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Imagine yourself seated in the concert hall, the lights have dimmed and the chatter of anticipation is silenced. From this moment until you stand to leave, the extrinsic and pragmatic issues associated with your decision to attend – the difficulty of getting here and finding a car park, the cost of your ticket, how you found out about the performance and how helpful that information was, and the professionalism with which your needs were met by staff – all of these factors should ideally be forgotten. What exists for you in these few short hours is simply the performance, your fellow audience members, and your own responses to both of these. If the concert is successful, these hours offer a rare opportunity for sustained absorption.

These few hours in the concert represent the great investment of artistic development, practice and skill on the part of the producers, and the investment of time and money on the part of the audience. Yet paradoxically, what exactly the audience member makes of these hours is one of the least well-understood aspects of the performance. As we describe below, most measures of the quality of the performance have focused not on the audience member’s experience in the concert but rather on either the extrinsic aspects of the production – most of which are principally of relevance before or after the performance – or on expert assessments of artistic quality. This tendency to neglect the audience’s experience of quality is currently being addressed. In an era in which music companies are increasingly risk-averse in their efforts to prevent audience decline (Burland and Pitts, 2012), understanding more about the qualities that the audience seeks and gains from their experience in a music performance offers music companies and their stakeholders opportunities to build audiences around informed artistic goals.
This chapter is concerned with what the audience sees, hears and experiences during a performance, based on focus groups and surveys conducted immediately after a performance with the audiences of five music companies performing a range of musical genres and in a range of venues. The focus of the chapter is entirely on the audience’s experience of the live performance because, the chapter argues, the very elements of ‘being there’ contribute to the qualities identified as important to the audience. The chapter examines how the live audience experience of a music performance contributes to the value of the performance. It examines audience-reported responses to the nature of their experience at a performance, and then analyses these reports in the context of research on the specific qualities of the live performing arts experience.

**Conventional Measures of Quality in the Performing Arts**

For many years it was accepted that quality in the performing arts was the rationale used for government subsidy and sponsor investment, and resulted in increased attendance and audience satisfaction for performing arts companies. To this end, arts companies established or were given performance indicators to measure their quality so that governments, sponsors, donors and ticket buyers could evaluate the ‘quality’ of a company or a particular production. Companies and funding agencies collected, compared and then used data as economic and social indicators of the value of the arts. While economist Myerscough in his 1998 study *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* described the intangible nature of the arts product and the ‘waste’ of empty seats at a performance as problematic in measuring outputs (cited in Evans, 1997, p. 442), economic measures of inputs (costs, resources, subsidies), throughput (number of people affected by the activity, target groups’ attendance, number of performances) and outputs (venue capacity against attendance, income against production costs) were the most common labels of quality measurement.

Some data sets included a qualitative assessment of audience satisfaction as an ‘outcome indicator’ designed to answer the question ‘What impact did the concert have?’ This was an attempt to determine if the audience experience had resulted in increased self-confidence and well-being of the defined group of users (Evans, 1997), or a more general change in the community or society. Generally, however, indicators of quality were confined to measuring satisfaction with service which assesses the difference between the consumer’s expectation and experience of attending the venue and
performance. Performing arts venues often relied on simple measures of audience satisfaction such as the number of complimentary or complaint letters received, and how many staff could recognize a patron by name. None of the indicators related to the experience the audience had during the performance. The use of indicators increasingly became the subject of critical scrutiny. In a political economy dominated by concern for commercial performance, Evans (1997, p. 443) suggested that more meaningful performance measures are not those driven by economy and efficiency measures. He stated that performance indicators ‘are not [...] a measure of quality, artistic excellence or a full measure of how far policy objectives are being met’.

**Research on Audience Measures of Performing Arts Quality**

In the late 1990s other researchers began to turn their attention to audience indicators of quality and value in the arts, which often identified these qualities as relating to personal fulfilment. Research by Tzokas and Saren (1999) argued that customers decide whether or not to become involved in an arts performance based on their own set of values. These values are extrinsic or intrinsic consumption values and include achieving shared experiences with peers, social recognition, self-fulfilment, aesthetic appreciation, a sense of belonging, emotional satisfaction and understanding of quality (Radbourne, 2002, p. 60). Botti examined the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards of arts consumption, claiming that the intrinsic rewards of such consumption carry more subjectivity and uniqueness for their target audience:

> The audience of an opera [...] give their own meaning to the work they are witnessing, based on the emotions it sparks. In the case of the performing arts [...] there is a ‘dual mediation’ since the way the artist performs the piece influences the audiences’ interpretation of it. (Botti, 2000 p. 19)

What bestows value on the music from the audience’s point of view depends very much on their emotional reaction to it: ‘the emotional experience that is elicited when the individual’s personal feelings come in contact with the meanings the artist has chosen to transfer through his/her work’ (p. 19). Rossel (2011, p. 88) argued that empirical studies of audiences for music should ‘expect to find two modes of consumption: one more analytical and intellectual, and the other focused on pleasurable aesthetic emotions’ (p. 88). This emphasis on the emotional aspect of a performance has been
neglected by conventional measures of artistic quality. The consistency with which it appears as a factor in audience accounts of their experiences, however, suggests that research on audiences must attempt to evaluate the audiences’ emotional response to the performance and the performers. While governments have values (and rewards) around operational performance and efficiencies, consumers and audiences have their personal values. These values are the benchmarks against which individual audience members attribute quality.

For the link to be made from emotional response and satisfaction of intrinsic needs to a measure of value and quality, the quantitative and qualitative observations provided by cultural economists make an important contribution. Ake Andersson and David Andersson (2006) presented detailed research on the economics of the arts and entertainment experience. Their discourse on quality includes both the quality of composition and the quality of production. They describe the musical composition process as a plan based on what has occurred at earlier stages (technical training and practice), arriving at ‘equilibrium’ where no change would improve the performance. Such consistency highlights the training, technical skill and performance achievement of the musician. Quality is thus defined as ‘consistency with the rules of composition’ (p. 25), and is usually the context evaluated by experts and critics. However, their second analysis describes the dimension beyond the objective technical and professional skill of the artist, to the subjective dimension judged by the buyer, consumer or audience member. Quality measurement, they determine, is in the hands of the audience.

Audiences increasingly seek a kind of authenticity from the experience of the musical performance, where authenticity delivers on audience perceptions and expectations. Recent research has begun to investigate the emotional or cultural impact of the arts on audiences with the aim of identifying intrinsic dimensions (Pitts, 2005b; McCarthy et al., 2004), although not with a view to using such knowledge to evaluate artistic quality. Holden (2004) claims that ‘responses to culture are personal and individual’ (p. 18), while Brown and Novak (2007) determine that the quality of an artistic performance resides in the individual audience member’s definition of quality, based on their intrinsic experience of a performance. Rossel’s study of audiences at classical music concerts concluded that the conventional notion of a passive, concentrating audience ‘only describes a part of
how a musical performance is actually appreciated’ (Rossel, 2011, p. 94). Intent on identifying various ways that audiences engaged with the concert, the study found that there are far more diverse ways of listening than only with concentrated attention or by consciously analysing the music heard:

Many listeners in our survey were also emotionally moved, or used music as an escape from more worldly concerns, or even felt an urge to dance and sing – an impulse quite rarely acted upon at classical concerts in contemporary Western societies! These findings challenge the sociology and psychology of music to develop a theory to explain such diversity in music listening. (Rossel, 2011, p. 94)

New research (Barker, 2013; Chesher, 2007; Bennett, in this volume and 2012) examines the use of media to capture and transmit the performance, and of social media to give the audience and performers opportunities to interact. Such research notes that new media technologies increasingly replicate the perceived attractions of liveness for remote audiences by, for example, offering a limited number of ‘tickets’ to a performance and limiting the period in which a performance can be accessed (Duffett, 2003). Paradoxically, these efforts to achieve the perceived benefits of liveness deliberately reject the benefits associated with internet-based media, which include universal and long-lasting access to the material transmitted. Duffett (2003) argues that such efforts are contributing to a redefinition of the meaning of liveness. Rather than referring to a concert in which both performers and audience members are physically present, ‘live’ is increasingly used to identify the way in which a performance was recorded or transmitted and ‘the distinction between an event and its recording appears to have been erased’ (Duffett, 2003, p. 311).

These efforts aside, a quality that contributes to the great expansion of the audience and its opportunities for engagement is social media’s capacity to transcend the temporal restrictions of a performance: audience members can participate in a performance and the excitement and discussion that surround it at their own convenience. In keeping with this chapter’s focus on the audience’s experience during a performance, the audiences we study here were physically present at the performances. As Reason points out, the fact that ‘experience is a phenomenon created by the non-live does not negate the potential impact of audience perceptions of the live nor suggest what that
experience of liveness might be’ (Reason 2004). The study described below represents one among a growing number of efforts to investigate what the audience experiences during a live performance.

**Five Australian Music Companies and their Audiences**

Studies from 2006 to 2011 of audiences at the music performances of five Australian companies were designed to identify how audience members define the quality of their experience during the performance. All of the companies are relatively small. They include an experimental Queensland orchestra called Deep Blue (2006), the Queensland Orchestra (2007), a Melbourne season of Musica Viva (2008), and two small innovative music companies: the Australian Arts Orchestra (2010) and the Victorian Opera (2011).

These companies and concerts present a range of different musical genres, venues and audiences. At the time of the study, the experimental orchestra Deep Blue had developed a new repertoire specifically in response to expressed audience needs and desires, presenting an eclectic selection of existing works and new compositions with projected visual images, player involvement and audience involvement, no conductor, no music stands, and a shared performance and audience space. The Queensland Orchestra performances included one classical and one popular orchestral concert. The two Musica Viva performances were held in two very different venues and with two different programmes. The first was a concert by a Melbourne-based piano trio, the Benaud Trio, performing in a small, informal jazz bar. The second was a concert by the touring Choir of Westminster Abbey, performed at Melbourne’s largest concert hall. The Victorian Opera is a state professional opera company with a focus on presenting new works and an unconventional repertoire across the state, often in collaboration with partners. The final company, the Australian Arts Orchestra, is a national ensemble of improvising musicians focused on using music to socially connect people.

Our research team conducted focus groups and surveys with audiences of each of these companies. Participants included both regular attenders of the work of that company, as well as people who had not previously attended performances by that company. In all cases, the audience enjoyed the interaction between the performers and themselves, positively describing the live enthusiasm, and the benefits of being among other audience members. At the Deep Blue performance,
audiences enjoyed the absence of physical barriers between themselves and the performers, and the fact that the concert stretched the boundaries of their relationship with music. At the Queensland Orchestra performance, the musicians/performers were considered the best element of the performance. Irrespective of the different audience demographics, it was important for people to connect and engage with the performing artists. This was reiterated at the Musica Viva performances where, despite the very different nature of the concerts, participants described the excellence of the performance and expressed their appreciation of performer–audience interaction and communication between audience members or a sense of common experience. The Australian Art Orchestra performance involved the orchestra accompanying Australian ‘Indie’ singers Paul Kelly and Vika and Linda Bull. It attracted many audience members who were familiar with the singers’ work from Melbourne’s lively pub scene. Participants commented that they expected a high quality performance from these singers, and were pleased to find that it was enhanced by the involvement of the orchestra.

The research undertaken involved two phases: 2006 to 2007, and 2008 to 2011. The research focus in the first phase was on performance innovation and capturing the audience response to this. Focus group questions allowed for a free-ranging discussion about when and where this audience usually experiences music, their feelings during the performance, their view of the role of the audience, and if they would come again to such a performance.

The first-phase studies provided foundational data on the audience experience, their attribution of quality and their value of the live experience. The findings facilitated expansion to other music genres and spaces, and with other demographic and cultural environments, in the second phase. In 2008 new focus group and survey questions were designed to specifically test expectations of audiences, the participation experience, and the value of the live performance. Some of the questions were similar to the earlier research, for example, asking audiences to identify what they liked most and least about the performance, their view on the role of the audience, and would they re-attend. The additional focus group questions were:

1. At what point in the concert were you most engaged with the music or musicians and how did you express that? Is there another way you would like to express this?
2. How does the experience of a live performance differ from seeing a film or TV version of this concert, or listening to a CD of the music? What makes the live arts experience authentic?

The findings from both phases are summarized here.

*Deep Blue (2006)*

The Deep Blue project demonstrated a shift from the traditional orchestral performance. It involved many new product components (repertoire, technology, visuals, venue, staging, musicians, instruments) challenging audience understandings of orchestral music. The test orchestra performed in a range of styles using specified acoustic, amplified and digital instruments, including synthesizers, samplers, laptops and strings. Surround sound systems and multi-screen live and pre-recorded visual images were added to the performance. The repertoire included a combination of new works, ‘Elegy’ composed by Robert Davidson, ‘Raising up Water’ composed by Phil Williams, ‘Chill’ composed by Yanto Browning, and ‘Mars’ from ‘The Planets’ by Holst, arranged by Robert Davidson.

In total about 40 people attended the initial test performance of the four works. Twenty-six audience members completed the survey. The greatest number of people in the audience preferred classical music, with a number of other styles identified such as funk, blues, folk and electronica. They commonly listened to music at home, in their car and in concert halls, and they nominated the musicians/performers as the best part of the performance. While respondents nominated the style of music as what was least liked, they described the performance as ‘experimental and innovative’, ‘an awesome production and great musicianship’, ‘fun and a new look’, ‘exciting and moving’, ‘a contemporary orchestra’, ‘music that would be good in a movie’, ‘different but enjoyable’, ‘an amazing collaboration of drama, lighting, costume, sound production’, ‘a break away from traditional ways of experiencing a performance’, and ‘refreshing, innovative, explorative but where boundaries can still be extended’.

Seventeen respondents (65%) said they would not buy a CD of this performance, although all but one respondent declared they would come again to a performance like this. They identified the role of the audience in a musical performance as an ‘emotional listener’ and 77 per cent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that ‘a musical performance evokes an emotional
response in the audience’. Sixty-five per cent agreed or strongly agreed that ‘the context (venue, ambience, behaviour, of audience) contributes to the meaning of a music performance’, and that ‘interaction between the audience and performers results in audience enjoyment’. Thirty per cent of respondents disagreed that ‘pre-performance information is important to enjoyment of a musical performance’.

Subsequent concerts by this orchestra were sold out. The performance was presented during the annual state music festival and in a partnership with the Queensland Performing Arts Centre in 2008. Over 600 people attended the Deep Blue shows in the festival and 220 completed the survey. Responses were overwhelmingly favourable, with 96 per cent of the respondents stating they would re-attend. An interview with the co-producer stated that expectations of audience size and reaction were surpassed and that the Deep Blue project has significant market potential.

The Queensland Orchestra (2007)

Two Queensland Orchestra concerts were evaluated by surveys and focus groups in 2007. The first was part of the Maestro Series and included Brahms’ Violin Concerto in D major, Ligeti’s *Concert Romanesc* and Respighi’s *Pines of Rome* symphonic poem. The venue was the Concert Hall at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre.

The audience demonstrated their enjoyment of the concert by their enthusiastic applause at the end. Consistent with the conventions of twentieth-century Western classical music performances, the musicians were formally dressed and did not appear to acknowledge the audience during the performance, being completely focused on their music scores and instruments. However, the conductor did informally acknowledge the applause of some audience members who ‘incorrectly’ applauded between movements.

This audience reported that they mostly listened to music in their own home and car, as well as in the concert hall. Ninety-five per cent preferred classical music to other music styles. When asked what they liked best about the performance, 71 per cent indicated the musicians or performers. They were enthusiastic in the words they would choose to describe the concert to others, using ‘wonderful’, ‘spectacular’, ‘exciting’, ‘moving’ and ‘amazing’. The violinist was mentioned a few times as being a ‘great soloist’. Sixty-seven per cent of respondents stated that they would not buy a CD/DVD of the
performance, and 97.7 per cent agreed that they would come again to a performance like this. When asked to describe their role as audience, the highest response (74%) was for the ‘emotional listener’ and that ‘musical performances evoke an emotional response in the audience’.

In contrast to the highly conventional first performance, the second Queensland Orchestra concert performance for this study had a science-fiction theme, including Superman, ET and Star Trek. The programme included acrobats and a compere who spoke in the style of the narrator from Star Trek, and contained a re-enactment of some scenes from other science-fiction movies. Non-traditional classical orchestral instruments were integrated into the performance, such as a bass guitar, electronics and sticks waved to create different harmonics.

Audiences reported that they like to hear music in the concert hall (95%), closely followed by ‘in the car’ and ‘in their own home’ (both 91%). Ninety-five per cent nominated classical music as their preferred style of music. As with all the other concerts analysed, the musicians/performers were rated highest as the most liked element of the performance.

This concert was designed to use theatrical elements to enhance the musical enjoyment of the performance, and 33.3 per cent of people stated that they liked this least about the performance. Despite this feeling, responses were very positive, with many people describing the performance as ‘fun, a great night out, exciting, different, entertaining, spectacular’. A few people commented that the spoken elements were too long and distracted from the music. Only 47 per cent of respondents said that they would buy a CD/DVD. Ninety-one per cent of respondents said they would come again to a performance like this, reflecting that a great part of the enjoyment of performance is that it is ‘live’. As with all the other concerts surveyed, the perception of the role of the audience as ‘emotional listener’ received the highest score with 77 per cent. Audiences strongly agreed that ‘a musical performance evokes an emotional response’ and that ‘interaction between audience and performers results in audience enjoyment’.

Musica Viva (2008)

The first Musica Viva performance was the Bernard Trio of pianists, performed at a Melbourne jazz bar. Two focus groups were conducted: one with regular Musica Viva attendees and one with audience members who had not previously attended a Musica Viva performance. Participants
described the music as ‘buoyant’, ‘fantastic’ and ‘wonderful’ and clearly these descriptions resulted from the intimacy of the venue and the close proximity of the performers, as described below. Where the participants identified limitations of their experience, it appeared that the intimacy of the performance was not matched by engagement of performer and audience member. For example, one participant said ‘I guess there wasn’t a lot of interaction [ … ] there wasn’t a lot of connection between the performers and the audience; or maybe it would have been good to get some more eye contact, and maybe try to draw the audience in a bit more’.

The second Musica Viva performance was a performance by the touring Choir of Westminster Abbey in a formal setting: Melbourne’s then-largest concert hall. Focus group responses to the performance were somewhat divided between respondents who clearly saw the choir as rooted in a cultural and spiritual context – that of the English church – and were resigned to if not disappointed with the performance in a concert hall, and those for whom such a context was not relevant. Spiritual or religious references were common in the responses of the former group of participants, who remarked that the concert was ‘uplifting’ and ‘I felt like I was in heaven’. The music was described as ‘exhilarating’, with ‘exquisite voices’. Participants commented that they would highly recommend the performance to their friends and families.

*Australian Art Orchestra and Victorian Opera (2010–2011)*

The final concerts in this research were with two small innovative groups in Victoria, the Australian Art Orchestra and the Victorian Opera. Researchers conducted a focus group and a survey. The focus groups revealed that audiences do not generally seek pre-show information but want to leave the performance with new learnings and understandings about themselves or particular social issues. They acknowledged the benefits of the emotional experience of the performance using phrases such as ‘fantastic, I was really blown away’, ‘those two (singers) together, there was a peak there, an absolute peak where they just got in to a groove where it was a kind of a perfect amalgam of rock and jazz [ … ] something very, very special’, ‘it was terrific’, ‘the hairs go up on your arms’, ‘you think how great they are’, ‘it’s in the zone, it’s transcendent, you know’ and ‘it’s magical in a way because it’s just that wall of sound: a voice and all the musicians’ (Australian Art Orchestra), and ‘they’re adventurous, they’re fresh, they’re intimate’, ‘exciting in its production and very modern and
colourful’, ‘imaginative and very exciting’, ‘wonderful voice’, ‘stunningly cast’ and ‘you’re involved and emotionally engaged’. The audiences for these performances expected the company to present quality performances, particularly to meet their expectations of entertainment, believability and transformation. For them, the live performance precipitates a heightened experience. Ticket price is not the driver of the decision to attend, but is expected to equal the value of quality, entertainment and intrinsic benefit.

For the Australian Art Orchestra, most respondents agreed that they attended as many performances as possible in the venue. They liked the singer, liked the company and this type of performing arts, have looked forward to attending and would go more often if possible. They were not interested in attending with others. Most used social media. They felt that it was important to have notes on the programme, that the performance matched the promotion, that audiences knew how to behave, and they wanted to discuss the performance with others. They felt that it was very important (75%) that the musicians have technical skill, and they wanted to be challenged by the performance. One hundred per cent of respondents learned something new and their enjoyment was enhanced because they understood the meaning of the performance. Although they had no previous knowledge of the show, they felt the quality was worth the cost, and matched the reputation of the performers. Most respondents felt that other members of the audience shared their experience but this did not increase their understanding of audiences.

Despite the diversity in type and content of the concerts and the diversity of the audience, all audiences in these studies acknowledged that their role is to be an emotional listener. This role, selected from a list of options, shows the audiences place their personal emotions, which are derived from their intrinsic values and rewards, as their predominant means of engagement. They then used this role, or these intrinsic values, to define quality in three ways:

Their appreciation and engagement with the performers/musicians was rated the highest of all components in the performance.

They used emotional and spiritual words and phrases (exciting, fantastic, wonderful, imaginative, emotionally engaging, amazing, refreshing, innovative, awesome) to describe the live performance experience.
Over 90 per cent of audience members stated that they would re-attend, or recommend to friends to attend this concert.

This reinforces that the audience experience in all these musical concerts is inextricably bound to their personal measure of quality, and to ‘live’ performance.

**The Value of ‘Being There’**

The focus group questions prompted respondents to reflect on the nature of their experience as audience members and to consider a variety of elements which enhanced or detracted from it. Participants were asked to reflect on their responses to the performance, such as when they most felt engaged in the performance, what prompted this engagement, what emotions were elicited and how they expressed this emotion. In particular, respondents noted that the live nature of the experience was qualitatively different to the experience of being an audience for the non-live (electronically recorded and transmitted) arts, noting in particular the nature of the live experience as a shared, communal audience experience. The importance of being among other audience members was a recurring quality identified by the participants of this and other studies (Radbourne, Glow, Johanson and White, 2009).

In this context, it is no surprise that social media have contributed to people’s willingness to engage with electronically transmitted performances (Bennett, 2012), because it offers a greater opportunity for a sense of being part of an audience that was not so achievable in the era of broadcast radio and television.

Auslander (2008) argues that the notion of liveness began with and is inevitably dependent upon its opposite: the recording. Before there was recording, there could be no notion of the live, and while there is no inherent superiority of one over the other, the aim of making such a distinction is often to identify the qualities that distinguish liveness from its opposite. Moreover, as new technologies develop, they challenge existing notions of liveness, causing that notion to be repeatedly redefined (Auslander, 2002). Barker (2013) identified a number of elements unique to the experience of liveness, including: physical co-presence with performers and performance; simultaneity with the performance; direct engagement and absence of intervening (technological) mediation; a sense of interaction with performers; a sense of interaction with others in the audience; and a feeling of intensified participation through sensing any of the above. The data gathered in the course of the
present study confirmed many of Barker’s categories of engagement in audience responses to live music concerts, and also suggests, as Auslander contends, that the audience seeks from the live experience those qualities that are not available through electronically broadcast music.

A participant at the 2011 Australian Art Orchestra focus group was particularly eloquent in articulating the experience of live music: ‘When you go to a live performance, it’s happening, it’s in the zone, it’s transcendent. You feel like you’re a part of something special: you’ve actually been present; you’ve borne witness to something’.

One of the key themes to emerge from the present research related to liveness as a form of ‘intensified participation’ (as identified by Barker, 2013, p. 20): liveness was seen to be a critical factor in determining the quality of the audience member’s experience as a listener or attender. One respondent noted: ‘I think when you are actually here in person you are more focussed and probably more attentive and more involved … than listening to it at home’. Another participant noted that the liveness of the experience allowed for ‘dedicated’ listening: ‘I think you’re actually dedicated to listening to the performance, whereas at home you could get distracted by everyday things’.

In addition to the idea of dedicated attention or focused listening, respondents noted that seeing what they were hearing – what Barker refers to as the ‘physical co-presence with performers and performance’ (p. 20) – was also a key factor: ‘I don’t think there is anything quite like hearing the real thing, you can almost sort of feel … you can see the strings move as they are being hit and you just wouldn’t get that from a CD’. A Musica Viva respondent noted that ‘I connected more with the leader (of the choir) when he turned around and said a few things – I suddenly became interested in him’. It was interesting that one participant identified the expectation that the performer should engage with the audience as an Australian – or at least a non-European – expectation: ‘I like the dynamics of one of the performers taking a break and coming to the microphone and just talking about the music [ … ] I don’t care if they don’t do it in Europe. We’re Australians and that is the way we enjoy our presentations’.

A further theme relates to the sense of connection with the performers and the other audience members: ‘A live performance is about the people more than just the music … and you’ve got to be there’. Another respondent noted that in addition to the aural pleasures of attending live music
performance, there is ‘the body language [of the performers] and seeing the expression and being part of the collective audience’. This was also the case for a Musica Viva research participant who declared that ‘I like to sit at the front, how close you are to the performers. I liked the energy you could see in the performance’. Another participant also identified the ‘intimacy’ of Musica Viva’s performances as one of the key attractions and the motivations for her subscription: ‘And I am very fortunate in that I have a seat close to the front and the intimacy is enhanced’. Yet another participant in the same focus group said that her opinion of where she was placed changed over the course of the performance: ‘at first I didn’t like the fact that I was near the front, I was uncomfortable with the amount of noise. As it progressed I actually started to really like the fact that I was close to it and you could really see detail and what was going on, and the facial expressions that I think you might have missed if you were sitting further back’.

The research presented here relates to the audience’s direct engagement with the performance and the absence of intervening mediation. One respondent noted: ‘I think on television you see the show through the eyes of the cameraman who tells you what to watch; when you see live theatre you choose what you will watch’. Another affirmed this point by comparing the live performance, which is ‘like watching a tightrope walker’ to watching mediatized images which have been ‘airbrushed’, a statement which underlines the excitement and the sense of authenticity that can come with the live experience. Reflecting again on research into the use of social media in performances, it is clearly significant that social media can be employed and disseminated directly by audience members, in contrast to the professionally produced media that our participants referred to, because it means that those watching or listening to a performance remotely are not subject to the same ‘airbrushing’, or in fact, ‘ear-brushing’.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify what the audience experiences and values about their presence among other audience members in a live music performance, with a view to contributing to increasing efforts to understand the audience’s experience and to place this experience in measurements of the quality of a performance. Participants in a range of concerts by five different music companies consistently identified the value of the experience as including: the existence of and shared experience
with other audience members; the proximity of the performers; and the opportunity to be thoroughly immersed in a performance. One respondent emphasized this last theme:

> Somehow when you’re in the theatre with the cast and in the moment you’re part of it, you’re involved and you’re emotionally engaged. When it’s something on television you can choose to be involved, you can get up and stretch your knees, make a cup of tea and lose interest.

For the participants, these qualities are no doubt shaped by a sense of a distinction between the live performance and the transmitted or recorded performance. As Duffett (2003) notes, the notion of the live performance is changing as new media technologies develop and increasingly reproduce the perceived qualities of the live experience. The introduction to this chapter identified the fact that the relatively brief period of the performance itself represents the fulcrum of work by the music company and the expectation of the audience, and yet the experience that the audience has is still little understood. A potentially beneficial research endeavour would be to examine whether and how the production of a live performance and audience assessments of the qualities of the live experience are both changing in an effort to maintain the distinction, and therefore the practice, of the live music event.

Taken together with the summary of responses relating to emotional engagement during the performance, the audience live experience is a critical driver of the value and quality of the musical performance. As an article in the Australian newspaper reported, too many marketing campaigns ‘are based on the assumption of repeat business, that a 60-something who buys a ticket to a Tchaikovsky symphony will want to hear another Tchaikovsky symphony the next time’ (Westwood, 2013). Rather than simply gathering information about audience preferences, arts organizations that cultivate an understanding of the impact of their productions on the audience’s social, intellectual and emotional lives are in a better position to increase the value of those productions.