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**Democratising excellence?
Chamber music and arts policy in Australia**

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Summary

Creative industries and creative city development agendas have produced new ways of perceiving the arts. These emphasize the commercial applications of arts alongside other activities and thus fit neatly within the rhetoric of a knowledge economy. They focus on relationships or ‘partnerships’, such as that between the arts and tourism, as a major rationale for arts funding.

In response to this new thinking, arts companies have begun to transform art into ‘product’ and to devise policies aimed at increasing and widening audiences for the arts. This paper argues that these recent initiatives are doomed to failure because they take a one-dimensional view of audiences and fail to address the ways in which audiences reach an understanding and appreciation of the arts. The argument is not so much that creative industry strategies and audience development initiatives are wrong but that the relations and issues with which they are concerned conceive of arts audiences as mere consumers.

This paper analyses the conditions that facilitate access, participation and pleasure at chamber music concerts to show that cultural policy-makers and arts organisations must engage in strategies that more directly acknowledge the audience experience. It has not been adequately recognised that audiences of high culture, such as chamber music, require life-long access to certain conditions of familiarity in order to participate. Audience development initiatives are too narrow and creative industry strategies illuminate only a certain set of relations between the parties, ones that do not take full account of the audience ethos.

In Australia, audiences of high culture form distinct social groups with particular values and attitudes about the art they experience. The description of the chamber music audience presented here fits a classic case of ‘cultural capital’ and illustrates the role played in the distribution of tastes by habitus, that is the social conditions through which tastes are formed. The chamber music audience is a highly educated, culturally homogeneous group residing largely in inner-metropolitan areas. In most cases, it is an older audience, comprising more women than men, with sufficient means to access other types of high culture including symphonic and choral music concerts.

Rather than simply dismissing this audience as a cultural and financial elite with access to seemingly exclusionary arts practices (music tuition and musical mentors) that serve as barriers of entry to many, this paper argues that the conditions which facilitate chamber music attendance (and other high cultural forms) should be accessible to everyone. It is not a case of bringing cultural forms to the uninitiated, for example string quartet concerts in coal mines; it is a case of investigating the kinds of pleasures and happiness that participation in the high arts can produce and acknowledging that all Australians should have the opportunity of that experience. But in order to ‘choose’ to participate in an array of art and entertainment forms one must first have exposure and knowledge, not to mention immersion and mentoring.

The logic that policy should focus on democratising the conditions that lead to an understanding and appreciation of the arts is not a prevalent one. A more popular

conception is one based upon satisfying the existing tastes, judgements and priorities of those who have not had access to the kind of cultural capital that facilitates an appreciation for high culture. While this acknowledges the needs of a larger part of the population, it misunderstands the nature of audience engagement with the arts. If access to the arts is to be democratic, all of our population requires sufficient understanding and appreciation in order to 'choose' attendance.

Art is not easy. As any young music student knows, practising a musical instrument can often be agonising, especially when every one else seems to be spending their time on activities that provide instant gratification. Similarly attendance at chamber music concerts is not always easy. The social conditions of familiarity that cultivate a knowledge and appreciation of chamber music require a commitment of effort, discipline, persistence and a sense of purpose; but the reward may be a state of mind that is harmonious and ordered. For those who overcome such obstacles the effort is worthwhile and becomes a productive way of using leisure time to produce happiness.

If we want to democratize the arts, that is make it possible for all citizens to choose from an array of possibilities, we must value the contribution families make to arts education and examine the role of arts education in our schools and communities.

1. The arts in Australia: a cultural perspective

1.1 Introduction

When we in Australia attempt to define our cultural lives our descriptions often centre on the behaviours that make us different from other nations. In recent times the baffling task of describing a national culture has been approached through investigations of tastes (Bennett *et al.* 1999), the ways in which we spend our leisure time (Lloyd and Auld 2000), attitudes and life-styles (Roy Morgan 2003), and as various ‘public’ groups (Bennett and Carter 2001). We often look to sport, broadcast media and new information technologies to determine who we think we are and what our culture is. We examine the representations of ourselves in television and film as our culture increasingly becomes visually defined (Dovey 2002). We use satirists, intellectuals, ‘shock jocks’, celebrities, politicians, socio-economic analysts and sometimes scientists to show us who we are. A description of Australian culture as experienced through the arts is less often voiced.

When we try to articulate it, we know that instead of having one Australian culture we live, uneasily perhaps, with an array of different cultures and forms. Our predominant use of an anthropological notion of culture has meant that culture is seen to encompass our whole way of life. As such, the arts and ‘high-culture’ are a sub-set of a sense of culture that is exhaustive and inclusive. This has replaced a more traditional view in which culture with a capital C was considered as somewhat different from the behaviours, attitudes and beliefs of everyday living; in Matthew Arnold’s words, ‘all that was excellent – the best which has been thought and said in the world’.¹

The dominant view of culture as a ‘whole way of life’ (Williams 1960) embraces diverse relations between high and popular culture and characterises the ways in which our culture is most often understood. Consequently, we frequently describe Australian culture in terms of a populist nationalism (Goodhall 1995) or the celebration of an increasingly global commercial culture (McGuigan 1992). We have come to consider Australian culture less in evaluative terms of what constitutes excellence or sophistication, and more generically as ‘the congeries of beliefs, values and attachments that give us our character and allow us to make sense of our lives’ (Ryan 1998, p. 63). In this wider perception of culture, the attitudes and behaviours of *all* groups are embraced as equally valid.

Within these paradigms it has become difficult to speak about the arts without sounding pretentious, elitist or old-fashioned. Much of this has to do with the vocabularies of excellence with which the arts have previously been described, funded and critiqued (Kalantzis and Cope, 1994). ‘Excellence’ is a heavily contested term, influenced by economic factors, with a history of discrimination and bias (Kalantzis and Cope 1994, p. 13-34). Moves to reject ‘excellence’ as a rationale for arts and cultural policy have meant there has been little discussion and comparison of the social lives of arts audiences.

¹ The seminal text referred to here is Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*, first published in 1869.

1.2 New logics for arts

In 1998 a new term, ‘creative industries’, was coined as the result of the Creative Industries Task Force Mapping Document in the United Kingdom (CITF 1998). The birth of creative industries has produced a new way of perceiving the arts which appears to fit neatly within the rhetoric of a knowledge economy and which emphasizes the commercial applications of arts alongside other activities. This new vocabulary does not distinguish between high arts and other cultural forms. The CITF defined creative industries as ‘activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through generation and exploitation of intellectual property such as advertising, architecture, arts and antique markets, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, television and radio, performing arts, publishing and software’ (Cunningham 2002). A contested concept, debates about the suitability of creative industries as a way of developing and selling the arts are lively. Andrew McNamara has written that:

One needs to be careful not to calculate in advance what will be viable as creativity and not to exclude other areas by fiat because the new ideological principles have dictated in advance that they will not be ‘creative’ in the right way’ (McNamara 2002).

Concerned mostly with organisation of enterprise, the exercise of opportunity, the styles and character of collaboration and the readiness to think strategically as an industry group, there is every reason to believe that creative industries strategies will continue to frame the arts. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, the ‘partnerships’ that have emerged largely conceive of audiences as markets and consumers.

An examination of the rhetoric used to describe the arts provides a way of exploring this point. In a national inquiry into Australia’s major performing arts companies *Securing the Future* (1999), writer David Malouf describes the value of arts in the Foreword in the following terms:

Visitors to our country are still drawn mainly by the promise of exotic landscapes and creatures, by sun, surf and the special interest of our indigenous people; they are seldom disappointed. But from what they see in our cities, what they hear at the opera or in concert halls, see on the walls of galleries or at dance and theatre performances, they go away with a very much more complex vision of what we are and what we have achieved - one that is truer in most ways to what Australia is ... a place that belongs not to some bucolic or more innocent world, but the international present (Major Performing Arts Inquiry 1999).

The first word in Malouf’s statement above is significant as it highlights the recent ‘partnership’ between the arts and tourism that has become a major rationale for arts funding. For governments, the relationship between arts and commercial business is clear. As Zukin (1995) notes, ‘There is a straight line from art to real estate to economic and cultural landscapes to the cultural strategies now transforming public space’. This relationship means that arts activities tend to be centralised in select districts with

importance for business and public policy, in other words inner city areas rather than outer suburbs. Arts precincts, such as that of Southbank in Brisbane and Melbourne, are cases in point.

Such partnerships have become defining rationales, representing a new support that comes from outside of the arts sector itself. The arts are thus thrown into the service of other agendas such as city planning, tourism, ICT development and towards the goal of attracting the ‘creative class’ (Cunningham 2002). Implicit in these partnerships is a sense that the arts are valued for the dollars they bring in and for ‘bums on seats’.

Consequently arts events, large and small, are expanding. For instance, the program for the annual Melbourne Festival increases each year. At a local level, ‘small concerts’ flourish. The web site of Melbourne musician Paul Grabovskiy reveals that during any month approximately a dozen small concerts with ticket prices of not more than \$35 are presented in town halls, churches, community arts centres and university auditoria. Similarly at the regional level, the birth of the ‘festival’ as a form of cultural tourism breathes hope into country towns, for example the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival.

As concert programs show, all such events are ‘subsidised’ forms of culture and while admission charges assist with costs, funding from state and local government remains crucial.² Governments are willing to fund the arts in order to use them to rejuvenate ‘downtown’ areas and cities generally (O’Regan and Cox 2002). Local and national policy makers who deal with town planning, city development, city blending, and creative city agendas³ are increasingly using the arts to re-present neighbourhoods, regions, cities and nations. In Australia, along with other post-industrial nations, the arts have increasingly come to be at the service of city, leisure and recreational planning groups. They are the new image tools for framing visions of cities (Zukin 1995), as the idea of a city is increasingly constructed around notions of cultural innovation, restaurants and cafes, avant-garde performances and architectural design.

There are other reasons why governments subsidise the arts. The arts are perceived as serving a number of civic values; they are a resource for the non-material well being of communities; they can produce precincts and spaces of dreams and ideals;⁴ and they can create a sense of a socially harmonious and healthy democratic city. A city as a ‘place of friendship, of respect for others, and of acceptance of one’s own strangeness’ relies on surprise, tolerance and diversity and expects pluralism in its singularity’ (Paquot 1999). In such a city residents ‘inhabit’ and ‘participate’ in the city rather than isolating themselves from each other. The arts can assist this. An antidote to the

² This data was obtained during interviews with concert managers. A list of grant recipients is also available on the web site of Arts Victoria.

³ For instance, the ‘creative industries precinct’ in inner suburban Brisbane is a project involving the Queensland University of Technology, the Queensland State Government through its Department of State Government, a variety of industry players and retail and property developers. For more details of ‘creative industries’ read Cunningham (2002).

⁴ The 2002 Melbourne Festival commenced on 17th October with a free event entitled ‘By Water’ in which an alternative response to asylum seekers was enacted. The program reads as follows: ‘From 11am, several small boats carrying children will make their way up the Yarra River. Constituting an Ark of Children they represent the diverse peoples of the world who have made their home in Victoria. They will be welcomed to land in a traditional way by members of the Kulin nations, the first indigenous inhabitants of the area we call Melbourne’.

crassness of city existence, the arts have the capacity to lift us out of the mire of everyday lives into ‘the sacred places of ritualised pleasures’ (Zukin 1995). Arts Victoria recognises these capacities when it states as its aim:

...[to] connect the arts with social development objectives [to] reduce social inequality and disadvantage and ... consequently build more cohesive communities. This is consistent with international research findings that community based arts programs are powerful catalysts for developing healthy, viable communities (Arts Victoria 2002, p. 9).

The logic of ‘cultural development’, a phrase used by Gibson (2002) which has come to replace the term ‘arts’, emphasizes the role of the arts in facilitating cultural diversity, giving local communities opportunities for cultural expression and easing cross-sectoral partnerships to encourage sustainable cultural activity (Gibson 2002, p. 25-34). As funding structures become increasingly based on projects that facilitate partnerships between community, business, non-arts and government departments, the arts have become more audience-focused than production-focused.

Coupled with these rationales of support for the arts is the imperative of ‘audience-development’ and the need to push audiences ‘up’ the cultural ladder. As audiences are forced up, or encouraged to experience ‘something different’,⁵ arts organisations often scramble to ‘dumb down’ in order to ‘widen’ their audience base. Gibson (2002) has argued that the push to facilitate broader access to traditional art forms is the result of pressure on the Australia Council from the Howard Government attempting to justify its expenditure as relevant to ‘Howard’s battlers’. Australia Council publications such as *Directions 1999-2001* (1999a), *Youth and the Arts Framework* (1999b), and the Major Performing Arts Inquiry (1999) *Securing the Future*, are examples of policy statements that articulate strategies for achieving a wider, more representative audience.

However, while there is much that is good about youth arts, community arts and other audience initiatives, these development strategies do not make connections with high culture. Arts practice in community, youth, and regional areas can potentially be linked with the social settings that facilitate an understanding of high cultural forms and, in this way, access to and participation in high culture need not remain the domain of a small ‘elite’ group but can become a ‘cultural choice’ for more people. To date the ‘high arts’ have remained separated from other forms of arts practice because points of conjuncture between community, youth, regional, multicultural groups and ‘high culture forms’ have not been made.

What audience development initiatives must not do is ‘dumb down’ the arts in order to make them available to more people. Barry Kosky’s critique of this trend published seven years ago still resonates:

‘Vain, fluctuating state of human empire’ sings the King of Babylon’s mother at the opening of Handel’s oratorio *Belshazzar* and how that mournful and elegiac phrase seems to echo across the

⁵ This is a reference to the advertising slogan of the Victorian Arts Centre, ‘always something different’.

cultural landscape of this country. Vain and fluctuating, something is going horribly wrong. Unholy alliances between media, the government and the arts. Self-congratulatory, smug posturings by self-appointed arts gurus. The celebration of the easy. The celebration of the banal. The denigration of the difficult. The denigration of the profound. Box Office. Market Strategies. Audience development. Cultural Export. Cultural Tourism. Cultural Consumption. Australia totters like a drag queen after a dance party – a tottering mass of strained nostalgia and smeared vanity (Kosky 1996).

Laments such as Kosky's are rarely articulated in the public domain. Occasionally they are echoed when musicians like Geoffrey Lancaster talk with Andrew Ford on ABC radio programs such as *The Music Show*. More often, however, the buzz of creative industries and the hype of strategic innovation are used to construct the arts as the newest form of commodity.

Thus the new logics of creative industries, that is creative city and audience development, have seen arts companies, forced to face a serious situation, begin to transform art into 'product'. Two changes have occurred. First, as distinctions between 'high and low-brow culture' have eroded, at least in terms of debate and discussion of the arts, chamber musicians, for instance, struggle to become 'entertainers' while retaining their artistic integrity. For many musicians the difference between being an 'entertainer' and an 'artist' is vast. Yet as government ministers and bureaucrats sell the new narrative that the arts are for 'all Australians' (Arts Victoria 2003), artists and their managers are blending and amending their art forms in order to widen their audience base to include those who may not have the understanding and competency relied upon from traditional audiences. Genre crossover has been the result.

This is not in itself a bad thing. With genre crossover, generic categories such as chamber music no longer have a single sensibility. Chamber music consists not just of traditional string quartets or piano trios such as those which perform at the biannual Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition. It also includes ensembles such as The Kronos Quartet, the Turtle Island Quartet and the Soweto String Quartet which use the traditional chamber music ensemble form to produce music from a range of styles. Guitar ensembles, such as those of Guitar Trek or Sapphire, which perform at a range of concert venues including folk festivals and flagship chamber music concerts are other examples. Chamber music also consists of concerts given by organisations such as Libra and Astra, dedicated to the new works of living composers and frequently recorded by the ABC for programs such as *Sound Quality*.⁶

At the same time as forms of presentation of the arts are converging,⁷ niche arts products for niche audiences have produced a market-inspired fragmentation of the performing arts. This also is not necessarily a bad thing. As genres cross over and chic

⁶ This program is broadcast on Friday nights on ABC Radio National hosted by Tim Richie.

⁷ See, for instance, plans for the *Strange Fruit Theatre Company* to perform at half time during games of the Collingwood Football Club. The Bangarra Dance Theatre already does this for home games of the Sydney Swans as does Perth's Deck Chair Theatre at games by the Dockers. The Sunday Show (ABC radio, 27/7/03).

nightclubs become the new performance venues for chamber music (Bagnall 2003; Sharpen 2003), there is a sense that the arts will become just as readily accessible as other forms of culture. But there is a problem inherent in this attitude. A shopping mall approach to audience development is one-dimensional. It assumes that cappuccino-based ‘enterprises’ and high culture-based ‘enterprises’ can share each other’s ‘market’ as long as they are strategically located together.

As smart multi-arts venues like Federation Square take on the appearance of stylish shopping malls, it seems the arts have finally become sufficiently demystified for all Australians and that we do indeed live in a truly egalitarian society. But have they?

1.3 Aesthetic pluralism in Australia

It is popular today to conceive of Australians as cultural consumers with increased choices and differentiated consumption behaviours. In this view, particular social groups are not locked into narrow prescriptive tastes determined by fixed demographic characteristics such as social class, educational background, ethnicity, gender and so on. Rather, they are seen as flexible consumers who use various forms and hybrid versions of popular and high culture.

Models such as those of veteran American sociologist Herbert Gans, who coined the terms ‘taste cultures’ and ‘taste publics’ in a theory of aesthetic pluralism consisting of a hierarchy of five main taste cultures, have been used to show how the cultural practices of groups of people cut across and between forms of high and popular culture (Gans 1999). Aesthetic pluralism acknowledges that all people have ‘aesthetic urges, a receptivity to symbolic expressions of their wishes and fears; a demand for both knowledge and self-fulfilment about their society; and a desire to spend free time, if such exists, in ways that diverge from their work routine’ (Gans 1999).

In Gans’ model of aesthetic pluralism people do not limit their choices to one cultural form or category; those who choose high culture also consume lower or popular cultures and are thus ‘omnivorous’ in their cultural consumption (Peterson and Simkus 1992). For instance, a recent study of Australian tastes (Bennett *et al.* 1999) found that it may carry just as much kudos at a dinner party to show that you know the title of Eminem’s latest song as to know the name of Phillip Glass’ latest composition (Bennett *et al.* 1999).⁸

Aesthetic pluralism emphasizes that contemporary culture is characterised by both a convergence and divergence of cultural forms. Convergence refers to the ways in which traditional art forms blend with other cultural forms to blur distinctions; divergence refers to the ways in which art forms fragment into smaller niche formats for specialised segmented audiences.

Cultural convergence does not happen automatically. It is contingent upon how much the cultural content involved requires previously noted built-in education requirements. The smaller the need for previously acquired knowledge, the more convergence can

⁸ Actually when Bennett *et al.* made this point they referred to the line-up of the Spice Girls. But things change quickly in popular culture so I have used another example. The status of Philip Glass, however, holds firm.

occur. In this way convergence is selective and does not take place when comprehension, even at the lay level, requires artistic schooling or some knowledge other than the most popular symbols and metaphors.

However, to many people with limited education in, and exposure to, the arts some cultural forms such as chamber music and the work of professional poets and some novelists remain off limits, as does scholarly writing. There is, therefore, only a limited capacity for convergence amongst such art forms. Convergence is said to occur when people from lower middle 'taste publics' attend museum blockbuster exhibitions at the national galleries or concerts such as *Rock Symphony*.⁹ Examples in the reverse include television sitcoms high in irony, such as *The Simpsons* and *Seinfeld*, which were previously associated with low culture but are now considered intellectual social satires by high culture audiences. Similarly it was once a sign of wealth to possess a television and still is in many parts of the world. Now, however, it is a sign of affluence in some countries to inhabit domestic space that is free of the constant noise of a television (Slouka 2000).

Cultural divergence is also a part of aesthetic pluralism. Divergence occurs as new tastes emerge, and blends of items such as age, education, gender, income and race influence taste. Youth culture, for instance, has become further subdivided by age, with music, movies and other entertainment for the young often packaged into pre-teen, teen, university-age and young adult categories (Gans 1999). Divergence is evidenced with Aboriginal media (Meadows 2002), and with the arrival of gendered television channels in the US. It is also apparent in chamber music; in Melbourne and districts there are at least six forms of chamber music with distinguishable characteristics and styles of production and reception.

While omnivorous cultural consumption, cultural convergence and divergence are terms used in mainstream discussions of the arts and culture, in practice these patterns of behaviour are expressed in one direction only, that is from high culture downwards. In their study *Accounting For Tastes*, Bennett *et al.* (1999) found that it is only particular social groups that are consuming omnivorously from a range of cultural forms. Inner-city tertiary educated 'professionals' consume a great deal of all types of cultural forms, while secondary school educated workers in outer suburban areas remain a great deal more selective.

Aesthetic pluralism in cultural consumption tends, therefore, to be concentrated among a small part of the population only. People who attend chamber music concerts may also go to hear bands in pubs (O'Regan and Cox 2002) but it is unlikely that those who listen to bands in pubs will go to chamber music concerts.¹⁰ Similarly those who go to Melbourne's Federation Square on a Sunday afternoon for a dose of 'high culture' may buy a cup of coffee (or a glass of wine) and wander briefly through shops full of Australian produced commercial art; they may even venture into a blockbuster

⁹ This concert was a collaboration between the Melbourne Symphony and the rock band Kiss performed in the Telstra Dome in February 2003.

¹⁰ In their clustered analysis of cultural events O'Regan and Cox (2002, p. 149) report that in the case of cultural festivals, 40 per cent of those who attend classical music-related events also attend popular music events whereas only about 15 per cent of those who attend popular music events attend classical music events.

exhibition but they are unlikely to buy a ticket to an Australia Pro Arte concert in the BMW Edge Auditorium to hear a premier performance of Whittaker's *Kia for Solo Flute*.¹¹ Those who do attend such concerts come to 'Fed Square' knowing full well what they are coming for and would probably attend even if the concert were held in the previous (much less fashionable but infinitely better acoustically) venue of the Melba Hall at the University of Melbourne.

For those who do wander accidentally, via a ticket seller, into a chamber music concert in the new glass-roofed auditorium with gum-tree-framed views of the Victorian Arts Centre spire, one of two things can happen. If the accidental attendee has had a particular kind of upbringing, the concert may trigger memories of parents who valued music sufficiently to pay for private music tuition and encourage daily music practice over several years, or classroom music at school, or school concerts of various kinds, or the odd encounter with an AMEB music examiner, or choir concerts. In this case the attendee may settle down into a comfortable state of engagement. If, however, accidental attendees have had none of these experiences, they are likely to think they have wasted \$35 on something unbelievably dull and must remain in a room full of anglo-celtic grey-haired 'snobs' until the onset of clapping allows for escape back into the real world.

1.4 Understanding high culture

Although an emphasis on aesthetic pluralism characterises our age, we also need to acknowledge that high cultural events are distinct from other cultural forms. For instance, attending a concert is a completely different experience from watching a television program. High cultural events can seem strange things if a sense of familiarity has not been developed beforehand. In their push to increase and widen audiences for the arts, policy-makers appear not to appreciate that, in order to provide and develop the necessary capacity for participation, audiences of high culture require life-long access to particular conditions of familiarity with the relevant art forms. Press releases, such as those announcing *Creative Capacity+*, the new Arts policy for Victoria, show an ill-informed understanding of the processes of audience participation. They undermine the integrity of the arts in Australia and end up patronising those who do not have the cultural and educational background or predisposition to participate in the arts in a profound way. The following press release could just as easily be used to address sports fans when announcing new sporting facilities:

The 2003-04 State Budget has delivered an extra \$127.6 million for arts and cultural projects and \$10.4 million in capital funding, Arts Minister Mary Delahunty said today. "The Bracks Government is committed to making the State's key cultural institutions more accessible, exciting and relevant for all Victorians," Ms Delahunty said ... "The \$25.4 million package demonstrates the Government's commitment to making arts and cultural activities available to all

¹¹ The concert to which I refer was a chamber music concert, part of a regular series of Sunday afternoon concerts featuring the Australian Chamber Soloists, a group of musicians mostly from the Melbourne Symphony who present traditional chamber music works as well as new Australian works. The concert was held in the BMW Edge Auditorium at Federation Square on Sunday afternoon, 12th July 2003.

Victorians," she said... Ms Delahunty said that the refurbished NGV International on St Kilda Road would open later this year, doubling the size of its exhibition spaces...

"When the redeveloped St Kilda Rd gallery opens, the NGV's footprint in Melbourne's arts precinct will be greater than the arena of the MCG [Melbourne Cricket Ground]. The NGV [National Gallery of Victoria] will provide access to one of the world's finest collections of international and Australian art," she said.

"The arts play a key role in the transition to a knowledge based economy and a culture of innovation. Victoria's major institutions are at the forefront of this transition. They are repositories for our cultural history, they set the highest standards of research and exhibition, and they offer lifelong learning for all Victorians," she said (Arts Victoria 2003).

In an ironic contrast to the sports-ground concept of high culture as a packageable and exportable product for the knowledge economy as outlined above, the fund managers at the Australia Council, whose task it is to distribute 'arms length' funding for the arts, have a more arts-based understanding. For instance, the Music Board of the Australia Council which assesses and allocates applications for funding in categories comprising New Work, Presentation and Promotion, Skills and Arts Development and Key Organisations, along with the prestigious Don Banks Award, has not (yet) abandoned excellence as a criterion for funding the arts. Mostly practitioners themselves, the members of the Board continue to make funding decisions that support organisations and individuals who produce 'art music' or are devoted to providing the conditions of familiarity necessary for participation competency at high cultural venues. Although the Board struggles 'to continue to fund many organisations at previous levels of support within its limited budget' (Waks 2002), its task is to reflect on which organisations it considers 'best contribute to our national musical fabric and should be supported as a key organisation' (Waks 2002). The funding decisions for triennial grants made in 2002 ensure that high culture organisations continue to operate for just a little longer.¹²

The sense of music and high culture that is evident in the decision making of the Music Board of the Australia Council reflects the views of creative practitioners and critics. The audiences for high culture usually accept the standards and perspectives of its creators (Gans 1999) who make up a significant proportion of its public. According to Gans there are two types of users of high culture: the 'creator-oriented users' who look at culture from a creator perspective; and the 'user-oriented' who participate in high-culture but are less interested in the methods and problems associated with its creation. They are almost all highly educated people from upper and upper-middle class backgrounds, employed mainly in academic and professional occupations (Gans 1999, p. 101). The content of high culture addresses itself to abstract, social, political and

¹² Such key organisations include the Australia Ensemble (University of NSW); the Australian Art Orchestra; the Australian Music Centre; australYSIS; Kulcha - Multicultural ARTS WA; Melbourne Chorale; The Song Company; Sydney Philharmonia Choirs; Sydney Youth Orchestra; Synergy Percussion; Wangaratta Festival of Jazz; WA Youth Jazz Orchestra (Assessment Meeting Report October 2002 Australia Council).

philosophical questions and fundamental societal assumptions more often, more intentionally and more systematically than do other taste cultures.

The audience for high culture has always been small. Indeed a major difference between high and popular cultural forms is the size and heterogeneity of the total audience. High culture appeals to a small number of people whereas a popular television program may attract an audience of millions. Because the popular audience is larger it is also more heterogeneous than the high culture public which, though priding itself on the individuality of its tastes, is actually more homogeneous (Gans 1999). A chamber music devotee illustrates this point in her description of concert audiences.

I've been going to concerts for fifty-three years, since I was fourteen and the audience hasn't changed one scrap ... I was in Adelaide then, came from England where I went to the Birmingham Conservatoire. I can see myself now in the Adelaide Town Hall with dad and he was saying hello to business associates, so we are talking about people in their 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s. They were all white-haired people, except for the student bunch and the ... arty bunch, the arts people, the cultured people. And this is the same since the world began. In England, as a little girl when I went to concerts at say 12, the same thing. You never get the rank and file to symphony concerts and particularly chamber music concerts. But you will get the educated because they're the people who read the poetry, read the books, look at the paintings, listen to the music.

(Pat, female, interview, concert lover, aged 60-69).

The arts in Australia are currently described and delivered in ways that fit within the new logics of a knowledge economy. For the most part audience development initiatives do not facilitate connections between community, youth, regional and multicultural sectors in ways that will increase access to high culture. Does democratising the arts simply mean that community singing workshops will be available should a group of citizens want them, or does it mean that the social vehicles which provide citizens with the capacity to 'choose' between a community singing workshop and a chamber music concert (or both) are facilitated in partnerships supported by policy-makers?

2. Chamber music audiences: a social and cultural profile

2.1 What is chamber music?

An alternative to the advertising and marketing approach to the arts, so heavily relied upon by policy makers, is a sociological study of the experience of high culture by its audiences. This section presents a case study of chamber music audiences in Melbourne and asserts that barriers to the arts are not imposed by lack of money or walls of snobbery but by lack of access to the conditions of familiarity during childhood and adolescence. When particular social conditions that support an interest and competency in the arts are part of the ordinary daily life in families, schools and extra curricular activities, people are more likely to find themselves valuing and participating in arts events. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu wrote that when making cultural choices there is a relationship between ‘the things which please’ and the things ‘whose concept is understood’. He notes:

The [researcher] establishes ... that the things which please are the things whose concept is understood or, more precisely, that it is only things whose concept is understood which can give pleasure (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991).

Before describing the social profile of chamber music audiences in Melbourne it is necessary to establish the term itself. Chamber music is the most esoteric, intellectual and ‘least hip’ of all music. A form often defined by its differences from other music, it is understood as ‘art-music’ and referred to by a range of names, such as ‘classical music’, ‘serious music’, ‘European art-music’, even ‘high art-music’. Inevitably such multiple and mixed usage creates confusion.

Chamber music is constructed as an abstract entertainment for the pleasure of the ears alone. It usually has ‘no purpose other than itself’ (Schafer 1992). This, of course, is a contradiction of the policy logics that measure value only with market-place rationales. Listeners are ‘not encouraged to associate [the] music with functions or purposes beyond the aesthetic enjoyment it provides’ (Schafer 1992). Sometimes chamber music is understood in terms of its structural features; it is ‘music written for [a] small instrumental ensemble, with one player to a part, and intended for performance either in private domestic settings with or without listeners, or in public in a small concert hall before an audience of limited size’ (Bashford 2001).

In many ways chamber music is at odds with the contemporary age. For instance, it is a relatively unknown form of music compared with others. The very name ‘chamber music’ exudes an aura of exclusivity in a world that no longer uses ‘chambers’. It could perhaps be better known as ‘small ensemble music’, although even this term is problematic because a rock band could also be considered as a small ensemble. Chamber music is the least visually spectacular form of music in a predominantly visual age. It is also the antithesis of the star system in that it does not require a conductor and all performers are equal, submerging their individuality into the identity of the ensemble. It is unlikely that even the most devout concert attendee would know the

names of the individual players in the Emerson String Quartet, an ensemble regarded by many as the finest string quartet in the world.

Chamber music has developed historically as a ‘cultivated tradition’. American musicologist Wiley Hitchcock (1988) argues that European art-music developed along two quite distinct lines, the cultivated and the vernacular traditions. The cultivated tradition refers to the ‘body of music that had to be consciously cultivated by the nation state, music faintly exotic, to be approached with some effort, to be appreciated for its edification – its moral, spiritual and aesthetic values’ (Hitchcock 1988). The vernacular tradition refers to the body of music ‘more plebeian, native, not approached self-consciously but simply grown into, as one grows into one’s vernacular tongue, music understood and appreciated for its utilitarian or entertainment value’ (Hitchcock 1988).

In Australia, chamber music has been cultivated, just as it has been in other western colonised countries. It has made a transition from a grafted Viennese tradition of intimate music making to become a type of music now marketed to audiences and presented in major concert halls. The transformation of chamber music from lounge room to concert hall occurred mostly after World War II. As Gordon Kerry (1998, p. 44) points out, chamber music gained currency as an art form comparable to that of orchestral music through two key events; first when the Queensland government funded a string quartet, and second when in Sydney a refugee from Nazism, Richard Goldner, founded the Musica Viva Ensemble. Over the last 50 years chamber music and Musica Viva have come to be synonymous in the Australian music landscape. It is a little known fact that Musica Viva hosts 2,500 concerts across Australia and around the world making it the world's largest entrepreneur of fine ensemble music (Musica Viva 2002).

2.2 A study of chamber music

In the study of Melbourne chamber music audiences, the primary research objective was to produce a profile of the audience itself and to chart patterns of use and attitudes towards chamber music. The project aimed to document not just the composition of the audience from a cross section of chamber music concerts but also the wider social settings of usage.

As indicated earlier, chamber music has fragmented into niche products for niche markets and thus it was necessary to categorise six groups.

<i>Flagship concerts</i>	Mainly concerts by Musica Viva, one of only two major chamber music companies (the other being the Australian Chamber Orchestra), which receive funding through the Australia Council.
<i>New music concerts</i>	Concerts hosted by music organisations largely committed to presenting the works of living or twentieth century composers.
<i>Community-based concerts</i>	Concerts relying on financial and audience support from particular local councils and committed to presentations in local venues.

<i>University-based concerts</i>	Concerts hosted by music faculties of tertiary music institutions.
<i>Regional concerts</i>	Concerts hosted by music organisations located outside of major metropolitan cities.
<i>Festival concerts</i>	Concerts forming part of the program of an annual music festival outside of metropolitan cities.

The research included focus groups, a concert audience survey comprising 549 responses and 20 in-depth interviews with concert attendees. A cross section of chamber music concerts was selected for survey. Surveys were placed on seats at a concert in each of the six categories and the audience was invited to complete the survey and leave it on seats at the conclusion of the concert. While there is no data available on the total population of chamber music consumers, the most useful comparisons are those by the ABS as follows:

Table 1 Attendance (a) at the performing arts, 1999

	Popular music concert	Classical music concert	Dance performance	Opera or musical	Theatre	Other performing arts
Attendance rate (b)	%	%	%	%	%	%
Sex						
Males	25.1	7.1	6.8	11.9	13.5	15.9
Females	25.6	10.4	11.2	20.5	19.4	19.5
Persons	25.4	8.8	9.0	16.3	16.5	17.8
Age group (years)						
15-17	37.3	5.0	12.7	15.8	25.1	16.4
18-24	42.4	6.4	7.5	14.4	14.7	18.1
25-34	32.8	7.3	9.4	17.0	17.5	22.1
35-44	25.9	8.7	10.7	15.5	16.8	23.4
45-54	22.7	11.6	10.7	20.1	19.6	16.1
55-64	16.2	11.5	8.1	17.9	16.2	13.5
65 +	7.2	8.9	5.1	12.9	10.3	10.4
Birthplace						
Australia	28.2	8.2	8.8	17.1	17.4	18.4
Main English speaking countries	24.1	12.3	10.1	19.0	19.5	18.7
Other countries	13.5	9.1	9.1	11.0	10.9	14.3

(a) Attendance at least once in the 12 months prior to interview in April 1999.

(b) The number of people who attended, expressed as a percentage of the number of people in that population group.

Source: ABS, 2003

The closest we have come to documenting the national population of chamber music audiences are the data collected by Musica Viva of its own audience. As the following table shows, attendance figures only are available:

Table 2 Musica Viva audiences (a)

Location	1997	1998	1999	2000
New South Wales	276,889	291,292	274,495	263,162
Victoria	41,929	42,853	34,183	48,096
Queensland	11,118	15,303	22,144	27,608
South Australia	24,209	23,089	16,073	19,624
Western Australia	30,665	43,015	44,474	43,999
Tasmania	8,060	9,599	8,024	11,408
Northern Territory	5,562	4,703	7,171	8,336
Australian Capital Territory	13,919	12,911	12,947	9,102
Australia	412,351	442,765	419,511	431,335
Overseas	20,600	50,000	34,350	37,500
Total	432,951	492,765	453,861	468,835

(a) Includes audiences at regional touring concerts, education concerts, subscription concerts and special events.

Source: Musica Viva Australia (ABS 2003)

For the Melbourne chamber music audience study, attempts were made to collect data from a sample as representative as possible of the total population of chamber music audiences. The sample was as follows:

Table 3 Survey respondents

Variable	No.	%	Variable	No.	%	Variable	No.	%
Concert Category			Gender			Household Income		
New Music	71	13	Female	349	64	\$15-19,000	64	14
Flagship Company	159	29	Male	196	36	\$20-35,000	91	20
Community-based music	65	12				\$36-49,000	86	18
University-based music	105	19				\$50-69,000	96	21
Regional Music	87	16				\$70,000+	128	27
Festival Music	62	11						
Total	549	100	Total	545	100	Total	465	100
Variable	No.	%	Variable	No.	%	Variable	No.	%
Age			Education			Birth Country		
15-19 years	38	7	Primary	6	1	Australia	407	75
20-29 years	56	10	Secondary	80	16	U K	69	13
30-39 years	31	6	Tertiary	237	47	Europe	39	7
40-49 years	58	11	Postgraduate	180	36	Asia	16	3
50-59 years	114	21				North America	7	1
60-69 years	125	23				Africa	3	1
70-79 years	89	16				South America	1	0
80+ years	33	6				Middle East	1	0
Total	544	100	Total	503	100	Total	543	100

2.3 Demographic features

Education

A high level of education is the most consistent characteristic of chamber music audiences. If level of education is any measure, chamber music audiences are communities of intellectuals for there is a disproportionately high representation of tertiary and post-graduate survey respondents compared with the total population. Across the whole sample, 83 per cent of respondents reported having either tertiary or post-graduate qualifications (47 per cent and 36 per cent respectively), a figure contrasting dramatically with the general population of Victoria where, in 2001, 14 per

cent of the population held tertiary and post-graduate qualifications (11 per cent a bachelor degree and three per cent a postgraduate degree, graduate diploma or graduate certificate) (ABS 2001).

Table 4 Education

	Frequency	%
Primary	6	1
Secondary	80	16
Tertiary	237	47
Postgraduate	180	36
TOTAL	503	100

Music education

Chamber music audiences are characterised not only by high levels of education but also by specific forms of music education. Private instrumental tuition was the single most important source of music education for more than 23 per cent of respondents, while school-based music tuition was the main source for 18 per cent. However, many respondents indicated multiple forms of music education. More than 34 per cent of respondents nominated more than one form of music education, the largest cohort having experienced a combination of private and school-based tuition. It should be noted, however, that formal music education is not an absolute requirement for access, as more than 15 per cent of respondents had had no formal music education.

Musical literacy

It comes then as no surprise to find high levels of self-reported musical literacy among chamber music audiences. When respondents were asked ‘Can you read music?’ 66 per cent, 72 per cent of females and 56 per cent of males, claimed that they could. This measure is, in effect, an indication of audience self-perception as to their own capacity to read music and in many cases respondents indicated that their skills were very basic with comments such as ‘only just’ scribbled alongside their responses. However, although there is a good chance that presented with a piece of manuscript many could not read much, the point is that this is a very high statistic. Figures on musical literacy in Australia have been hard to come by, but Christopher Small (1998) estimates that in England the percentage of the population who can read music is about three per cent. Needless to say, the difference is dramatic. Table 5 illustrates the gender differences with respect to musical literacy in the chamber music audience where more females than males are able to read music.

Table 5 Musical literacy and gender

Gender		Frequency	%
Females	Yes	245	72
	No	97	28
	Total	342	100
Males	Yes	104	56
	No	82	44
	Total	186	100

Age

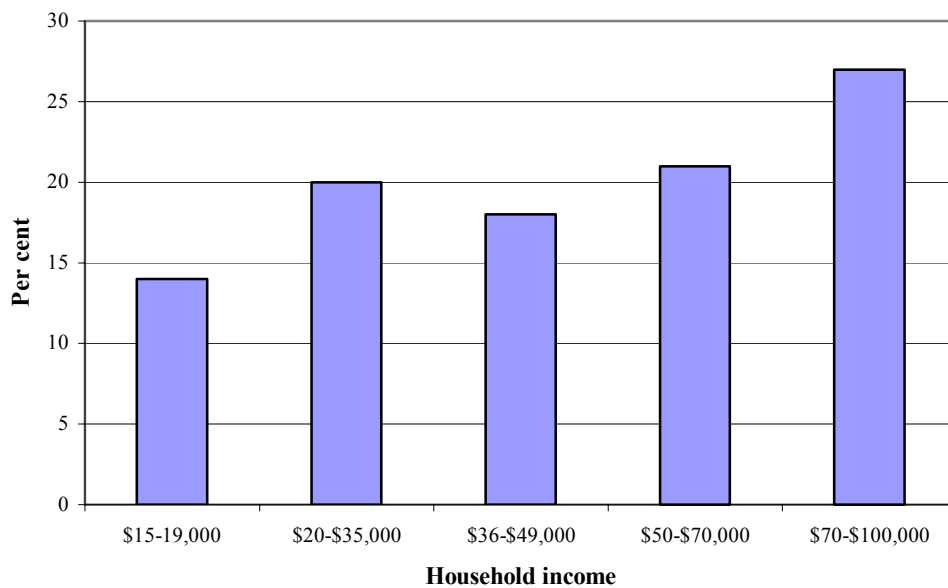
Most people who attend chamber music concerts in Melbourne are in their older years. Respondents 50 years or over constituted the largest age cohort in five of the six categories of chamber music. At new music concerts and festival concerts the age cohort with the highest rate of representation consisted of people aged 50-59 (24 per cent and 42 per cent respectively). In the case of the flagship concerts 60-69 was the most represented age group and at regional and community based concerts 70-79 year olds made up the largest age group (31 per cent and 28 per cent respectively).

For flagship, community-based, regional and festival concerts, attendance begins to increase in the 40-49 years cohort. In contrast, at new music concerts, the 40-49 years cohort was marginally less than that of the 30-39 year old group but when the two cohorts are combined, new music audiences have much larger representations than other categories. For instance, at new music concerts the combined 30-39 and 40-49 cohorts constituted 28 per cent compared with 16 per cent for flagship concerts, 16 per cent for community-based concerts, two per cent for regional concerts, 12 per cent for university audiences and 11 per cent for festival audiences. It is to be expected that at university-based concerts the age cohort is much younger which allows us to conclude that universities are central to concert attendance for future audiences.

While attempts were made to survey a sample that was as representative as possible of the total population of chamber music audiences, we cannot be absolutely certain that the age characteristics closely resemble the total population. However, with this caveat in mind, three interpretations are possible: first the audience for chamber music will get smaller, as it is literally dying out; second, there is a threshold in recruitment to the audience at around 45 years of age; or third, particular social conditions of familiarity are necessary for chamber music to have meaning and value. It is this third interpretation that is explored in greater detail below.

Income

Despite high levels of education, attendance at chamber music concerts is not necessarily associated with high levels of income. Indeed, as shown in Figure 1, income is quite widely distributed across the respondents surveyed.

Figure 1 Household income of chamber music audience

The largest cohort consisted of those with an annual household income of between \$70,000-100,000 (27 per cent) while the lowest cohort comprised respondents with an annual household income of \$15,000-19,000 (14 per cent). The distributions in between included respondents with annual incomes of \$50,000-69,000 (21 per cent), those with annual incomes of \$20,000-35,000 (20 per cent) and those with annual incomes of \$36,000-49,000 (18 per cent). Despite a more even distribution, the largest cohort for three of the concert categories, new music, flagship and festival concerts, consisted of respondents from households with incomes of \$70,000-100,000.

The category attended by people with the highest levels of income was festival concerts. This is to be expected at a concert venue where over 85 per cent of the audience travels from outside the local area and would also have to pay for accommodation in addition to concert admission.¹³ Conversely, the category demonstrating the lowest incomes was that of university-based concerts where 24 percent had an annual household income of \$15-19,000. While the distribution of income is wide, it should nevertheless be noted that more than 66 per cent of respondents came from households in which income was higher than the average annual earnings of Victorians which, in 1998, was \$31,174 (ABS 2001, p. 59).

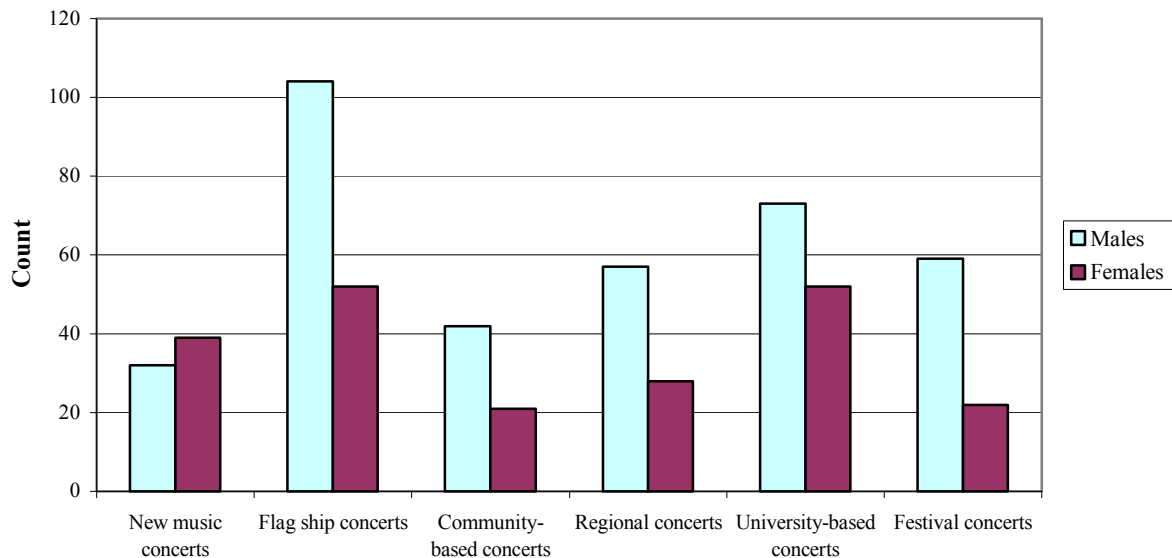
The cost of chamber music concerts is not prohibitive compared with other kinds of concerts such as opera or rock music. Admission prices for concerts surveyed were approximately \$25-35 with concessions offered at every one. The university-based lunchtime concert was free.

¹³ This information was obtained in a telephone interview with a manager of the festival in November 2002.

Gender

A consistent finding amongst audience studies has been the importance of gender (Grey 1999). Like other forms of audience, chamber music concert participation is a heavily gendered activity with 64 per cent of respondents female and 36 per cent male. This may be a consequence of the numbers of females who learn a musical instrument compared with the numbers of males. In 2000, 29 per cent of Australians aged up to 14 years were involved in playing a musical instrument, and/or receiving singing and dancing tuition (ABS 2003), with girls twice as likely as boys to participate in these activities. However, as Figure 2 shows, this trend is not seen with respect to one category of chamber music. At new music concerts there were more males than females in attendance: 55 per cent male compared with 45 per cent female. In the case of individual concert organisations, one new music organisation, the Libra Ensemble, reported a gender distribution that was even wider with 71 per cent of respondents male compared with 29 per cent female. This is a finding that warrants further investigation.

Figure 2 Gender and concert categories



2.4 Attitudes and values

That audiences attribute high personal value to concerts is to be expected in a survey of chamber music attendees. Respondents who considered concert music to be of important or very important personal value made up 51 per cent of the sample (23 per cent and 28 per cent) compared with 15 per cent who ranked concerts as either unimportant or very unimportant (11 per cent and four per cent). This distribution is generally reflected in each of the concert categories.

The highest level of personal importance was reported at community-based concerts, where incidentally the most frequent age cohort comprised respondents in their 70s. Importance was also highly ranked among the 60s age cohort compared with other age groups. Personal reasons for considering concerts important included the appreciation of

a new and live experience; the perceived psychological enrichment of concerts; the physical proximity to authentic creative production; love, enjoyment, relaxation; a personal link with performers when they are known to audience members; professional interest; and interest in other art-forms leading to a desire for new experiences.

2.5 Sources of introduction

The ways in which people are introduced to concerts can also be important as a means of understanding access to chamber music. Family is the main vehicle through which concerts are introduced with 38 per cent reporting that parents had been the major source of introduction to concert life, and 12 per cent indicating other family members such as siblings, uncles, aunts, or a spouse. A further 16 per cent were introduced by a teacher, while 22 per cent were introduced by a friend and 11 per cent were self-introduced. A pivotal point for relationships between arts and other forms of music such as community music, youth music, regional music and multicultural music, this finding offers policy-makers a key to the kinds of partnerships and connections that will foster access to, and participation in, forms of high culture considered unappealing by many Australians.

2.6 Self-descriptions

The manner in which an audience perceives itself can shed light on many issues relating to participation in the arts. When respondents were asked to describe themselves among five types of attendees, the largest cohort, 42 per cent, considered themselves to be ‘concert lovers’, 27 per cent described themselves as ‘interested in concerts’, 19 per cent as ‘satisfied’ at concerts, ten per cent as ‘occasionally interested’ in concerts and one per cent as ‘disinclined’ to attend. At new music concerts the largest cohort consisted of those who described themselves as ‘interested in concerts’, 47 per cent, compared with 26 per cent who described themselves as concert lovers.

When respondents were also asked to describe the kinds of people who attend chamber music concerts, their descriptions included the following: an audience that appreciates classical music and the arts in general; a group of ‘cultural, leftist elites’; the ‘chattering classes’; serious music appreciators; people who are not just following the mainstream artistic events and who are not making a statement by ‘being there’; well educated and intellectual; music lovers; people with genuine interest; music lovers and musicians; people with an appreciation of musicians’ technique who enjoy individual performances; national trustees; older people; people who study music; musicians and other ‘weirdos’; people interested in music performance, aesthetics, life; friends of performers and students; new music lovers, baroque, chamber aficionados etc; people whose emotions resonate with live chamber music and are in touch with their emotion; appreciate live performance as an enriching experience; mostly those with some musical background; musicians; older, better educated types.

2.7 Valuing chamber music and associated tastes

A second method of assessing how audiences value chamber music was with the open question, ‘What does chamber music mean to you?’ A wide range of responses indicated that chamber music is valued for its musical components; for engagement

with the structural elements of the music; for the characteristics and features that differentiate it from other forms of music; for its ‘intimacy’; for the level of elite professionalism; and for its mystique as a form of music difficult to verbalise.

Listening to music on the radio is an important associated activity for many who attend chamber music concerts. The audience questionnaire sought to identify a range of associated music and concert behaviours as a means of additional insight into the social contexts of chamber music audiences. Those who attend chamber music concerts are often avid listeners to both ABC FM radio (the national broadcaster for classical music), or a combination of ABC FM and ABC Radio National with 66 per cent of the audience listening principally to these two radio networks. However, when the six categories of concerts are viewed separately there is more variety.

2.8 Taste in CDs

Patterns of taste in CD consumption are more diverse than are radio preferences, with two thirds of the entire sample reporting wide-ranging and omnivorous tastes. Although 68 per cent of respondents purchase CDs from a range of musical styles, for 31 per cent taste in CD purchase is more specific with preference for European-derived art music (classical music). While there are no gender differences with respect to taste in CDs, there are differences relating to audience types, most clearly expressed with comparisons across concert categories. See Table 6.

Table 6 CD preferences according to audience type

Category of Concert	Music styles	
	Mixed (%)	Art-music (%)
New music	77	23
University-based	78	22
Regional	57	43
Community music	59	41
Festival	64	36
Flagship	68	32


As age increases, the distribution between those who prefer a mix of styles and those who listen mainly to European classical music decreases. No respondents aged between 15-19 years, including tertiary music students at university-based concerts, reported listening only to classical music CDs while 58 per cent of those aged 80 or more prefer to purchase classical music only.

2.9 Attendance at other concerts

The survey also sought to ascertain the likelihood of audience attendance at symphony, choral, opera, musicals, jazz, popular music and ballet. The findings show that chamber

music audiences attend many other types of concerts, the closest relationships being with symphony and choral concerts. Across the entire sample 79 per cent also attended symphony concerts, 67 per cent attended choral concerts, 55 per cent attended opera, 53 per cent attended musicals, 52 per cent attended jazz concerts and 51 per cent attended ballet concerts.

The socio-cultural profile of the audiences presented here implies that audiences of high culture such as chamber music consist of a particular group with identifiable characteristics. They are highly educated compared with the rest of the population yet household income is more widely distributed. Chamber music audiences are thoughtful and are aware of and committed to their concert attendance with chamber music being, for the most part, a highly valued aspect of their lives. Where there are young people at chamber music concerts they are to be found at university-based performances and concerts of new music. Except for new music concerts, chamber music is experienced by more females than males. While there is a mix of types of people who attend chamber music concerts, for the most part they appear to be an unusually homogeneous group bound by a genuine interest in, and appreciation of, a particular type of music that is rarely heard by the population at large.



3. Cultural capital and chamber music

3.1 Cultural capital

The profile of chamber music audiences just presented suggests that it is a narrow social group. From this it appears that high culture, such as chamber music, remains unattractive and therefore off limits to most Australians despite the communication strategies of music organisations and their attempts to let people know what is going on inside concert halls.

In a recent national study of Australian attitudes to the arts, Costantura (2000, p. 43) demonstrates the perception of unattractiveness of the arts in his typology of five attitude segments. Two segments termed ‘the disinclined’ and the ‘disengaged’ are social groups that find the arts to be irrelevant or elitist and Costantura (2000, p. 38) estimates these two groups (the most disenfranchised from the arts) to be 38 per cent of those surveyed. It is doubtful that two further groups in Costantura’s typology attend high cultural events such as chamber music concerts. These groups, termed ‘interested’ and ‘satisfied’ in the arts, constitute a further 46 per cent of those surveyed and, while they have positive attitudes where the arts are concerned and enjoy a range of arts events, they are unlikely to have the devotion and background necessary for engagement with chamber music. In Costantura’s study only those termed ‘arts lovers’, 16 per cent of those surveyed, revealed the characteristics of the chamber music audience just presented.

Throughout this paper, the question underpinning our discussion has asked why it is that only a small and select part of the Australian population attends events such as chamber music concerts? We have not been content to dismiss the practice of chamber music consumption as an exclusionary practice for a small cultural elite and we reject the idea that democratising the arts involves imposing the taste cultures of an elite group upon every one else. The answer presented here is not simple. In light of the Melbourne study of chamber music audiences, it seems that a familiarity and appreciation of chamber music is acquired with the possession of ‘cultural capital’.

A term coined by Bourdieu (2001), ‘cultural capital’ is a complex concept that offers a compelling explanation for why high culture, such as chamber music, is valued by only a small sector of the population. Essentially, cultural capital refers to:

A form of value associated with culturally authorised tastes, consumption patterns, attributes, skills and awards. Within the field of education for example, an academic degree constitutes cultural capital (Webb *et al.* 2002).

Cultural capital comprises three states, the ‘embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalised state,’¹⁴ and all three apply to chamber music. The embodied state is directly linked to and incorporated within what we as individuals know and can do. Investing time into self-improvement, personal development and forms of learning can

¹⁴ There have been many interpretations of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital. Elaine Hayes (2002) describes them in these three ways, all of which can be applied to chamber music.

increase embodied capital. When audiences describe gratification from chamber music concerts, their descriptions illustrate this concept. As embodied capital becomes integrated into the individual it becomes a type of habitus, which will be discussed below.

Cultural goods provide the second form of expression of cultural capital, the objectified state. They comprise material objects such as books, paintings, musical instruments, recordings and technologies. For many, chamber music recordings, concert programs and other material artifacts associated with concerts exemplify this form of cultural capital. The third aspect of cultural capital, its institutional form, confers on graduates a 'certificate of cultural competence' through the credentials and qualifications obtained from educational organisations (Hayes 2002). For the chamber music audience this is derived through private music tuition, school based music programs and participation in music-making organisations outside of school.

Each of these forms of cultural capital is transmitted principally through what Bourdieu terms the 'habitus'. The habitus is an explanation of the ways in which individuals 'become themselves' through the transmission of the values and tastes of their social and cultural environment. For Bourdieu, one of the most observable functions of the habitus is to account for the style which unites the practices and goods of a single agent or class of agents. In this way the habitus is a:

generative and unifying principle which retranslates the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle, that is, a unitary set of choices of persons, goods or practices (Bourdieu 2001).

The habitus is thus, on the one hand, the ways in which individuals 'become themselves' by developing attitudes and dispositions and, on the other hand, the ways in which those individuals engage in practices. An artistic habitus, for example, disposes the individual artist to certain activities and perspectives that express culturally and historically constituted values of the artistic field (Webb *at al.* 2002). Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, the ways in which particular tastes are authorised, cultivated and transferred through a life-style habitus, offers a compelling method of investigating audiences for high culture (and other cultural forms for that matter). The profile of Melbourne chamber music audiences shows that a particular kind of habitus is necessary in order to have the desire not only to attend a chamber music concert but also to derive the kinds of pleasures that are part of attendance. It would seem there are direct points of conjuncture to be made between the three states of cultural capital together with the ensuing habitus, and community music, youth music, regional music, multicultural music and high art music such as chamber music.

3.2 A habitus for chamber music

If we recognize that a particular habitus *is* required in order to understand and participate in high cultural forms then we need to examine this habitus closely. In its *Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues*, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1999) reported that ten per cent of Australian females attended a classical music concert compared with 26 per cent who attended a popular music concert. For males, seven per cent attended a classical music concert compared with 25 per cent who attended a

popular music concert (see Table 1). An explanation for these differences may lie in the kind of habitus that facilitates attendance.

The habitus necessary for chamber music appreciation is primarily expressed through the family. Members of the chamber music concert audience are often born into and grow up surrounded by musically minded families thus achieving a sense of familiarity or ‘naturalness’ about music which facilitates competencies and translates into attendance. As one chamber music concert lover puts it, ‘... music was all around [us]. And it was a way of being a family as well’.¹⁵

In musically minded families an everyday familiarity with music and music making is part of domestic life, music is actively and consciously valued by parents and expressed through particular social actions such as support for ongoing instrumental tuition. If music presupposes instruments, then families are the places where children become familiar with musical instruments and when children learn to play a musical instrument they become aware of some of the production aspects of music such as sound making, and rhythm and melody generation. Music is studied at school. Music recordings are played, music radio is selected. During adolescence extra curricular music making is undertaken. Concerts are attended and boyfriends and girlfriends are found at music camps, youth music organisations and university. In this way the love of music is transferred from one generation to the next. Music making occupies a prominent daily presence in the domestic world of the family.

Knowledge of chamber music is developed during these processes. The rules of ‘correctness’ associated with music making, and ‘the rules of completeness’ such as those pertaining to the length and structure of musical works and the conventions of playing and listening, are learned. Training repertoires for orchestral instrumental tuition have traditionally been based on the canons of European art-music,¹⁶ although in recent times this has begun to change. When children learn to play an orchestral instrument their daily practice serves as a mechanism enabling access to concert participation. The working knowledge obtained through playing a musical instrument can give children the beginnings of an ‘insider’s’ perspective into what is involved in concert performance.

Being born into a musically minded family is a common experience for many members of chamber music audiences, regardless of generation. Old and young alike describe growing up in families that value classical music as an object of pleasure and desire. For people in their 60s (the largest component of most chamber music audiences), their habitus for chamber music involved singing and music making around a piano. The piano assumed a prominent role in households in a way that is not familiar today and served as an introduction to music.

Before the days of radio every household had a piano. And if you were visiting friends and staying for tea, after tea everyone got around the piano. And most people could play the piano ... and if it was songs

¹⁵ This is a quote from an interview during the field study of Melbourne chamber music audiences with ‘Peter, male, concert lover, aged 20-29’.

¹⁶ See for instance the Australian Music Examinations Board syllabus.

everybody would sing. I mean also this probably sounds very corny today, especially to younger people ... I was born and brought up in a little county town where there were no music teachers or anything like that at all. How they learnt the piano god only knows because it was miles from anywhere yet every place you walked into had a piano.

(Catherine, female, interview, concert lover aged 80+).

However, technology has changed, and the ways in which this pleasure and desire are expressed have also changed. For instance, the kinds of experience familiar to older people, such as those described above, are not ones that resonate with the experiences of the young. When younger audiences describe their family experiences they identify a music consciousness that is expressed predominantly through private instrumental tuition and participation in public music activities such as youth music associations. In musically minded families daily music making involves a number of conscious activities. It requires on the part of parents a financial undertaking to pay for ongoing weekly music lessons, the purchase of a musical instrument and regular maintenance expenses. Perhaps most importantly, it also requires the conscious commitment of regular daily practice and a positive response to this practice over extended periods of time, usually years. One such interviewee describes his own musically minded family thus:

Mum and Dad started off everyone on instruments. I was the youngest of four ... and Paul played clarinet. Kate started learning guitar, Jane played the violin and then I was on the piano. I think, compared to my siblings, I've taken a much stronger active interest. ... I'm somewhat similar to my dad in terms of how strong my interest is... But music was all around. And it was a way of being a family as well. Dad used to always enjoy when we were at family gatherings putting on his old open-reel player, Handel's *Messiah* – some German recording of it and he'd get out the score and he'd sing away and we'd all sing along.

(Peter, male, interview, concert lover, aged 20-29)

It is not just parents but also siblings and extended family members who have an influence on family music making.

My grandparents were very musical. My grandfather conducted the Kew Methodist Church Choir for a very long time. He died when I was six, but I remember that he had a beautiful voice. Everybody compared him to Peter Dawson. He studied Peter Dawson kind of songs. They are the sort of songs you can sing without having studied them very deeply and they had, and I still have, some of their record collection. As a matter of fact the records which have the strongest nostalgic affect on me are the old acoustically recorded pre-electric recordings, with terrible sound quality... Peer group [also] counted for a lot in fact has continued through out my life.

(Graeme, male, interview, concert lovers, aged 70-79)

Thus a particular habitus that embraces music provides children and adolescents with the knowledge and competency necessary for an understanding of chamber music. Instrumental music teachers act as musical mentors. Involvement in public music making events such as youth orchestras, choirs and music camps, music exams, music competitions and house concerts are all experiences that are facilitated by families. This domestic sphere and family activity constitute the first 'space' in which music is experienced. Shinichi Suzuki, the famous Japanese violin pedagogue, sees the domestic sphere as an explicit concert site, and his method of violin teaching relies on parents encouraging their children to perform concerts for them as part of their ordinary everyday practice. Musically minded families can thus be significant functional sites where serious art-music is valued and where mechanisms of access are introduced, maintained and developed.

3.3 Concert pleasures

The kind of habitus described above creates an appreciation of chamber music as an object of desire and pleasure and, in addition, cultivates competencies for pleasure. There is no doubt that when audiences describe the personal meanings and values they ascribe to chamber music they do so in ways that emphasize the mystery, magic, ecstasy and euphoria that the art form provides. American psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, describes such experiences as follows:

Contrary to what happens all too often in everyday life, in moments [that are optimal experiences] ... what we feel, what we wish, and what we think are in harmony' (Csikszentmihaly 1992).

When chamber music audiences describe their conceptions of concerts and their reasons for attendance, they do so in ways that demonstrate the sense of exhilaration, ecstasy and fulfilment that is part of a disciplined, concentrated 'optimal experience'. They allude to four forms of aesthetic pleasure: an intellectual, a discovery, a social and an emotional aesthetic. These are all 'optimal experiences', a term for happiness that describes 'situations in which attention can be freely invested to achieve a person's goals, because there is no disorder to straighten out, [and] no threat for the self to defend against' (Csikszentmihaly 1992).

Optimal experiences consist of a process of 'flow', a metaphor used to describe the sense of effortless action people feel in moments that stand out as the best in their lives (Csikszentmihaly 1992). When athletes win, when religious mystics experience ecstasy, when artists and musicians feel aesthetic rapture they describe an experience similar to that which chamber music audiences recount when they talk about concert participation. The wondrous nature of a concert is reported by audiences as an experience of 'flow', an experience that comes only when commitment, effort and consciousness have been deployed beforehand.

As sites of pleasure, of concentrated consciousness, concerts can be a means of emancipation from the ongoing controls in a social system that often exploits our energies for purposes of commodification. The thinking that occurs inside audience heads at a concert can be completely within each individual's control for concerts are socially sanctioned occasions of reward and satisfaction where the power of response

lies only with the listener. The feeling of order experienced by audiences is more a lack of the sense of worry about losing control which often characterises experiences in ‘real life’, for example the work place. Chamber music concerts, however, are usually distinct, removed or separate from ordinary life and contain no sense of failure for the audience. The result is a feeling of power and harmony which in turn produces the ability to derive moment-by-moment enjoyment and fulfilment from the concert. Respondents report that participation at concerts can offer moments where a sense of mastery over one’s life seems possible. Even when a performance is met with disappointment or confusion, the sense of enjoyment and intellectual stimulation from engagement can be an optimal experience.

Chamber music audiences can experience a state in which they become so involved in the activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will seek it at great cost for the sheer sake of doing it. In this way attendance at chamber music concerts is an expression of a ‘way of living’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1992) and a means of ensuring that life is serene, useful and worthwhile. Attendance is not always easy; it requires a commitment of effort, discipline, persistence and a sense of purpose, but the reward may be a state of mind that is harmonious and ordered. Such effort is seen by audiences as a productive way of using leisure time to produce well-being.

Concert participation is both solitary and unifying or, to use the psychological terms of Csikszentmihalyi (1992), it involves ‘differentiation’ and ‘integration’. While these two tendencies seem to be opposites, they are frequently necessary for optimal experiences. The differentiation or separation from others is evident with both the body language of audiences and the proxemics of the concert. Because of its abstract qualities, music is an individualising form and audiences physically separate themselves from others in order to fully receive and interpret the performance. At the same time, however, during interval and before and after the performance, there is clear union with others in the sharing of ideas and conversations and a common commitment to the concert event.

The use of space is another part of the pleasure of being at a chamber music concert. Being physically close to the musicians is central to understanding the performance. Audiences are drawn into the creative process by virtue of being a physical part of the concert in ways that are not possible when listening to recorded music or other forms of reception. The visibility of the performers can directly assist with comprehension of the music. While audiences of course will see different things, just as they hear different sounds, the following comment emphasizes the importance of visibility to understanding music:

I actually get quite a lot of benefit out of being able to *see* the performers. Because, particularly with chamber music, you can actually see the interaction with them. I mean I’m not really a terribly musical person ... but I’m intrigued by music and I enjoy listening to music but I do find that actually watching the performance, which you can’t do with CD – you can do it on TV I suppose but that’s a different thing.

(Geoff, male, interview, interested in concerts, aged 40-49).

Tastes and pleasures of concerts are not rigid but change over time and according to each life-cycle stage.

[When I was about 14] string quartets were too austere. Then, when I was about 19 one of my friends started to become very enthusiastic about Beethoven string quartets and started to communicate that enthusiasm to me ... Now I have broader tastes. Tchaikovsky bores me now. I haven't enjoyed Tchaikovsky for ten years. I value Chopin now. In my teens I thought of him as a light weight composer, but I don't now.

(Graeme, male, interview, concert lover, aged 70-79).

Innovation, discovery and surprise are also part of concert pleasure. For those who describe themselves as 'interested in concerts', the innovation and 'newness' are part of the thrill of intellectual discovery. For instance, one interviewee describes his interest in new music thus:

If I'm listening to a new work I don't expect it to be familiar. In fact I'd be rather disappointed [if it was]. It would strike me as being – if it sounds like a re-hash of somebody else's music, which I'm familiar with, then I would feel robbed. Whereas, if it is something different then that's exactly what I would expect.

(Geoff, male, interview, interested in concerts, aged 40-49).

By contrast, others rely on familiarity and recognition and the redemptive power of music. For some, the particular musical landscape that was taught through music education, mentoring and role modelling has been accepted throughout their lives. Others have amended the concepts modelled in the family habitus and have charted their own taste formations. Life-style and life-cycle factors also shape conceptions of concerts. Having young children and teenagers, the difficulty of night time travel, living a long way from city centres, becoming too old to travel and insufficient funds are some reasons given for not attending concerts as frequently as wished. For older people, issues of night time travel, safety and expense limit access to concerts.

A conception of chamber music, constituted as a form of cultural capital, acquired and cultivated through a particular habitus and capable of generating immense pleasure is not one that features in the rhetoric of arts policy or press releases from government arts ministers. In order to understand, value and participate in forms of high culture such as chamber music particular kinds of cultural precursors are necessary. As this section has shown, these precursors are expressed, cultivated and developed primarily through a habitus consisting of a home and school life which values music and music making as a worthwhile object of desire and an activity worthy of immense effort, time and endurance. Such notions of the arts are nowhere to be found in the logic of creative industries or cultural development.

4. Conclusion

Ministers for the arts and policy-makers avoid talking about cultural capital and the social habitus necessary for arts appreciation perhaps because the subject is too difficult. It is much simpler to conceive of arts audiences along the same lines as shoppers and sports fans than to acknowledge that the arts require a different mode of thinking.

This paper has presented a concept of democratic arts that involves all citizens having the capacity to choose from the full array of arts options. But in order for this to happen all citizens require opportunities of access. Although this perception of democratic arts seems out of step with the logics of creative industries, creative city developments and cultural development policy, the argument is not that these are wrong but rather that the conceptions of audience within these strategies are too narrow. It is not enough to market concert programs so that people know what is going on inside concert halls; it is not enough to entice inner city sophisticates to ‘try something different’; it is not enough to perform a piece of creative dance theatre during the quarter break of a televised football game. Strategies such as these will not widen the audience in any long term, real way. Rather it is necessary, first of all to understand the conditions that facilitate participation in the arts, and then to make possible the ‘partnerships’ that can develop these capacities for larger numbers in the Australian population.

Currently only a small section of our population has the capacity to ‘choose’ from a wide palate of cultural activities. For most of the population, the barriers of entry to the arts (and these are not financial barriers because the cost of entry to a chamber music concert often equates with that of a movie ticket), such as knowledge and skill, mean that choice is not even possible.

Although it may illuminate a perspective of practitioners and fans in an art form that is not often spoken about, this paper does not merely put the case for chamber music. There are other art forms and contests of ideas, all just as valid, that ensure that particular cultural forms need to be promoted. The assertion is that cultural policy has failed to make points of connection between the logics of widening access to the arts and the actual requirements – acquisition of cultural capital – necessary for that access, participation and pleasure in the first instance. The chamber music audience is used as a case study to show clearly that cultural capital is necessary for arts participation.

Connections between the views expressed here and current policy arguments *can* be made. Partnerships enhancing exposure, access, understanding and appreciation of the arts can be accommodated within current policy logics. Partnerships capable of supporting the mechanisms which enhance an understanding of high culture such as in families, in activities that foster musical literacy and in vehicles that connect with the three states of cultural capital, can be created between arts sectors, for example youth arts, community arts, regional arts and multicultural arts. Such connections have the potential to increase the size of the arts audience and enhance its longevity. In contrast, partnerships with industries such as that of wineries (is there a state in Australia that does not have chamber music concerts in vineyards?) do little to cultivate the enduring conditions of familiarity that are necessary for a life-long appreciation of the arts.

This paper argues that democratising the arts requires an exploration of the conditions of familiarity necessary for arts appreciation and presents a particular example of such conditions. The mechanisms through which audiences come to understand the arts need to be centre stage in the strategic collaborations and creative enterprises that currently frame arts and cultural policy. This requires a review of, and investment in, arts programs at school, at home, and in the community. A frequent lament among esteemed music pedagogues¹⁷ is that the most accessible of all forms of music, that of singing, has almost disappeared from our schools. As school music departments become stocked with expensive electronic musical equipment that few people can play, the most democratic instrument of all, the human voice, is ignored. If we want democracy in the arts we must acknowledge that acquisition of the necessary cultural capital requires long-term commitment and particular social conditions.

In profiling the social circumstances that lead to and surround the chamber music audience, a set of unique features shows that, at least in terms of audience, high culture is separate to and different from popular cultural forms. These distinctions can be broken down but only if mechanisms that facilitate access to the arts are widely and fully supported in collaborative enterprises. Policy-makers require a better-informed conception of the audience and must begin to make connections that embrace the realities of how audiences are created. Within the buzz of opportunities that surround creative industry discourses and creative city agendas, partnerships involving governments, schools, families, children and arts industry sectors may be a much smarter way of widening the audience. When Australian culture is viewed through the lens of audience we find that access to some forms of culture is far from equal. Until current arts and cultural policies are able to provide to everyone the education and experiences that result in a lifetime of aesthetic engagement, current government ambitions to democratise the arts will remain unfulfilled.

¹⁷ This is the view expressed during conversations with Professor Warren Bebbington, Ormond Professor, Dean of the Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne.

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