipice, Says Peter Gelb,” *Guardian*, June 6, 2014, accessed October 24, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jun/06/new-york-met-opera-house-edge-precipice>.

and the 1980s development of surtitles. Over the past fifteen years or so, the internet has made opera more accessible than ever before – there are many full performances on YouTube, and many universities live-stream their student opera performances. However, opera has retained its reputation as a highbrow, upper-class art form that is of little interest to the general American public.

There have been significant shifts in America’s demographics and social class structure since the mid-twentieth century. Levy suggests that opera has remained a “high class” activity, but instead of wishing to emulate the high class, Americans are more likely to criticize it. She states that “opera has become less effective as a sign of status, likely due to the decline in the mass public’s aspiration to emulate elites.”<sup>81</sup>

Another factor in Levy’s list of potential reasons for declining fine arts attendance is America’s changing immigration patterns. Opera originated in Europe, and most operas performed in America were written by European composers and are sung in European languages. Beginning in the 1980s, a significant number of immigrants to the United States have come from non-European countries, and therefore do not have as many cultural ties to opera.<sup>82</sup>

Changing cultural ideals have also affected opera’s reputation. The general public is less interested in “highbrow” activities than they used to be – in the 1950s and 1960s,

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<sup>81</sup> Levy, “Democratizing Opera,” 288.

<sup>82</sup> Abby Budiman, “Key Findings About U.S. Immigrants,” Pew Research Center, August 20, 2020, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/20/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>; Levy, “Democratizing Opera,” 285-286; “Two Centuries of US Immigration,” Metrocosm, accessed November 3, 2020, <http://metrocosm.com/us-immigration-history-map.html>.

middlebrow culture, which is really high-toned popular culture, was thriving in America. There was still a sense that culture is good for your character, and that a respectable person should spend time absorbing the best that has been thought and said...[H]ow one spends one's leisure time is intensely important. Time spent with consequential art uplifts character.<sup>83</sup>

Even if people didn't attend opera, it was sufficiently well-known to be regularly covered alongside movie reviews in news magazines.<sup>84</sup> Levy argues that, beginning in the 1970s, changes in social values, such as greater multiculturalism, cultural relativism, and progressivism, led to a decline in interest in "highbrow" art forms.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, musicologists were studying opera to a greater degree, leading to more historically-informed performances; while this scholarship is valuable, it led to changes in operatic performance that may have made it less appealing to the public. Examples of this include performing operas in their entirety with no cuts, accompanying operas with period instruments, a more historically accurate singing style, and performances in the original language instead of in English. Therefore, Levy says, opera now caters to an audience that values performances authentic to the composer's intentions.<sup>86</sup>

Because today's opera enthusiasts value high-quality, authentic performances, opera companies must cater to those tastes. This leads to the neglect of programming that might appeal to a broader audience, such as abridged performances or operas translated

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<sup>83</sup> David Brooks, "Joe Strauss to Joe Six-Pack," *New York Times*, June 16, 2005, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/16/opinion/joe-strauss-to-joe-sixpack.html>.

<sup>84</sup> Brooks, "Joe Strauss to Joe Six-Pack."

<sup>85</sup> Levy, "Democratizing Opera," 298-299.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Snowman, *The Gilded Stage: A Social History of Opera* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009): 394-396, quoted in Levy, "Democratizing Opera," 295-298.

into English.<sup>87</sup> Instead, current democratizing efforts, such as *The Met: Live in HD*, imply that “easy access to opera [is] easy access to high culture and the elite or upper class status associated with appreciating it. ... [H]owever, the seeming decline in aspiration among the general public to imitate the upper class has meant that this strategy has found little success.”<sup>88</sup> Therefore, instead of opera gaining a broader audience, it has “become an increasingly niche cultural form that relies on its uniqueness, its difference from the vast array of other cultural products in the art and entertainment market, to appeal to the mass public.”<sup>89</sup>

### The Met’s Aging Audience

The Metropolitan Opera in particular is often singled out as an example of aging and dwindling opera audiences. In 2006, shortly before the *Live in HD* series began, the average age of a Metropolitan Opera attendee was 65. “We’ve stopped the increasingly elderly attendance,” stated Peter Gelb in 2014, noting that the average age was now “59 or 61.”<sup>90</sup> Still, he noted in the same year that 30% of the *Live in HD* audience was over the age of 75.<sup>91</sup> As the Met’s audience is aging, it is also dwindling. In 2015, the Met

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<sup>87</sup> Levy, “Democratizing Opera,” 288-289.

<sup>88</sup> Levy, “Democratizing Opera,” 288.

<sup>89</sup> Levy, “Democratizing Opera,” 289-290.

<sup>90</sup> Nockin, “Met Live in HD Begins to Pay Dividends,” 6.

<sup>91</sup> Service and Kennedy, “New York’s Met Opera House.”

only earned sixty-six percent of its potential box office revenue for live performances in the opera house, down from ninety percent just twenty years ago.<sup>92</sup>

The aging opera audience might be a particularly American problem. Alex Beard, chief executive of the UK's Royal Opera, said that the fears of opera's looming demise are "just *so* far from our experience. Opera is on a roll. As long as love, death, longing and despair are part of the life experience, and people want to hear great stories told through music, opera has a vibrant future."<sup>93</sup> John Berry, artistic director of the English National Opera, concurred, saying "[O]ur audiences are not dying – they are getting steadily younger."<sup>94</sup>

Perhaps American opera companies and their audiences need a change of perspective. Gelb describes opera as "a dinosaur of an art form" and says the Met is operating "in the face of a cultural and social rejection of opera as an art form."<sup>95</sup> Such statements paint opera as a cultural institution on the cusp of disappearance, struggling to survive. In fact, with over two hundred opera companies in the United States – not to mention many university music programs staging their own performances – and over two thousand cinemas worldwide showing *Live in HD* broadcasts, American opera is very

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<sup>92</sup> Terry Teachout, "Rampant Cost Disease May Be Killing the Met," *Wall Street Journal*, June 29, 2016, accessed October 24, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/rampant-cost-disease-may-be-killing-the-met-1467233987>.

<sup>93</sup> Service and Kennedy, "New York's Met Opera House," emphasis in original.

<sup>94</sup> Service and Kennedy, "New York's Met Opera House."

<sup>95</sup> Teachout, "The Fat Lady is Singing."

much alive and accessible.<sup>96</sup> Perhaps potential new attendees would be more interested in opera if Gelb and others in the opera industry stopped emphasizing its supposed irrelevance.

### Opera Attendance Statistics from the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts

It is true that only a small minority of Americans attend live opera, and that audiences have shrunk somewhat in recent decades. The National Endowment for the Arts's 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), which measures Americans' engagement in the arts and other cultural events, found that only 2.1% of respondents attended a live opera performance within the past year, down from 3.2% in 2002.<sup>97</sup> Slightly more respondents consumed opera recordings, with 1.5% watching or listening to opera via the internet within the past year, and 3.6% watching opera on television or listening to it on the radio within the past year.<sup>98</sup> Even if we only look at respondents who have attended any live music event within the past year, opera was the least-attended genre, only mentioned by 4.8% of concert attendees.<sup>99</sup> However, 8.8% of total survey respondents said they enjoyed *listening* to opera.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Number of cinemas taken from Anastasia Tsioulcas, "Met Opera Chief Peter Gelb Renews His Contract Through 2027," NPR, November 26, 2019, accessed October 24, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2019/11/26/782905615/met-opera-chief-peter-gelb-renews-his-contract-through-2027>.

<sup>97</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *A Decade of Arts Engagement: Findings from the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, 2002-2012* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, January 2015), 7, accessed July 22, 2020, <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/2012-sppa-jan2015-rev.pdf>.

<sup>98</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *Decade*, 34.

<sup>99</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *Decade*, 24.

<sup>100</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *Decade*, 84.



Opera attendees' demographics tend to match the American stereotype of the typical operagoer – older white adults who are wealthy and well-educated. The SPPA found that 78% of opera attendees were white; African Americans and Hispanic Americans were the ethnic groups least likely to attend. Attendance was highest among older people – 46.2% of opera attendees were age 55 and up. Seventy percent of opera attendees were college graduates, and 54.1% earned over \$75,000 per year.<sup>101</sup> Interestingly, those earning under \$20,000 per year (perhaps college students) were more likely to have attended than those earning \$20,000-75,000, though those earning \$75,000 and up were the most likely to attend.<sup>102</sup>

More generally, attendance at concerts and other fine arts events has been dwindling over the past several decades. All types of live performing arts events mentioned in the 2002 SPPA (jazz, classical, opera, musicals, plays, ballet, and other dance) had decreased attendance by 2012.<sup>103</sup> Frequent attendees of classical music and opera (defined as attending at least once a month) decreased by 36.7% from 2006-2012.<sup>104</sup> However, those who did attend opera saw, on average, two operas in the past year, a number that stayed the same from 2002 to 2012.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *Decade*, 12-13.

<sup>102</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *Decade*, 24.

<sup>103</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *Decade*, 24.

<sup>104</sup> David H. Gaylin, *A Profile of the Performing Arts Industry: Culture and Commerce* (New York: Business Expert Press, 2016), 203.

<sup>105</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *Decade*, 8.

### Reasons for the Decline in Attendance

One explanation for the decline in audience numbers is the changing demographic makeup of the United States. According to the 1982 SPPA, people under age 35 made up 31.7% of recent opera attendees, but by 2008 that had fallen to 21.2%. Meanwhile, the proportion of audience members aged 60 and above rose from 21.6% to 28.1% during the same time period; in part, the aging audience reflects the aging American population as a whole.<sup>106</sup>

True to their name, the Baby Boomers, defined as being born between 1946-1964, outnumber the generations both immediately before and after them (the Traditionalists or Silent Generation, born between 1928-1945, and Generation X, born between 1965-1980). Since Baby Boomers make up a larger percentage of the population than other generations, it makes sense that they would make up a larger percentage of audiences as well. In fact, as stated in an NEA report on audience demographics, “Baby Boomers continue to dominate audiences, just as we did in the 1980s, when we were among the youngest audience members.”<sup>107</sup> So, it is not so much that people tend to attend opera and other classical music more often as they age – rather, it is that the Baby Boomers, a particularly large section of the American population, have been more interested in the arts throughout their lifetimes. Baby Boomers also tend to value civic engagement, and

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<sup>106</sup> Mark Stern, *Age and Arts Participation: A Case Against Demographic Destiny* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, February 2011), 38-39, accessed July 22, 2020, <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/2008-SPPA-Age.pdf>.

<sup>107</sup> Stern, *Age and Arts Participation*, 5.

they may see concert attendance as an aspect of that value.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, empty-nesters and retirees are more likely than Millennials to cite “wanting to experience high-quality art” or “celebrating cultural heritage” as motivators for attendance, and retirees were more likely than younger people to attend events alone.<sup>109</sup>

Alongside the country’s changing demographics, American lifestyles are also changing – there is an ever-increasing variety of ways to spend our time, and there is not enough time for everything we would like to do. Even in 2002 (almost two decades ago), a study of classical music audiences found that “[o]nly half of those who express the very highest levels of preference for attending classical music concerts actually attend, even infrequently.”<sup>110</sup> One contributing factor to this apathy towards live performances is that there is an ever-increasing array of entertainment opportunities available to the public. The internet, particularly the rise of on-demand streaming media, makes it much easier to consume entertainment in one’s home.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, the former standard of selling season tickets to an arts organization or concert series is less appealing to younger audiences. People younger than 35 tend to buy tickets only for a single concert at a time.<sup>112</sup> This has been partially blamed on “commitment phobia” – younger people like to remain flexible and keep their schedules open.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Stern, *Age and Arts Participation*, 26.

<sup>109</sup> Stern, *Age and Arts Participation*, 3.

<sup>110</sup> Gaylin, *Profile*, 219.

<sup>111</sup> Gaylin, *Profile*, 207.

<sup>112</sup> Gaylin, *Profile*, 216.

<sup>113</sup> Gaylin, *Profile*, 214-215.

Younger people also like to socialize – a 2012 NEA survey found that “Socializing with friends or family members was the most common motivation for arts attendance...76 percent of performance attendees mentioned socializing among their reasons for attending, and over half of performance attendees were accompanied by one or more friends at the most recent event they attended.”<sup>114</sup> Twenty-two percent of survey respondents said that “not having anyone to go with” was a significant barrier to attendance.<sup>115</sup> Not having a friend or family member to attend with is “important – possibly even a deal-breaker” for many respondents.<sup>116</sup> If a Millennial, for example, is interested in attending an opera or other classical music performance, they may change their mind if they cannot find a friend to go with them. As an NEA report states:

For example, if an individual’s friends do not attend arts events, if the individual herself has not previously attended or if she thinks there will not be others like her in the audience, then she might experience perceptual barriers to attendance. Perceptual barriers can increase the sense of risk people feel, thus making prospective attendance less attractive...it is reasonable to suppose that [practical] behaviors come into play only *after* an individual overcomes perceptual barriers.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *When Going Gets Tough: Barriers and Motivations Affecting Arts Attendance* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, January 2015), 2, accessed July 22, 2020, <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/when-going-gets-tough-revised2.pdf>. “Performance” was defined as a live music, theater, or dance event within the past year, not including K-12 school performances.

<sup>115</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *When Going Gets Tough*, 2.

<sup>116</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *When Going Gets Tough*, 16.

<sup>117</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *When Going Gets Tough*, 14, emphasis in original.

Other significant barriers to attending performing or visual arts events included lack of time (especially among parents of young children), high cost, and difficulty getting to the venue.<sup>118</sup>

### Proposed Solutions to the Attendance Problem

Performing arts organizations, especially orchestras and opera companies, have done studies regarding the best ways to attract and retain new audience members. One study found that new orchestra concert attendees wanted a more seamless experience, including parking, socializing at a bar, and ease of exchanging tickets.<sup>119</sup> A major motivator for attendance is the content – “to see the programming or the performers and to be inspired and uplifted by their live performance.”<sup>120</sup>

Interestingly, ticket discounts and promotions are good at bringing in first-time attendees, but not necessarily effective at keeping them. One theater found that over two thirds of their attendees had gotten their tickets at some type of discount – “[t]he discounts helped fill the seats, but did not grow revenue or encourage repeat purchases... [t]he industry’s long-term challenge is rebuilding demand for the product.”<sup>121</sup>

A report by Cindy Asen for the Wallace Foundation focuses specifically on how to get more Millennials (defined in this study as ages 18-34) to attend fine arts events.

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<sup>118</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *When Going Gets Tough*, 2.

<sup>119</sup> Gaylin, *Profile*, 217.

<sup>120</sup> Gaylin, *Profile*, 218.

<sup>121</sup> Gaylin, *Profile*, 217-218.

The study notes that compared to prior generations, Millennials as a group tend to have lower annual earnings, lower net worth, and more student loan debt, resulting in less disposable income. However, they are also more likely to live in cities (where most opera performances take place) and to move within the next five years, and they almost always have their smartphone nearby.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps performing arts organizations could use this information to encourage Millennial attendance. Potential strategies include mailing postcards or brochures to neighborhoods where Millennials are likely to live, or creating a smartphone app that informs and educates them about upcoming local events.

The Wallace Foundation study emphasizes cost as a barrier to Millennial attendance: “Millennials are willing to spend more freely for rock concerts or other special events they know they’ll enjoy. They will not spend as much for an event they’re not sure about.”<sup>123</sup> Compared to older age groups, Millennials are more likely to overestimate how much a classical music performance ticket will cost.<sup>124</sup> They prefer to attend events where they will be around peers, that have food and drink, opportunities to socialize, an informal atmosphere, and are “buzz-worthy” (e.g., worth telling friends and coworkers about, or sharing on social media to make one’s friends jealous). They are also interested in events that feel like an “experience,” which could include food and drink, opportunities to meet performers, or an unusual performance venue.<sup>125</sup> In fact, many

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<sup>122</sup> Cindy Asen, *Building Millennial Audiences: Barriers and Opportunities* (New York: Wallace Foundation, February 2017), accessed July 22, 2020, <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Building-Millennial-Audiences.pdf>.

<sup>123</sup> Asen, *Building Millennial Audiences*, 21.

<sup>124</sup> Asen, *Building Millennial Audiences*, 22.

<sup>125</sup> Asen, *Building Millennial Audiences*, 30-33.

movie theaters are already providing such experiences by expanding their food and drink options, providing interactive experiences, and showing films in nontraditional locations.<sup>126</sup> Millennials are most likely to hear about events from word of mouth, Facebook and Instagram, and arts organizations' websites and mailing lists.<sup>127</sup>

Asen's study suggests that organizations should market performing arts events in a way that engages Millennials' emotions – Millennials who attend opera and other performing arts events say that it lets them experience beauty, feel part of something bigger, stay “in the moment,” de-stress, and feel sophisticated. Opera companies and other organizations could encourage Millennials to buy tickets by emphasizing each live performance as a unique experience that demands one's full attention in order to “be in the moment.” They could also “focus on topics that reflect Millennials' passion for social issues” and “provide [an] opportunity to be part of a diverse audience or community that's different from usual friends and associates.”<sup>128</sup>

Soprano and scholar Caitlin Vincent concurs, saying that high ticket prices, “opera's reputation for snobbery,” and the short attention span of Millennials (generally defined as those born between 1981-1996) show the need for opera companies to shift their priorities and innovate more. To attract a younger audience, Vincent suggests taking

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<sup>126</sup> Andrew Arnold, “Convenience Vs. Experience: Millennials Love Streaming But Aren't Ready To Dump Cinema Just Yet,” *Forbes*, Oct 26, 2017, accessed November 18, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewarnold/2017/10/26/millennials-love-streaming-but-arent-ready-to-dump-cinema-just-yet/>.

<sup>127</sup> Asen, *Building Millennial Audiences*, 38.

<sup>128</sup> Asen, *Building Millennial Audiences*, 41-46.

inspiration from modern stage productions such as professional theater and pop music concerts, along with performing more contemporary operas:

There will always be a place in the canon for Mozart, Puccini, and Verdi, just as there will always be a certain glamor and sophistication associated with grand opera. But we can't hope to build the audience for opera if our philosophy is to rely on past masterpieces and remain oblivious to the cultural changes around us. We need masterpieces from our own time that are relevant to the current generation. And, most importantly, we need patrons and impresarios who are willing to advocate for these new works and remind us why we need opera in the first place.<sup>129</sup>

Cost can be another potential barrier. While a *Live in HD* performance costs much less than actually going to see a Met performance in person – especially for people who do not already live in New York City – it still costs more than many similar events. Table 1 compares ticket prices at two independent theaters in large Nebraska cities – the Mary Riepma Ross Media Arts Center in Lincoln, Nebraska and Film Streams in Omaha, Nebraska.

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<sup>129</sup> Caitlin Vincent, “The Incredible Shrinking Opera Audience.”



TABLE 1: Ticket Prices for *Live in HD* vs. Regular Movies

<b>Ticket type</b>	<b>Mary Riepma Ross Media Arts Center (Lincoln)</b>	<b>Film Streams (Omaha)</b>
<i>Live in HD</i> adult ticket	\$24	\$24
<i>Live in HD</i> ticket for theater members	\$17	\$20
<i>Live in HD</i> student ticket	\$5 for students at Lincoln colleges & universities, otherwise \$17	\$10
Regular movie adult ticket	\$10.75 (\$8.50 matinee)	\$10
Regular movie ticket for theater members	\$6.50 (\$6 matinee)	\$5
Regular movie student ticket	\$5 for students at Lincoln colleges & universities, otherwise \$7 (\$6.50 matinee)	\$7.50

While these are locally owned, independent theaters, many large theater chains such as AMC, Cinemark, and Regal also show *Live in HD* broadcasts.<sup>130</sup> While many offer discounts for seniors and children, regular ticket prices are fixed at \$24. However, depending on the location, movie, and showtime, a regular movie ticket can cost much less. Many theaters also have promotions, such as Marcus Theaters' "\$5 Tuesday," that cannot be applied to *Live in HD* broadcasts. For someone who is unsure about whether

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<sup>130</sup> "U.S. Cinemas: *The Met: Live in HD* 2019-20 Season," The Metropolitan Opera, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/globalassets/season/in-cinemas/us-theaters-july11.pdf>.

they will enjoy opera, it may be more appealing to see a Hollywood film they know they will enjoy than to pay at least twice as much for a *Live in HD* ticket.

Additionally, the cost to see a *Live in HD* broadcast often exceeds the cost of attending a live professional performing arts event. Some examples of live concert ticket prices in the Lincoln/Omaha area are: \$15 for the Lincoln Symphony, \$19 for the Omaha Symphony, \$12.66 for Opera Omaha (based on a \$38 season ticket for 3 performances), and around \$25-30 for a touring Broadway show at the Lied Center in Lincoln.<sup>131</sup> Again, it is likely that many people would rather pay less to see a live concert in their local community than to spend more on a *Live in HD* ticket when they are unsure of whether they will enjoy it.

### Introducing Opera to Potential Listeners

Recorded opera has never been as available as it is now. Even if someone is not able to attend *Live in HD* or a live, in-person opera performance, they can choose from thousands of opera clips and full performances available for free on YouTube. There are also many ways to watch live opera online for free – many university music departments, for example, live-stream their concerts, and the Met itself has made a different *Live in HD* performance available to stream for free on their website each day during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Met also offers Met Opera on Demand, a subscription service

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<sup>131</sup> Prices for movie and concert tickets were found on the respective organizations' websites on Feb. 29, 2020 and reflect the lowest adult ticket price offered.

allowing members to watch previous *Live in HD* performances along with many audio and video recordings of Met performances that predate *Live in HD*; the monthly cost is \$14.99, less than the cost of a single ticket to a *Live in HD* broadcast!<sup>132</sup>

The number of people who watch opera via the internet cannot be easily ascertained, but it seems likely that similarly to *Live in HD*, opera on the internet is mainly consumed by people who are already interested in opera, along with students who are required to watch or listen to opera for a college music class. In fact, I would suggest that attending a live opera or a *Live in HD* broadcast in-person may be a good catalyst to get people listening to more opera on the internet over time. People may think that opera is outdated, irrelevant to them, and difficult to understand until they get caught up in the emotions and grandeur of a live performance. The vividness of a live performance could provide a good starting point for people to become interested in opera, leading them to later seek it out on their own.

The rhetoric around the demise of opera may be contributing to its downfall; the idea that an art form is “dying” does not make it sound appealing to the average person. It is important for opera companies and opera lovers to emphasize why opera should be preserved and celebrated. One could compare the preservation and popularization of opera to that of theater – plays by Shakespeare (hundreds of years old) and Greek playwrights such as Euripides (thousands of years old) are commonly studied and

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<sup>132</sup> “Met Opera on Demand,” The Metropolitan Opera, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/season/on-demand/>.

performed today. Why should opera, a similar art form, not also be preserved in this way? What if someday high school students were required to learn as much about a Puccini or Mozart opera as they do about Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*? Adding opera to the public high school curriculum could also reach students across a broad spectrum of racial and socioeconomic demographics that are not currently well-represented among opera attendees.

Opera is also a more diverse art form than even *Live in HD*'s variety of programming would suggest. The Met only performs large, grand operas due to the size of the opera house, and likely also due to its audience's tastes. Once someone is interested in opera, they can explore similar works such as oratorios and chamber operas, along with newer or more avant-garde pieces that are not in the Met's repertoire.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS OF THE MET'S *LIVE IN HD* PROGRAMMING

*The Met is leading a revolution, albeit one that has less to do with what it's putting onstage than with how it's sending it into the world.*

– Zachary Woolfe, *The New York Times*<sup>133</sup>

Typical *Live in HD* experience

The Metropolitan Opera provides an excellent experience for its *Live in HD* audiences. The audio and video quality is superb, the camerawork is smooth, and the onscreen content is varied and engaging. *Live in HD* not only combines live operatic performance with a movie theater setting, but also adds elements most often associated with television programming, including messages from sponsors and live and/or pre-recorded interviews with performers.

Before the live broadcast begins, there is an onscreen countdown alongside promotional images from various *Live in HD* productions; this is accompanied by the sound of the orchestra warming up and some ambient audience noise from the Met, the same sounds one would hear in the opera house itself. After the countdown ends, an image of a satellite appears onscreen, reminding the audience that people around the world are watching the performance at the same time. The satellite fades into a similarly-shaped image, one of the Metropolitan Opera House's famous chandeliers. Next, several

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<sup>133</sup> Zachary Woolfe, "I'm Ready for My Close-Up, Mr. Puccini," *New York Times*, April 27, 2012, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/29/arts/music/the-mets-hd-broadcasts-are-changing-opera.html>.

sponsorship messages are played (in the 2019-20 season, the major corporate sponsors were the Neubauer Family Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, and Rolex). Just before the performance begins, the host (often a singer from another performance in the same *Live in HD* season) provides a brief introduction to the opera's plot, setting, singers, and conductor. Then, the opera itself begins, and the audience can enjoy the performance with the assistance of English subtitles, which are carefully placed to not interfere with the audience's enjoyment of the visuals onscreen.

Depending on the opera's length and structure, there are typically one or two intermissions during the live performance. While an audience member in the opera house can use this time to chat with friends or get a drink, the *Live in HD* audience is treated to a number of special features to enhance their operagoing experience. These include live and/or prerecorded short video features, which can include interviews with the singers, conductor, or other performers (for example, the puppeteers in *Madama Butterfly* and the jugglers in *Akhnaten*); interviews with other Metropolitan Opera staff; a preview of an upcoming performance (for example, rehearsal footage); and the trailer for the current *Live in HD* season. Each intermission period concludes with about ten minutes of live behind-the-scenes footage of the sets being changed for the next act. These intermission features provide constant video content for the *Live in HD* audience – they may choose to leave the theater during this time, but if they stay, they are not bored by an empty screen. As the intermission ends, the host returns to introduce the next act. Each broadcast ends with an acknowledgement of the people and organizations that made the performance possible; combining traditions from live performance and movies, the singers take their bows onstage while credits roll onscreen. The Met has clearly put much thought and

effort into providing an exceptional experience for their satellite audiences, even providing them with behind-the-scenes content that opera house attendees do not get to see. But what happens before the broadcast? How does the Met market its *Live in HD* series to potential audiences?

### Finding New Audiences

Elena Park, the Met's former Assistant General Manager for Creative Content and current Supervising Producer for *Live in HD*, described three audiences that the Met is hoping to attract to its *Live in HD* broadcasts.<sup>134</sup> The first is current opera lovers, the second is people who enjoy similar cultural activities, such as theater performances and going to art galleries, and third, those who are completely new to opera.<sup>135</sup> Regarding this third category, however, Levy notes,

since the attendance at the HD broadcasts has been so high, the Met seems satisfied with its initiative, even though the available evidence suggests that the audiences being drawn to the HD showings are existing, traditional opera audiences consisting of people who can't go to the Met in person or who already go to their local opera house, not new audiences who have never seen an opera before.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> I tried repeatedly to contact someone at the Met for an interview by phone or email, along with asking for attendance numbers for specific broadcasts, but did not get any helpful replies. It is likely that this is in part due to limited staffing while the opera house is closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Quotes from Ms. Park are taken from her conversation with Daniela Smolov Levy in November 2013, as reproduced in Levy's dissertation.

<sup>135</sup> Levy, "Democratizing Opera," 314-315.

<sup>136</sup> Levy, "Democratizing Opera," 314.

The Met's *Live in HD* Frequently Asked Questions web page indicates that they believe any opera can appeal to a newcomer:

*Is this program just for opera fans?*

*The Met: Live in HD* is for everyone. The productions are chosen to represent a variety of styles and the full range of the Met repertoire and artists. They all feature great storytelling, great singing, and extraordinary production values. Many people tell us that it is a perfect, low-risk way to introduce a reluctant opera goer to the art form.

*How are the operas chosen for the series? Are there some operas that might be more "challenging" for a general audience than others?*

Various factors play a part in choosing the repertoire for *Live in HD*, including the music, the composers, the performers, a Met favorite, etc. In general, opera, when it's presented at the highest level both musically and theatrically, appeals to a very broad audience.<sup>137</sup>

It is true that the Met's level of operatic excellence is impressive, no matter the specific opera performed. It makes sense that the Met's *Live in HD* staff do not want to alienate potential audiences by saying that any particular opera is more appealing or enjoyable than another. However, anyone advertising *Live in HD* at a local level – for example, a movie theater or an arts organization promoting *Live in HD* to their local constituency – should be aware of which operas are more approachable than others. The Met itself is certainly aware of this, considering that the first *Live in HD* broadcast in 2006, *The Magic Flute*, was an abridged English-language version of an opera with fantastical characters in a fairy-tale setting, aspects that would appeal to a broader

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<sup>137</sup> "Live in HD FAQ," The Metropolitan Opera, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/about/faq/live-in-hd-faq/>.



audience than, for example, *Wozzeck*. While the Met has since broadcast only full-length operas in their original languages, their choice of operas throughout each subsequent *Live in HD* season continues to favor operas with more approachable musical styles.

### Trends in *Live in HD* Programming

From December 2006 to February 2020, the Met produced 156 *Live in HD* broadcasts, showing a total of 159 opera performances. I am counting each of the 2014-15 season's "double bill" broadcasts (*Iolanta/Duke Bluebeard's Castle* and *Cavalleria rusticana/Pagliacci*) as two operas, counting 2007's *Il trittico* as three operas, and not counting 2008's Opening Night Gala since it included excerpts from multiple operas. For the purposes of this analysis, I am including the full projected 2019-20 *Live in HD* season, even though the last three broadcasts were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This brings the total to 159 broadcasts and 160 distinct opera performances.

Though it remains unclear who is ultimately responsible for choosing which of the Met's operas are broadcast via *Live in HD* each year (Gelb? Met music director Yannick Nézet-Séguin? A committee of some sort?), Gelb states that "[t]he HD season is a microcosm of the best – in terms of quality and variety – of the Met season."<sup>138</sup> Park describes each season as a combination of "blockbusters" and "rarities."<sup>139</sup> So far, it appears that *Live in HD* mainly presents well-known, standard opera repertoire, mainly

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<sup>138</sup>Kyle MacMillian, "HD Broadcasts of Met Reeling in Opera Lovers," *Denver Post*, October 1, 2009, accessed August 29, 2020, <https://www.denverpost.com/2009/10/01/hd-broadcasts-of-met-reeling-in-opera-lovers/>.

<sup>139</sup> Levy, "Democratizing Opera," 319.

from the Classical and Romantic eras, with perhaps one new, rarely performed, or otherwise “unusual” opera each season.

Operabase.com is a website that tracks performances of operas around the world. To determine the relative popularity of the operas broadcast via *Live in HD*, I retrieved a list of the top one hundred most-performed operas in the United States over the past decade (2010-2019) from Operabase. I then noted the position on the list of each opera shown via *Live in HD* from 2006-2020. The full list of the one hundred most-performed operas can be found in Appendix B. This analysis shows that *Live in HD* has shown each of the top twenty-nine operas on the list at least once, along with forty-three of the top fifty operas and seventy-one of the top one hundred operas. The remaining thirty-three operas that the Met has shown via *Live in HD* cover a range of time periods, composers, and popularity, spanning from the Baroque (Handel’s *Agrippina*, first performed in 1709 but premiered at the Met in 2019) to the present (Nico Muhly’s *Marnie*, premiered in 2017).

To determine the most frequently performed opera composers for *Live in HD* programming, I retrieved a list of the top one hundred most-performed opera composers in the United States over the past decade (2010-2019) from Operabase. I then noted the position on the list of each composer whose work has been performed via *Live in HD*. This analysis shows that *Live in HD* has shown works by a total of thirty-nine composers, including the top twelve opera composers, thirty of the top fifty, and thirty-three of the

top one hundred.<sup>140</sup> The full list of the one hundred most-performed opera composers can be found in Appendix C.

In 2011, *The Met: Live in HD* broadcast its first repeated work, a new performance of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which had previously been broadcast in 2009. To date, twenty-seven operas have had at least one repeat broadcast (whether a subsequent performance of a previously broadcast stage production, or a different stage production than previously broadcast).<sup>141</sup> These are not recordings of past performances but rather a completely new performance. Each broadcast is different from previous broadcasts of the same work; each performance showcases different singers, and sometimes there is even a new stage production with new sets, costumes, and staging. An example is Puccini's *Tosca*, which has been the most repeated *Live in HD* title – it has been scheduled in four *Live in HD* seasons (in 2009, 2013, 2018, and a cancelled 2020 performance). A different soprano sang the role of Tosca in each of the four broadcasts; the 2009 and 2013 performances used a stage production by Luc Bondy, whereas the 2018 and 2020 performances were staged by Sir David McVicar.

*Live in HD*'s most-performed composer is Giuseppe Verdi (the second-most-performed opera composer nationally) with twenty broadcasts, followed closely by Giacomo Puccini (the most-performed opera composer nationally) with nineteen

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<sup>140</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, I am excluding 2011's *The Enchanted Island*, which was a pastiche of music by several Baroque composers.

<sup>141</sup> I am counting the abridged English version of *The Magic Flute* and the complete German version of *Die Zauberflöte* as a single opera.

broadcasts. These are followed by Gaetano Donizetti (fifth most-performed nationally) and Richard Wagner (seventh most-performed nationally), with eleven *Live in HD* broadcasts each.

In terms of the number of discrete operas, not individual broadcasts, Verdi still holds the top place, with thirteen distinct works shown via *Live in HD*. Wagner is in second place with nine distinct works, Puccini in third place with eight distinct works, and Donizetti and Rossini tied for fourth place, with seven distinct works each.

To determine trends in *Live in HD* programming, I have sorted operas into three categories:

- Top 20 – The twenty most-performed operas of the past decade, according to Operabase.
- Familiar – Operas that are not in the Top 20 but still have good name recognition; this includes those that are among the one hundred most-performed operas, as well as rarer operas that were written by the top ten most-performed composers.
- Unusual – Operas that do not fall into either of the previous two categories.

Table 2 contains the number of *Live in HD* broadcasts that fell into each of these categories each season.

TABLE 2: Categorization of *Live in HD* Operas by Season

Season	Top 20 operas	Familiar operas	Unusual operas
2006-07	2	5	1
2007-08	3	4	1
2008-09	3	5	2
2009-10	4	4	1
2010-11	1	10	1
2011-12	2	7	2
2012-13	3	6	3
2013-14	4	4	2
2014-15	4	7	1
2015-16	3	6	1
2016-17	3	6	1
2017-18	5	4	1
2018-19	3	5	2
2019-20	3	6	1
Totals (140 total operas)	43 (30.7% of <i>Live in HD</i> operas)	77 (55% of <i>Live in HD</i> operas)	20 (14.3% of <i>Live in HD</i> operas)

*Live in HD* programming has skewed heavily toward Top 20 and Familiar operas.

This may indicate that the Met believes its audience prefers to attend operas that are “classics” or “have stood the test of time.” It is also likely that the Met has performed these operas many times throughout its history, meaning that costumes and sets from previous performances can be reused. Singers are also more likely to have well-known operas in their current repertoire, meaning that they will not have to take the time to learn new music and lyrics as they would for a new or otherwise less-familiar opera.

However, the Met also likes to stage “rarities,” as Elena Park said. Staging new or rarely-performed operas shows that the Met is forward-thinking and wants to give its audience a chance to explore operas they may not already be familiar with. Most *Live in HD* seasons have included just one Unusual opera. These Unusual operas fall into three categories, each of which caters to different audience interests:

- Very New (Adams's *Doctor Atomic* [2005], Adès's *The Exterminating Angel* [2016] and *The Tempest* [2004], Muhly's *Marnie* [2017], Saariaho's *L'Amour de loin* [2000], Tan Dun's *The First Emperor* [2006]). These operas were premiered in the twenty-first century, making them of interest to audiences who enjoy keeping up with the operas being written today. (*The Enchanted Island* was premiered in 2011 but belongs more to the Traditional category since it is based on music from the Baroque period.)
- Modern (Berg's *Lulu*, Britten's *Peter Grimes*, Glass's *Satyagraha* and *Akhnaten*, Shostakovich's *The Nose*). These operas were premiered in the twentieth century and incorporate elements such as minimalism and twentieth-century tonalities that may be more challenging for the general listener to enjoy.
- Traditional (Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust* and *Les Troyens*, Borodin's *Prince Igor*, Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur*, Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Léhár's *The Merry Widow*, Thomas's *Hamlet*, Zandonai's *Francesca da Rimini*, and the Baroque pastiche *The Enchanted Island*). These operas are lesser-known but use a musical vocabulary (that of the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic periods) that is enjoyable to the average listener.

Though each *Live in HD* season includes at least one “rarity” which will attract the attention of audiences who want something new, the Met still wants to sell as many tickets as possible – they have never scheduled more than one truly “challenging” (Very New or Modern) opera in a single *Live in HD* season.

Of course, rarity and familiarity can be subjective; for example, while Hector Berlioz and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky are not among the top ten opera composers, nor

represented among the top one hundred operas, their names will almost certainly be familiar to those who enjoy classical orchestral music. Similarly, those familiar with twentieth-century instrumental music are likely to recognize the names of John Adams and Philip Glass. It could be beneficial to introduce these operas to classical music lovers by making connections from the operas to their composers' more familiar works. For example, a local classical radio station could play Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* and mention to the audience that if they enjoyed this piece, they should consider attending the *Live in HD* broadcast of *Les Troyens*. Ideally, each *Live in HD* opera could have its own marketing strategy based on the composer, historical era, subject matter, etc. Ideas for developing such marketing strategies will be explored in the next chapter.

#### Relationship between Opera Popularity and Attendance

While the Met does not provide the attendance numbers for each individual *Live in HD* broadcast, I was able to get some attendance data from the past few seasons from the Mary Riepma Ross Media Arts Center, which shows *Live in HD* in Lincoln, Nebraska. The full data can be found in Appendix D. This local attendance data shows that attendance roughly correlates to opera popularity.

In the 2018-19 season, the broadcast with the lowest attendance in Lincoln was Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur*, with 47 attendees; this was one of two Unusual operas this season. The other was *Marnie*, which attracted 94 attendees – likely because it was both a Very New opera that people had not had the chance to see before and also an adaptation of an Alfred Hitchcock film. The most well-attended opera, attracting 134 attendees, was

Verdi's *La Traviata*, which is the third most popular opera of the decade according to Operabase.

In the 2017-18 season, there were three Unusual operas. Two of these, Verdi's *Luisa Miller* and Rossini's *Semiramide* (both lesser-known operas by well-known composers) were the least well-attended, with 45 and 55 attendees, respectively. The highest attendance (182) was for Massenet's *Cendrillon*, which is seventy-third on the Operabase list, but likely has high appeal since it is both written by a well-known composer and based on the familiar story of Cinderella. The second-highest attendance (132) was for Puccini's *Tosca*, the fifth-most-performed opera of the past decade.

In the 2016-17 season, the least-well-attended opera was Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* (60 attendees), which is the twenty-third most-popular opera; in this case, attendance does not directly correlate with the opera's nationwide popularity. However, this season was filled with popular operas and composers, and *Eugene Onegin*'s attendance was not far off from other well-known operas this season, for example Mozart's *Idomeneo* (70) and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (67). The sole Unusual opera this season was Saariaho's *L'Amour de loin*, which attracted 77 attendees and was notable as a Very New opera by a female composer (and in this broadcast, also conducted by a woman!). The most well-attended opera this season was, again, *La Traviata*, with 180 attendees.

In the 2015-16 season, Richard Strauss's *Elektra* was the least-well-attended opera, with 57 attendees. The two most well-attended were *Turandot* (163) and *Madama Butterfly* (158), both very well-known Puccini operas. Interestingly, the one Unusual opera this season, Berg's *Lulu*, reached a respectable 94 attendees – perhaps because of



the curiosity aroused by the Met's trailer for the production, which focused on the opera's salacious and sensationalistic elements.<sup>142</sup>

In the 2013-14 season (the Ross Media Arts Center did not provide data for 2014-15), the best-attended opera was the most popular according to Operabase – Puccini's *La bohème*, which reached 141 attendees. *Eugene Onegin* was again not very well-attended, reaching 64 attendees compared to 2016-17 season's 60; this may just be a matter of the local opera audience's tastes. The least-well-attended opera this season was Shostakovich's *The Nose* (59 attendees), one of two Unusual operas – the other was Borodin's *Prince Igor*, with 76 attendees.

It may be useful for both local theaters and the Met itself to analyze attendance data for each season to determine how to better market the less-popular operas to improve ticket sales and overall revenue. For example, *Marnie* was unfamiliar to audiences as an opera, but likely familiar to many of them as a movie. Making connections between each opera and the potential audience's interests is likely to draw greater attention to each broadcast and even increase overall *Live in HD* attendance over time.

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<sup>142</sup> "Lulu: Trailer" (video), posted November 4, 2015, accessed November 18, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5GoAnCaq9U>.

## CHAPTER 4: HOW CAN *LIVE IN HD*

### FURTHER DEMOCRATIZE OPERA IN AMERICA?

*I need audience shots. Young people. Is there anyone under 40? Find young people!*

– An unnamed *Live in HD* video director at the 2009 broadcast of *Turandot*<sup>143</sup>

#### Marketing to New Audiences

*The Met: Live in HD* has been a financial success for the Metropolitan Opera, and it has fulfilled Peter Gelb's goal of making opera more accessible to the public. However, there is much potential for the Met to reach a broader audience with *Live in HD*. As discussed in Chapter 3, the *Live in HD* series has consistently provided audiences with popular, recognizable operas and works by well-known composers. This combination of crowd pleasers with the occasional new or obscure opera is well-suited to opera-loving audiences. As the 2008 Opera America survey of *Live in HD* attendees found, 73% of respondents said "they love opera and want to see as much as possible."<sup>144</sup> However, based on the available data, the Met does not seem to have succeeded in introducing a significant number of new audience members to opera.

To attract a wider audience, both the Met and the movie theaters that show *Live in HD* broadcasts must develop tactics that help opera shed its stuffy stereotypes and appeal to a younger and more diverse audience. To that end, I suggest the following methods:

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<sup>143</sup> Munk, *The Met's Grand Gamble*"

<sup>144</sup> Shugoll Research, *Metropolitan Opera Live in HD Survey*, 37.

creating and distributing interesting marketing materials, marketing directly to students and young adults, and lowering financial and temporal barriers to attendance. All these strategies could help *Live in HD* reach a broader, more diverse audience and educate the public about opera.

### Creating Marketing Materials

The Metropolitan Opera’s website contains the most up-to-date information about the *Live in HD* series. However, the information provided about each opera is rather sparse, focusing more on the singers and producer than on the music or the plot. While this may be useful to current opera enthusiasts, it is useless to a potential new attendee who is trying to decide what opera to attend. People new to the opera world will most likely be unfamiliar with the singers, conductors, and producers that are prominently listed.

For example, the description of the November 2019 broadcast of *Madama*

#### *Butterfly*:

Soprano Hui He takes on the heartbreaking title role of the doomed geisha, with tenor Bruce Sledge as the American naval officer who abandons her—in cinemas November 9. Paulo Szot is Sharpless, alongside Elizabeth DeShong as Suzuki, and Pier Giorgio Morandi is on the podium for Anthony Minghella’s sweeping production, a perennial audience favorite. This live cinema transmission is part of the Met’s award-winning *Live in HD* series, bringing opera to more than 2,200 theaters in more than 70 countries worldwide.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> “Madama Butterfly Live in HD,” The Metropolitan Opera, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/season/in-cinemas/2019-20-season/madama-butterfly-live-in-hd/>.

This description does not describe the plot beyond a “doomed geisha” and “the American naval officer who abandons her.” It is “a perennial audience favorite,” but does not explain why. Particularly interesting is that this paragraph does not mention the opera’s music at all. Further down the page, there is a “Read Synopsis” link, followed by one paragraph each describing the opera’s importance in the repertoire, the composer, the setting, and the music. However, all this information, which is arguably more important to an opera newcomer than the paragraph quoted above, is easy to miss due to the design of the web page. One must scroll past several large photos, a list of the main singers, and the names of the production team to see all the information available. There are also two video excerpts from the opera, which are helpful for potential audiences to get a taste of the music, but again, these are rather far down the page.

Another example, this time from a more lighthearted opera, is the May 2019 broadcast of *La fille du régiment*:

Tenor Javier Camarena and soprano Pretty Yende team up for a feast of bel canto vocal fireworks—including the show-stopping tenor aria “Ah! Mes amis,” with its nine high Cs. Alessandro Corbelli and Maurizio Muraro trade off as the comic Sergeant Sulpice, with mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe as the outlandish Marquise of Berkenfield. Enrique Mazzola conducts.<sup>146</sup>

Again, this description focuses on names that the average American will not recognize. Though it provides a small amount of information on the music, mentioning “bel canto

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<sup>146</sup> “La Fille du Régiment,” The Metropolitan Opera, accessed November 8, 2020, <http://web.archive.org/web/20180218224732/http://www.metopera.org/Season/2018-19-season/fille-du-regiment-donizetti-tickets/>.

vocal fireworks” and “the show-stopping tenor aria,” these terms may be meaningless to newcomers, and the plot is not mentioned at all. As with *Madama Butterfly*, there is more relevant information further down the page, but many people may not realize that they have to scroll down so far to see it.

To attract a wider audience, the Met needs to provide more information upfront that is relevant to newcomers trying to decide what opera to attend. The Met does not even need to change their current web layout, assuming it meets the needs of existing opera enthusiasts. Instead, they could create a page called “New to Opera?” that provides information in a more inviting way. It could help visitors decide which opera to attend by saying “If you enjoy stories of romance that end in heartbreak, try *La bohème*” or “If you enjoyed *Così fan tutte*, you may also like *Don Pasquale*.” This information could be focused on the current *Live in HD* season, or it could be expanded to be a perennial resource for audiences new to opera that provides easy-to-understand descriptions for all the operas available through the Met’s online streaming service.

The Met could also benefit from the increased use of trailers. Movie trailers are an iconic part of the moviegoing experience and are a major way for people to learn about upcoming movies they may want to see. Each *Live in HD* broadcast includes a trailer for the rest of the *Live in HD* season.<sup>147</sup> However, this trailer shows only a few still images from each upcoming opera, with the title, composer, and lead singers’ names prominently

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<sup>147</sup> For example, “Metropolitan Opera 2013-14 Live in HD Trailer” (video), posted March 27, 2013, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXyr2Vs2niw>.

featured. Each set of images is accompanied by a short audio excerpt of the opera. While seasoned opera enthusiasts may recognize many of these titles and composers, audiences who do not know much about opera will not gain much knowledge from the trailer. It would be more helpful to less-experienced audience members to provide more context about each upcoming opera. Any voice-over narration would compete with the underlying audio clip, so perhaps a short summary of the plot could be written onscreen alongside the opera's title and composer. The host of each *Live in HD* broadcast typically provides a short description of the next *Live in HD* opera, but adding a short description to each segment of the trailer would be a beneficial repetition, as well as introducing audience members to operas further ahead in the season.

In any type of marketing, it would be useful for the Met's opera descriptions to include a few specific points that a potential viewer can use to differentiate between operas and decide which ones sound the most interesting to them. One example would be to point out whether a particular opera is a popular fan favorite or a more obscure work, or whether it is a comedy or a tragic drama. The following is a list of other salient features that could be emphasized in opera marketing – specifically to English-speaking audiences in the United States – along with examples from past *Live in HD* programming:

- English-language libretti – *Doctor Atomic*, *The Enchanted Island*, *The First Emperor*, *Marnie*, *Peter Grimes*
- Operas based on other, more familiar works – *Nabucco*, *Salome*, *Samson et Dalila* (the Bible), *The Enchanted Island*, *Hamlet*, *Otello*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *The Tempest* (Shakespeare plays), *Orfeo ed Euridice* (Greek myth), *Iphigénie en*

*Tauride* (Greek play), *Les Troyens* (the *Aeneid*), *Faust* (German legend), *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (Norse sagas), *Cendrillon*, *La Cenerentola*, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* (European folktales collected by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm)

- Diversity of composers – *L'Amour de loin* (female composer), *Dialogues des Carmélites*, *Peter Grimes*, *The Tempest* (gay composers), *The First Emperor* (Chinese composer), *Akhnaten*, *Doctor Atomic*, *Porgy and Bess* (American composers)
- Newness – *Doctor Atomic*, *The Exterminating Angel*, *Marnie* (21<sup>st</sup> century operas), *Agrippina*, *Porgy and Bess* (Met premieres of older works)
- Non-European setting – *Armida* (Middle East), *The First Emperor*, *Turandot* (China), *Madama Butterfly* (Japan)
- Historical setting – *Aida*, *Akhnaten* (ancient Egypt), *Agrippina* (ancient Rome), *Thaïs* (Egypt under the Roman Empire), *Armida* (the Crusades), *Dialogues des Carmélites* (French Revolution), *La fille du régiment* (Napoleonic Wars), *Doctor Atomic* (World War II)
- Fanciful setting or plot elements – *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, *La damnation de Faust*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Magic Flute/Die Zauberflöte*, *Turandot*
- Unusual literary/musical style – *The Exterminating Angel* (surrealism), *Lulu* and *Wozzeck* (Expressionism), *Akhnaten* (minimalism)
- Unusual staging – *Agrippina*, premiered in 1709 and taking place in the Roman Empire, using a modern set that “features homeless people pushing shopping carts; TV reporters; a lively bar scene; and a deranged Nero, consuming positively

imperial amounts of cocaine”<sup>148</sup>; director Robert Lepage’s controversial production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* using a set that “features 24 planks constructed between two towers and runs on a hydraulic system” and “can be configured into a multitude of forms to accommodate every scene,” though the “machine’s malfunctions became something of a leitmotif, right from the start”<sup>149</sup>; and *Rigoletto* “set in a 1960s Las Vegas casino”<sup>150</sup>

- Similarity to well-known stories in other forms of media – *Don Giovanni* (Don Juan), *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Lord of the Rings), *Rusalka* (The Little Mermaid)
- Shorter run times<sup>151</sup> – *La bohème*, *Cavalleria rusticana*, *Duke Bluebeard’s Castle*, *Elektra*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Iolanta*, *Iphigénie en Tauride*, *The Nose*, *Pagliacci*, *Les pêcheurs de perles*, *Salome*, *Suor Angelica*, *Il tabarro*, *Tosca*, *Wozzeck*

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<sup>148</sup> Michael Cooper, “In the Met Opera’s ‘Agrippina,’ the Roman Empire Never Ended,” *New York Times*, January 31, 2020, accessed November 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/31/arts/music/handel-agrippina-met-opera.html>.

<sup>149</sup> “The Ring Transformed,” The Metropolitan Opera, accessed November 9, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/user-information/nightly-met-opera-streams/articles/the-ring-transformed/>; James Barron, “Leaving the Met, but Not for Valhalla,” *New York Times*, May 17, 2013, accessed November 18, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/18/arts/music/the-met-packs-up-its-notorious-ring-machine.html>.

<sup>150</sup> “Michael Mayer’s Las Vegas-themed production of Verdi’s *Rigoletto* returns to the Met April 26,” The Metropolitan Opera, April 26, 2019, accessed November 18, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/about/press-releases/michael-mayers-las-vegas-themed-production-of-verdis-rigoletto-returns-to-the-met-april-26/>.

<sup>151</sup> These operas have an approximate runtime of two hours or less, according to “Running Times: Are All Operas Long?” The Opera 101, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://www.theopera101.com/operas/runningtimes.html>.



- Melodies that have made their way into popular culture – *Carmen* (“Habanera,” used in all sorts of contexts from *The Muppets* to food advertisements<sup>152</sup>), *Die Walküre* (“Ride of the Valkyries,” used in the movie *Apocalypse Now* and the *Merrie Melodies* short film “What’s Opera, Doc?”), *Thaïs* (“Meditation,” performed and recorded by many violinists and other instrumentalists), *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (“Largo al factotum,” used in “Rabbit of Seville” and other *Looney Tunes* short films), *Rigoletto* (“La donna è mobile”), *Turandot* (“Nessun dorma,” often sung by Luciano Pavarotti and The Three Tenors)

Of course, different aspects will be of interest to different audiences. For example, the general American public might particularly appreciate English-language operas and shorter run times, while theater students may be interested in seeing an opera with unusual staging elements, and those studying history might be drawn to operas set in a historical period of interest to them.

### Finding a Younger Audience

As discussed in Chapter 2, many arts organizations are investigating ways to attract younger audiences, and the Met should do the same. For opera to remain relevant, it must attract younger attendees who will support opera companies after their current, aging audiences pass on.

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<sup>152</sup> “Carmen in Pop Culture,” Seattle Opera, October 12, 2011, accessed November 18, 2020, <https://www.seattleoperablog.com/2011/10/carmen-in-pop-culture.html>.

Currently, *Live in HD* does not seem to have a comprehensive promotional strategy. While the Met has advertised its live performances in the subways and on city buses in New York City since 2006,<sup>153</sup> the promotion of *Live in HD* seems to be left to each individual theater or theater chain. For example, the Mary Riepma Ross Media Arts Center in Lincoln, Nebraska advertises *Live in HD* broadcasts on its website and social media pages.<sup>154</sup> Social media marketing is an inexpensive way for theaters and local organizations to reach potential audiences. Movie theaters showing *Live in HD* broadcasts should take advantage of social media features that can expand their reach in the local community. For example, the theater could create a Facebook event for each broadcast and share it with local opera companies, orchestras, museums, libraries, and other organizations that have Facebook pages. As these organizations share the event on their own pages, information about *Live in HD* will reach many of the people who follow those pages. If someone is interested in attending the broadcast, they can also share it with their friends and family, further increasing the event's reach and potentially making the *Live in HD* broadcast an attractive social outing. This can all happen organically, but organizations can also pay Facebook to show the event to certain groups of users – for example, people in the local area who are 18-35 years old and are interested in music. Other social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram do not have similar event-

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<sup>153</sup> Julie Bosman, "The Metropolitan Opera's New Stage," *New York Times*, August 29, 2006, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/29/business/media/29adco.html>.

<sup>154</sup> Danny Ladely, email message to author, November 10, 2020.

planning features, but they can be additional avenues to spread the word about *Live in HD*.

Theaters and arts organizations could also collaborate to provide memorable, worthwhile experiences for young adults in their twenties and thirties who are interested in opera but hesitant about attending on their own. Events should be planned using tactics from the Wallace Foundation's *Building Millennial Audiences* report summarized in Chapter 2. For example, a local art museum or orchestra could create an exhibit or concert that ties in with an upcoming *Live in HD* performance. Another idea is for a nearby venue to host a pre-performance event that includes food and one or more speakers who can inform the attendees about issues related to the opera they are about to see. This could take the form of a brunch before the live Saturday broadcast, or a dinner before an evening encore screening. Colleges and universities would be ideal locations to host this type of event, given that many instructors and students, as well as people who live in the surrounding community, will be interested in learning something new and perhaps already familiar with the location and speakers. Hosting this type of event at a college will also help younger attendees to see the opera as a social event that they can discuss with like-minded people, instead of as an intimidating event they will be attending by themselves. A college instructor could also ask their students to attend a relevant opera for a required or extra credit assignment, which would guarantee students could attend with a group of their peers.

### Lowering Barriers to Attendance

As described in Chapter 2, *Live in HD* tickets have a significant cost. Many people do not want to spend \$24 on a performance they might not enjoy. The Met likely requires theaters to charge these high prices as a way to show that *Live in HD* is different from a typical movie theater experience, that it is a premium product, and that it is worth at least as much as a rush ticket or standing room ticket at the Metropolitan Opera House itself. The Met should keep its *Live in HD* tickets at their current price, given that *Live in HD* has become a significant source of revenue, and many opera lovers are willing to pay for the experience. However, the Met and/or local theaters and arts organizations should find ways to lower the cost for people who are new to opera, so that they can experience an opera broadcast with little financial risk and potentially become a regular purchaser of full-price tickets in the future.

There are many ways that *Live in HD* ticket prices could be lowered for new attendees. A classical radio station, community orchestra, or other organization that provides low-cost classical music to the local community could hold a prize drawing and give *Live in HD* tickets to the winners. Colleges, universities, and secondary schools could use grant or donor money to subsidize the cost of tickets for their students. Movie theaters that already provide discounted student movie tickets could expand this program to *Live in HD* – the Ross Media Arts Center in Lincoln, Nebraska currently does this,

charging \$24 for a standard adult ticket and \$17 for a child ticket, but allowing local college students to attend an opera broadcast for just \$5.<sup>155</sup>

Another option would be to keep the initial *Live in HD* broadcast at its current price, with a more affordable encore offered at a later time. This would keep the initial live satellite transmission at a premium price that higher-income opera enthusiasts are willing to pay. Entertainment, like many other things, loses its perceived value over time – for example, first-run movie tickets and new DVD releases cost more than second-run movie tickets and DVDs that have been available for several years. Similarly, *Live in HD* tickets cost around \$24, but some recorded *Live in HD* broadcasts are eventually rebroadcast on public television stations, making them free to anyone with a television set.<sup>156</sup> Additionally, the Met has a subscription service that allows unlimited streaming of its audio and video broadcast archives for only \$14.99 per month.<sup>157</sup> There is potential to have a middle option, where older *Live in HD* recordings are shown on a movie theater screen at a discounted price. A lower price could also encourage audiences to spend more money on concessions, which are where movie theaters make most of their money.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> “Opera and Theatre Broadcasts,” Mary Riepma Ross Media Arts Center, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://theross.org/live-theatre/>.

<sup>156</sup> Jasmine Wilson, “The Top 5 Can’t-Miss Operas of Great Performances at the Met Season 14,” *In the Wings: News and Insights from Great Performances*, June 2020, 2020, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/blog/the-top-5-cant-miss-operas-of-gmet-season-14/>.

<sup>157</sup> “Met Opera on Demand,” accessed November 14, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/season/on-demand/>.

<sup>158</sup> Clancy Morgan, “17 Sneaky Ways Movie Theaters Get You to Spend More Money,” *Business Insider*, August 2, 2019, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/movie-theaters-sneaky-ways-spend-more-money-amc-regal-2019-8>.

The Met runs an educational program called HD Live in Schools, which provides free *Live in HD* tickets and related educational materials to public school teachers and students. This is an excellent opportunity for children and teenagers to learn about opera, but it is currently only active in fifty-three school districts in the United States, plus five New York City high schools.<sup>159</sup> As of late 2020, the program is active in forty-three states, but most of these states have only one or two school participating school districts. This opportunity could be greatly expanded as a way to reach more young people who could become loyal opera attendees in the future.

Time is also a significant barrier to opera attendance. *Live in HD* performances are consistently broadcast on Saturdays at 12:55 PM EST; many theaters show a recording of the broadcast as an encore at some time during the following week. This means that there are only one or two chances to see each opera in the theater. This makes attending a *Live in HD* broadcast harder to fit into one's schedule, unlike a typical movie that is shown in the theater multiple times per day for several weeks. If someone misses the opportunity to see a particular *Live in HD* broadcast, they will likely not have a chance to see it on a theater screen in the future. Additionally, it can be hard to remember when *Live in HD* events are happening soon, since they do not occur on a predictable schedule, such as the first weekend of every month. People who intend to attend a *Live in HD* broadcast but do not carefully note the broadcast date can easily forget to attend.

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<sup>159</sup> "School District Partners," The Metropolitan Opera, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/discover/education/hd-live-in-schools/school-district-partners/>.

Depending on whether the Met places any restrictions on encore showings, and depending on whether a theater has a screen available at a given time, theaters could alleviate this problem by providing several time slots for audiences to see an encore recording of each *Live in HD* opera. This could also bring in more ticket revenue for both the local theater and the Met itself. Additionally, since the Met's 2020-21 season was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, theaters could use *Live in HD* encore showings to their benefit. Theaters who have reopened could host socially-distanced encores, perhaps at a slightly reduced price if the recording has already been pushed out to other markets, such as streaming, DVDs, or public television. Having more showings of each opera could be particularly beneficial in locations that regularly sell out their *Live in HD* broadcasts, whereas theaters with smaller *Live in HD* attendance numbers might not see much additional revenue.

Another time constraint is that operas, on average, run much longer than a typical movie does. Few newcomers to opera would be willing to sit through *Götterdämmerung* or *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, which are each four and a half hours long before factoring in intermissions!<sup>160</sup> Many Hollywood movies are under two hours long, whereas a *Live in HD* broadcast, including intermissions, often lasts three hours or even longer. It can be difficult for a potential attendee to carve out this amount of time to see an opera, especially on a Saturday afternoon when they likely have several competing leisure activities from which to choose. Fortunately, the Met's website always provides

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<sup>160</sup> "Running Times: Are All Operas Long?"

the expected runtime for each broadcast, and movie theaters should provide this information on their websites as well. Marketing materials could indicate which operas have a relatively shorter runtime, so that potential audiences are not dissuaded by the idea of having to endure a very long opera. This is not to say that shorter operas are better, only that they could be a more palatable entry point for someone who is interested in opera but is intimidated by the potential time commitment.

### Conclusion & Opportunities for Further Research

*The Met: Live in HD* has been an important, innovative, and lucrative development in the history of opera. Opera enthusiasts no longer need to travel to New York City to hear the Metropolitan Opera perform live – now, these world-class performances can be seen and heard in over two thousand movie theaters throughout not only the United States, but over seventy other countries. Such an innovation has the potential to reach thousands of people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to see a live opera in their local community, and it could increase interest in opera in communities that do have a local opera company.

However, the demographic information and audience surveys that have been made available indicate that *Live in HD* audiences consist mainly of older, wealthier people who already enjoyed opera prior to attending a *Live in HD* broadcast. It would benefit both the Met and local movie theaters to further study the demographics of *Live in HD* audiences, along with developing tactics to attract and retain new audience members. This will financially benefit both the Met and local theaters due to increased ticket sales, introduce more people to opera as an art form, and create opera fans who will support the



Met, and opera as a whole, for decades to come. Potential areas of study include comparing *Live in HD* audiences in the United States to those in other countries – it would be interesting to see how the audience demographics differ. Do audiences skew a bit younger in Europe, where opera is more firmly settled in the cultural landscape? How do ticket prices for both *Live in HD* and local live opera events compare between countries?

Another interesting area for future research is to determine who is watching opera via the internet. Though the Met focuses on the “liveness” of the *Live in HD* experience, it is much less expensive to watch opera performances on a smaller screen. Are subscribers to the Met Opera on Demand streaming service generally also *Live in HD* attendees, and if so, how could the Met expand its reach to more potential subscribers? Which YouTube channels post the most opera content, and who watches those videos? Who tunes in to watch livestreamed student performances from universities and music schools? How many people in a particular community attend *Live in HD* broadcasts vs. watching the *Live in HD* recordings that are later broadcast on public television?

It is essential that the Met and other opera companies research potential new audience members and actively reach out to them in order to create a strong, diverse group of music lovers who regularly attend performances and financially support these organizations through ticket sales and donations. *The Met: Live in HD* is well-positioned to demonstrate that opera is not dying in America – it is a complex, beloved art form that just needs to determine the best ways to grow and diversify its audience.

APPENDIX A: FULL LIST OF *LIVE IN HD* BROADCASTSColor Key

Green: Top 20 most-performed operas

Blue: Familiar operas

Orange: Unusual operas

Asterisks (\*) indicate repetition of operas that had been broadcast in a previous *Live in HD* season.

Title	Composer	Year Premiered	Language	Operabase Popularity
<b>2006-07</b>				
<i>The Magic Flute</i> (abridged)	Mozart	1791	English	7
<i>I puritani</i>	Bellini	1835	Italian	98
<i>The First Emperor</i>	Tan Dun	2006	English	>100
<i>Eugene Onegin</i>	Tchaikovsky	1879	Russian	23
<i>Il barbiere di Siviglia</i>	Rossini	1816	Italian	5
<i>Il tabarro</i>	Puccini	1918	Italian	80
<i>Suor Angelica</i>	Puccini	1918	Italian	42
<i>Gianni Schicchi</i>	Puccini	1918	Italian	35
<b>2007-08</b>				
<i>Roméo et Juliette</i>	Gounod	1867	French	17
<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>	Humperdinck	1893	German	16
<i>Macbeth</i>	Verdi	1847	Italian	31
<i>Manon Lescaut</i>	Puccini	1893	Italian	53
<i>Peter Grimes</i>	Britten	1945	English	>100
<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>	Wagner	1865	German	84
<i>La bohème</i>	Puccini	1896	Italian	1

<i>La fille du régiment</i>	Donizetti	1840	French	26
<b>2008-09</b>				
<i>Salome</i>	Strauss	1905	German	39
<i>Doctor Atomic</i>	Adams	2005	English	>100
<i>La damnation de Faust</i>	Berlioz	1845	French	>100
<i>Thaïs</i>	Massenet	1894	French	100
<i>La rondine</i>	Puccini	1917	Italian	64
<i>Orfeo ed Euridice</i>	Gluck	1762	Italian	40
<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>	Donizetti	1835	Italian	12
<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	Puccini	1904	Italian	3
<i>La sonnambula</i>	Bellini	1831	Italian	>100
<i>La Cenerentola</i>	Rossini	1817	Italian	20
<b>2009-10</b>				
<i>Tosca</i>	Puccini	1900	Italian	5
<i>Aida</i>	Verdi	1871	Italian	13
<i>Turandot</i>	Puccini	1926	Italian	14
<i>Les Contes d'Hoffman</i>	Offenbach	1881	French	25
<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	Strauss	1911	German	69
<i>Carmen</i>	Bizet	1875	French	2
<i>Simon Boccanegra</i>	Verdi	1857	Italian	97
<i>Hamlet</i>	Thomas	1868	French	>100
<i>Armida</i>	Rossini	1817	Italian	>100
<b>2010-11</b>				
<i>Das Rheingold</i>	Wagner	1869	German	49
<i>Boris Godunov</i>	Mussorgsky	1874	Russian	93
<i>Don Pasquale</i>	Donizetti	1843	Italian	22
<i>Don Carlo</i>	Verdi	1867	French	44
<i>La fanciulla del West</i>	Puccini	1910	Italian	38
<i>Nixon in China</i>	Adams	1987	English	82

<i>Iphigénie en Tauride</i>	Gluck	1779	French	>100
<i>Lucia di Lammermoor*</i>	Donizetti	1835	Italian	12
<i>Le Comte Ory</i>	Rossini	1828	French	81
<i>Capriccio</i>	Strauss	1942	German	>100
<i>Il trovatore</i>	Verdi	1853	Italian	18
<i>Die Walküre</i>	Wagner	1870	German	57
<b>2011-12</b>				
<i>Anna Bolena</i>	Donizetti	1830	Italian	55
<i>Don Giovanni</i>	Mozart	1787	Italian	8
<i>Siegfried</i>	Wagner	1876	German	67
<i>Satyagraha</i>	Glass	1980	Sanskrit	>100
<i>Rodelinda</i>	Handel	1725	Italian	>100
<i>Faust</i>	Gounod	1859	French	24
<i>The Enchanted Island</i>	Pastiche of Handel/Vivaldi/Rameau	2011	English	>100
<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	Wagner	1876	German	78
<i>Ernani</i>	Verdi	1844	Italian	>100
<i>Manon</i>	Massenet	1884	French	65
<i>La traviata</i>	Verdi	1853	Italian	3
<b>2012-13</b>				
<i>L'elisir d'amore</i>	Donizetti	1832	Italian	19
<i>Otello</i>	Verdi	1816	Italian	34
<i>The Tempest</i>	Adès	2004	English	>100
<i>La clemenza di Tito</i>	Mozart	1791	Italian	66
<i>Un ballo in maschera</i>	Verdi	1859	Italian	41
<i>Aida*</i>	Verdi	1871	Italian	13
<i>Les Troyens</i>	Berlioz	1863	French	>100
<i>Maria Stuarda</i>	Donizetti	1835	Italian	77
<i>Rigoletto</i>	Verdi	1851	Italian	10
<i>Parsifal</i>	Wagner	1882	German	>100
<i>Francesca da Rimini</i>	Zandonai	1914	Italian	>100
<i>Giulio Cesare</i>	Handel	1724	Italian	72

<b>2013-14</b>				
<i>Eugene Onegin*</i>	Tchaikovsky	1879	Russian	23
<i>The Nose</i>	Shostakovich	1930	Russian	>100
<i>Tosca*</i>	Puccini	1900	Italian	5
<i>Falstaff</i>	Verdi	1893	Italian	28
<i>Rusalka</i>	Dvořák	1901	Czech	51
<i>Prince Igor</i>	Borodin	1890	Russian	>100
<i>Werther</i>	Massenet	1892	French	48
<i>La bohème*</i>	Puccini	1896	Italian	1
<i>Così fan tutte</i>	Mozart	1790	Italian	11
<i>La Cenerentola*</i>	Rossini	1817	Italian	20
<b>2014-15</b>				
<i>Macbeth*</i>	Verdi	1847	Italian	31
<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	Mozart	1786	Italian	9
<i>Carmen*</i>	Bizet	1875	French	2
<i>Il barbiere di Siviglia*</i>	Rossini	1816	Italian	6
<i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>	Wagner	1868	German	>100
<i>The Merry Widow</i>	Lehár	1905	German	>100
<i>Les Contes d'Hoffman*</i>	Offenbach	1881	French	25
<i>Iolanta</i>	Tchaikovsky	1892	Russian	92
<i>Duke Bluebeard's Castle</i>	Bartok	1918	Hungarian	76
<i>La donna del lago</i>	Rossini	1819	Italian	>100
<i>Cavalleria rusticana</i>	Mascagni	1890	Italian	45
<i>Pagliacci</i>	Leoncavallo	1892	Italian	15
<b>2015-16</b>				
<i>Il trovatore*</i>	Verdi	1853	Italian	18

<i>Otello*</i>	Verdi	1816	Italian	34
<i>Tannhäuser</i>	Wagner	1845	German	>100
<i>Lulu</i>	Berg	1937	German	>100
<i>Les pêcheurs de perles</i>	Bizet	1863	French	21
<i>Turandot*</i>	Puccini	1926	Italian	14
<i>Manon Lescaut*</i>	Puccini	1893	Italian	53
<i>Madama Butterfly*</i>	Puccini	1904	Italian	4
<i>Roberto Devereux</i>	Donizetti	1837	Italian	>100
<i>Elektra</i>	Strauss	1909	German	60
<b>2016-17</b>				
<i>Tristan und Isolde*</i>	Wagner	1865	German	84
<i>Don Giovanni*</i>	Mozart	1787	Italian	8
<i>L'Amour de loin</i>	Saariaho	2000	French	>100
<i>Nabucco</i>	Verdi	1842	Italian	33
<i>Roméo et Juliette*</i>	Gounod	1867	French	17
<i>Rusalka*</i>	Dvořák	1901	Czech	51
<i>La traviata*</i>	Verdi			3
<i>Idomeneo</i>	Mozart	1781	Italian	83
<i>Eugene Onegin*</i>	Tchaikovsky	1879	Russian	23
<i>Der Rosenkavalier*</i>	Strauss	1911	German	69
<b>2017-18</b>				
<i>Norma</i>	Bellini	1831	Italian	32
<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	Mozart	1791	German	7
<i>The Exterminating Angel</i>	Adès	2016	English	>100
<i>Tosca*</i>	Puccini	1900	Italian	5
<i>L'elisir d'amore*</i>	Donizetti	1832	Italian	19
<i>La bohème*</i>	Puccini	1896	Italian	1

<i>Semiramide</i>	Rossini	1823	Italian	>100
<i>Così fan tutte</i> *	Mozart	1790	Italian	11
<i>Luisa Miller</i>	Verdi	1849	Italian	>100
<i>Cendrillon</i>	Massenet	1899	French	73
<b>2018-19</b>				
<i>Aida</i> *	Verdi	1871	Italian	13
<i>Samson et Dalila</i>	Saint-Saens	1877	French	70
<i>La fanciulla del West</i> *	Puccini	1910	Italian	38
<i>Marnie</i>	Muhly	2017	English	>100
<i>La traviata</i> *	Verdi	1853	Italian	3
<i>Adriana Lecouvreur</i>	Cilea	1902	Italian	>100
<i>Carmen</i> *	Bizet	1875	French	2
<i>La fille du régiment</i> *	Donizetti	1940	French	26
<i>Die Walküre</i> *	Wagner	1870	German	57
<i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i>	Poulenc	1957	French	61
<b>2019-20</b>				
<i>Turandot</i> *	Puccini	1926	Italian	14
<i>Manon</i> *	Massenet	1884	French	65
<i>Madama Butterfly</i> *	Puccini	1904	Italian	4
<i>Akhnaten</i>	Glass	1984	English/ Egyptian/ Hebrew	>100
<i>Wozzeck</i>	Berg	1925	German	95
<i>Porgy and Bess</i>	Gershwin	1935	English	29
<i>Agrippina</i>	Handel	1709	Italian	>100
<i>Der fliegende Holländer</i>	Wagner	1843	German	27
<i>Tosca</i> *	Puccini	1900	Italian	5
<i>Maria Stuarda</i> *	Donizetti	1835	Italian	77

## APPENDIX B: TOP 100 OPERAS BY NUMBER OF PERFORMANCES

IN THE UNITED STATES, 2010-2019

Data taken from Operabase.com on October 12, 2020.

Opera titles in this list sometimes vary from the title the Met used.

Rank	Title	Composer
1	<i>La bohème</i>	Puccini
2	<i>Carmen</i>	Bizet
3	<i>La traviata</i>	Verdi
4	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	Puccini
5	<i>Tosca</i>	Puccini
6	<i>Il barbiere di Siviglia</i>	Rossini
7	<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	Mozart
8	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	Mozart
9	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	Mozart
10	<i>Rigoletto</i>	Verdi
11	<i>Così fan tutte</i>	Mozart
12	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>	Donizetti
13	<i>Aida</i>	Verdi
14	<i>Turandot</i>	Puccini
15	<i>Pagliacci</i>	Leoncavallo
16	<i>Hänsel und Gretel</i>	Humperdinck
17	<i>Roméo et Juliette</i>	Gounod
18	<i>Il trovatore</i>	Verdi
19	<i>L'elisir d'amore</i>	Donizetti
20	<i>La Cenerentola</i>	Rossini
21	<i>Les pêcheurs de perles</i>	Bizet
22	<i>Don Pasquale</i>	Donizetti
23	<i>Eugene Onegin</i>	Tchaikovsky
24	<i>Faust</i>	Gounod
25	<i>Les Contes d'Hoffmann</i>	Offenbach
26	<i>La fille du régiment</i>	Donizetti
27	<i>Der fliegende Holländer</i>	Wagner
28	<i>Falstaff</i>	Verdi
29	<i>Porgy and Bess</i>	Gershwin
30	<i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i>	Strauss
31	<i>Macbeth</i>	Verdi
32	<i>Norma</i>	Bellini
33	<i>Nabucco</i>	Verdi



34	<i>Otello</i>	Verdi
35	<i>Gianni Schicchi</i>	Puccini
36	<i>Die Entführung aus dem Serail</i>	Mozart
37	<i>Fidelio</i>	Beethoven
38	<i>La fanciulla del West</i>	Puccini
39	<i>Salome</i>	Strauss
40	<i>Orfeo ed Euridice</i>	Gluck
41	<i>Un ballo in maschera</i>	Verdi
42	<i>Suor Angelica</i>	Puccini
43	<i>L'italiana in Algeri</i>	Rossini
44	<i>Don Carlo</i>	Verdi
45	<i>Cavalleria rusticana</i>	Mascagni
46	<i>Dead Man Walking</i>	Jake Heggie
47	<i>Amahl and the Night Visitors</i>	Menotti
48	<i>Werther</i>	Massenet
49	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	Wagner
50	<i>Silent Night</i>	Puts
51	<i>Rusalka</i>	Dvořák
52	<i>María de Buenos Aires</i>	Piazzolla
53	<i>Manon Lescaut</i>	Puccini
54	<i>As One</i>	Kaminsky
55	<i>Anna Bolena</i>	Donizetti
56	<i>Florencia en el Amazonas</i>	Catán
57	<i>Die Walküre</i>	Wagner
58	<i>Three Decembers</i>	Heggie
59	<i>Moby-Dick</i>	Heggie
60	<i>Elektra</i>	Strauss
61	<i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i>	Poulenc
62	<i>Glory Denied</i>	Cipullo
63	<i>The Turn of the Screw</i>	Britten
64	<i>La rondine</i>	Puccini
65	<i>Manon</i>	Massenet
66	<i>La clemenza di Tito</i>	Mozart
67	<i>Siegfried</i>	Wagner
68	<i>La voix humaine</i>	Poulenc
69	<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	Strauss
70	<i>Samson et Dalila</i>	Saint-Saëns
71	<i>Little Women</i>	Adamo
72	<i>Giulio Cesare in Egitto</i>	Handel
73	<i>Cendrillon</i>	Massenet

74	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>	Previn
75	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	Britten
76	<i>A kékszakállú herceg vára</i> [ <i>Bluebeard's Castle</i> ]	Bartók
77	<i>Maria Stuarda</i>	Donizetti
78	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	Wagner
79	<i>Trouble in Tahiti</i>	Bernstein
80	<i>Il tabarro</i>	Puccini
81	<i>Le comte Ory</i>	Rossini
82	<i>Nixon in China</i>	Adams
83	<i>Idomeneo</i>	Mozart
84	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>	Wagner
85	<i>The Medium</i>	Menotti
86	<i>Dido and Aeneas</i>	Purcell
87	<i>The Rake's Progress</i>	Stravinsky
88	<i>The Little Prince</i>	Portman
89	<i>The Consul</i>	Menotti
90	<i>L'incoronazione di Poppea</i>	Monteverdi
91	<i>Les mamelles de Tirésias</i>	Poulenc
92	<i>Iolanta</i>	Tchaikovsky
93	<i>Boris Godunov</i>	Mussorgsky
94	<i>Arabella</i>	Strauss
95	<i>Wozzeck</i>	Berg
96	<i>The Rape of Lucretia</i>	Britten
97	<i>Simon Boccanegra</i>	Verdi
98	<i>I puritani</i>	Bellini
99	<i>Billy Budd</i>	Britten
100	<i>Thaïs</i>	Massenet

APPENDIX C: TOP 100 OPERA COMPOSERS BY NUMBER OF PERFORMANCES  
IN THE UNITED STATES, 2010-2019

Data taken from Operabase.com on October 12, 2020.

Rank	Composer	19	Philip Glass
1	Giacomo Puccini	20	Jacques Offenbach
2	Giuseppe Verdi	21	Francis Poulenc
3	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	22	Christoph Willibald Gluck
4	Gaetano Donizetti	23	George Gershwin
5	Gioachino Rossini	24	Leoš Janáček
6	Georges Bizet	25	Pietro Mascagni
7	Richard Wagner	26	Ludwig van Beethoven
8	Richard Strauss	27	Kevin Puts
9	Charles Gounod	28	Daniel Catán
10	George Frideric Handel	29	John Adams
11	Jake Heggie	30	Antonín Dvořák
12	Benjamin Britten	31	Carlisle Floyd
13	Jules Massenet	32	Ástor Piazzolla
14	Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky	33	Tom Cipullo
15	Ruggero Leoncavallo	34	Laura Kaminsky
16	Engelbert Humperdinck	35	Kurt Weill
17	Vincenzo Bellini	36	Ricky Ian Gordon
18	Gian Carlo Menotti	37	Leonard Bernstein
		38	Mark Adamo

39	Henry Purcell
40	Claudio Monteverdi
41	Igor Stravinsky
42	Camille Saint-Saëns
43	André Previn
44	Béla Bartók
45	Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov
46	Alban Berg
47	Modest Mussorgsky
48	Hector Berlioz
49	Tobias Picker
50	Nico Muhly
51	David T. Little
52	John Musto
53	Francesco Cavalli
54	Jonathan Dove
55	Rachel Portman
56	Gregory Spears
57	Douglas Moore
58	Claude Debussy
59	Jeanine Tesori
60	Thomas Adès
61	Antonio Vivaldi

62	Umberto Giordano
63	Terence Blanchard
64	Maurice Ravel
65	Mieczysław Weinberg
66	Dmitri Shostakovich
67	Missy Mazzoli
68	Jean-Baptiste Lully
69	John Paul Corigliano
70	Robert Xavier Rodríguez
71	Huang Ruo
72	Arrigo Boito
73	Jack Perla
74	Michael Nyman
75	Xavier Montsalvatge
76	David Lang
77	Hans Werner Henze
78	Michael Ching
79	William Bolcom
80	Robert Ward
81	Mark-Anthony Turnage
82	Thomas Pasatieri
83	Lee Hoiby
84	Mason Bates

85	Samuel Barber
86	Ralph Vaughan Williams
87	Viktor Ullmann
88	Dominick Argento
89	Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari
90	Daniel Schnyder
91	Erich Wolfgang Korngold
92	Ted Hearne

93	Iain Bell
94	Kamala Sankaram
95	Kaija Saariaho
96	Péter Eötvös
97	Luigi Cherubini
98	Anton Rubinstein
99	Ned Rorem
100	Paul Moravec

APPENDIX D: RECENT *LIVE IN HD* ATTENDANCE DATA FROM  
THE MARY RIEPMA ROSS MEDIA ARTS CENTER IN LINCOLN, NEBRASKA<sup>161</sup>

Opera title	<i>Live in HD</i> broadcast date	Attendance
<b>2013-14</b>		
<i>Eugene Onegin</i>	10/5/2013	64
<i>The Nose</i>	10/26/2013	59
<i>Tosca</i>	11/9/2013	93
<i>Falstaff</i>	12/4/2013	91
<i>Rusalka</i>	2/8/2014	108
<i>Prince Igor</i>	3/1/2014	76
<i>Werther</i>	3/15/2014	88
<i>La bohème</i>	4/5/2014	141
<i>Così fan tutte</i>	4/26/2014	101
<i>La Cenerentola</i>	5/10/2014	71
<b>2014-15</b>		
No data provided		
<b>2015-16</b>		
<i>Il trovatore</i>	10/3/2015	103
<i>Otello</i>	10/17/2015	No data provided
<i>Tannhäuser</i>	10/31/2015	71
<i>Lulu</i>	11/20/2015	94
<i>Les pêcheurs de perles</i>	12/11/2015	112
<i>Turandot</i>	1/30/2016	163
<i>Manon Lescaut</i>	3/5/2016	87
<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	4/2/2016	158
<i>Roberto Devereux</i>	4/16/2016	91
<i>Elektra</i>	4/29/2016	57
<b>2016-17</b>		
<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>	10/8/2016	67

<sup>161</sup> Data provided by Danny Ladely, Director of the Mary Riepma Ross Media Arts Center. Attendance for each opera includes both the original live satellite broadcast, plus the encore showing the following day.

<i>Don Giovanni</i>	10/22/2016	139
<i>L'Amour de loin</i>	12/10/2016	77
<i>Nabucco</i>	1/7/2017	156
<i>Roméo et Juliette</i>	1/21/2017	79
<i>Rusalka</i>	2/25/2017	162
<i>La traviata</i>	3/11/2017	180
<i>Idomeneo</i>	3/25/2017	70
<i>Eugene Onegin</i>	4/22/2017	60
<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	5/13/2017	107
<b>2017-18</b>		
<i>Norma</i>	10/7/2017	69
<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	10/14/2017	66
<i>The Exterminating Angel</i>	11/18/2017	73
<i>Tosca</i>	1/27/2018	132
<i>L'elisir d'amore</i>	2/10/2018	104
<i>La bohème</i>	2/24/2018	75
<i>Semiramide</i>	3/10/2018	55
<i>Così fan tutte</i>	3/31/2018	125
<i>Luisa Miller</i>	4/14/2018	45
<i>Cendrillon</i>	4/28/2018	182
<b>2018-19</b>		
<i>Aida</i>	10/6/2018	110
<i>Samson et Dalila</i>	10/20/2018	88
<i>La fanciulla del West</i>	10/27/2018	87
<i>Marnie</i>	11/10/2018	94
<i>La traviata</i>	12/15/2018	134
<i>Adriana Lecouvreur</i>	1/12/2019	47
<i>Carmen</i>	2/2/2019	110
<i>La fille du régiment</i>	3/2/2019	126
<i>Die Walküre</i>	3/30/2019	72
<b>2019-20</b> (limited data)		
<i>Turandot</i>	10/12/2019	76
<i>Manon</i>	10/26/2019	36
<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	11/9/2019	222

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