

**“It is a lifeline to understanding what we
are experiencing right now.”**

Hearing from the Guthrie Theater audience during a pandemic

Humphrey School of Public Affairs Program Evaluation Capstone Project: *The Guthrie Theater*

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Guthrie Theater Leadership

FROM: Humphrey School of Public Affairs Evaluation Capstone Student Team, Spring 2020

DATE: May 4th, 2020

RE: Results & Recommendations following Guthrie audience survey, April 2020

In late April, a survey sent to Guthrie Audience members received 1,627 responses and aimed to answer three questions: 1) are arts/storytelling and the Guthrie Theater relevant to audiences now; 2) are Guthrie Theater-produced shows important to the Guthrie audience; and 3) how important is online artistic content for the Guthrie audience now? Upon analyzing survey results, the Humphrey School team recommends that Guthrie Leadership do the following: 1) maintain in-house productions as much as possible; 2) do not heavily invest in creating new online programming; 3) coordinate with Twin Cities arts institutions to communicate to a wider audience and build excitement for the arts when programs can safely resume. 61% of survey respondents were season ticket holders, so these results should be understood to reflect the opinions of Guthrie's most committed audience members.

Conclusions:

- For the Guthrie audience, the arts are relevant for themselves and the Twin Cities community right now. Arts and storytelling helps them feel connected at this time. The Guthrie audience primarily miss seeing plays, the physical space of the theater, and social components that accompany live theater. The arts matter now and live theater will matter in the future.
- The Guthrie audience cares deeply about in-house productions, and believes it deepens their connection to the wider Twin Cities artistic community. In-house production is an important factor in their decision to purchase tickets to the Guthrie.
- Many audience members engage with storytelling right now, but not with Guthrie's Facebook content or with other institutions they previously engaged with in-person. There is little interest in new online content from the Guthrie Theater. There is a desire to see programs in-person.

Recommendations:

- **Maintain in-house productions as much as possible.** Survey data showed that 95% of season ticket holders and 85% single ticket purchasers go to the Guthrie Theater mainly to see in-house productions. While difficult financial decisions will have to be made in the coming months, leadership should attempt to continue in-house production at current or similar levels.
- **Do not invest heavily in creating new online programming.** While the Guthrie audience considers arts

and storytelling quite relevant, they are not engaging regularly with Guthrie's social media, nor is there a strong desire for new, online artistic content. The Guthrie should of course continue an online presence, but should not invest considerable, additional resources.

- **Coordinate with other arts institutions during this time to communicate with a wider audience about what they can get excited about when programming may resume.** There is clear enthusiasm for arts institutions and live programs, but not for new online content. Guthrie leaders should make a concerted effort to build excitement around an eventual return for in-person programs, and draw on the collective audience of multiple Twin Cities arts institutions. A collaborative strategy may benefit the entire Twin Cities artistic community.

Executive Summary

Background & Pivot

At the outset of the project, the Humphrey School Capstone Evaluation Team was meant to focus on conducting an evaluation with the Guthrie Theater Community Engagement Department, building off of a previous evaluation conducted by another Humphrey School evaluation team. After an initial meeting with the Director of the Community Engagement Department, Rebecca Noon, the Capstone Evaluation Team devised an evaluation initially focused on understanding how the Community Engagement Department's work was perceived by other Guthrie staff, including the extent that Guthrie staff believed the Community Engagement Department to be advancing the Guthrie Theater's mission and vision. The initial survey also planned to evaluate how well the Community Engagement Department program met the expectations of a number of nonprofit community partners (*See Appendix A for more detail*).

Following the US outbreak of COVID-19, including the Stay-at-Home issued by Minnesota Governor Tim Walz on March 25th, the new circumstances warranted a significant pivot in direction. Like virtually all other arts institutions in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, and the US, the Guthrie Theater faces extreme challenges in an environment dominated by COVID-19. Necessary measures taken to reduce the spread of the virus—including bans on public gatherings, social distancing, and Stay-at-Home orders—during the spring has resulted in serious reductions in revenue and program disruptions for the Guthrie Theater. Following additional conversations with Rebecca Noon, who was in regular communication with other key Guthrie Theater stakeholders such as senior leadership and artistic management, it was decided that the best option would be to shift to an audience focused survey, meant to capture clear, actionable data to assist Guthrie Leadership in navigating this new environment.

Revised Evaluation Questions & Survey Sample

This new direction led to the development of three evaluation questions that would be answered by a short survey distributed to Guthrie audiences:

1. *How does the Guthrie audience perceive arts, storytelling, and the Guthrie Theater at this current time? (considering anxiety, uncertainty, unique challenges, and social distancing)*
2. *Are self-produced shows important to the Guthrie audience?*

3. How important is online artistic content for the Guthrie audience now?

Following survey distribution, the Humphrey School Capstone Team would draw conclusions based on the data to answer the questions. These answers then, would be used to draft recommendations for Guthrie Senior Leadership.

The short survey was distributed to 27,791 Guthrie Theater audience members on April 21st, 2020. Due to project time constraints, the survey closed that Friday on April 24th. 1,627 Guthrie audience members responded to the survey, with an overall response rate of 6%. The sample was segmented by 'Season Ticket Holders' and 'Single Ticket Purchasers.' 990 of the 7,363 Season Ticket Holders responded to the survey (a 13.5% response rate). 637 of the 20,428 Single Ticket Purchasers responded (a 3% response rate). While the Guthrie Theater's previous surveys to their audience yielded higher response rates, a power analysis of the sample and population sizes concluded that the survey sample was large enough to be considered valid (*see Results: Survey Sample*).

Conclusions & Evidence

For the Guthrie audience, arts are relevant for themselves and the Twin Cities community right now. Of the entire sample, 53% considered the arts "extremely relevant" while 1.2% responded "Not at all relevant." 57% considered arts institutions "extremely relevant" for the Twin Cities community right now.

The Guthrie Audience primarily miss seeing plays, the physical space of the theater, and social components that accompany live theater. Over 90% of both audience segments answered that seeing plays was the number one thing they missed most about the Guthrie Theater not being open. For both audience segments, "visiting the building" was the second thing most missed. Other data suggests that the social aspect of live theater is very important to the audience as well.

The Guthrie audience seems to care deeply about 'in-house' productions, and believes it deepens their connection to the wider Twin Cities artistic community. 95% of Season Ticket Holders and 85% of Single Ticket Purchasers said they "go to the Guthrie mainly to see Guthrie-produced shows, performances, and musical acts." 52% of all respondents "strongly agreed" that in-house productions makes them feel more connected to the Twin Cities artistic community.

Many engage with storytelling, but not with Guthrie's social content or with other institutions they previously engaged with in-person. There is little interest in new online content from the Guthrie Theater. While 49-50% of both Season Ticket Holders and Single Ticket Purchasers engage with some form of art or storytelling every day during the Stay-at-Home orders, 74% of all respondents said they engage "once a month or less" with Guthrie social media content. In addition, 71% said that if the Guthrie offered online programming, they would most want to see archival material.

Recommendations

Maintain in-house productions as much as possible. While difficult financial decisions will have to be made in the coming months, leadership should attempt to continue in-house production at current or similar levels.

Do not invest heavily in creating new online programming. While the Guthrie audience considers arts and storytelling quite relevant, they are not engaging regularly with Guthrie’s social media, nor is there a strong desire for new, online artistic content. The Guthrie should continue its current online presence, but not invest considerable resources in new online content.

Coordinate with other arts institutions during this time to communicate with a wider audience about what they can get excited about when programming may resume. There is clear enthusiasm for arts institutions and live programs, but not for new online content. Guthrie leaders should make a concerted effort to build excitement around an eventual return for in-person programs, and draw on the collective audience of multiple Twin Cities arts institutions.

Acknowledgments

The Humphrey School Capstone team sincerely thanks our partners: the Guthrie Theater. We are particularly grateful to the Director of the Community Engagement Department, Rebecca Noon and the Community Engagement Assistant, Daisuke Kawachi who gave us the opportunity to continue this project. Thank you for your partnership and dedication to your organization and the fine arts. Other Guthrie Theater staff who played important roles in distributing the survey and providing information include Director of Marketing and Communications Trisha Kirk, Associate Artistic Director Jeff Meanza, and Associate Director of Marketing Elizabeth Deacon. Finally, we want to thank the many Guthrie audience members who took time to complete this survey during a stressful moment in all of our lives.

Thank you to Professor Emily Kalnicky, Ph.D., at The Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities as well for your mentorship and teaching on Capstone Preparation Workshop. Your review of this evaluation was integral in developing this project. Your insight, expertise, and support made this project possible.

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Introduction

Project Description

Founded in 1963, the Guthrie Theater is a well-respected and well-known, elite cultural institution in downtown Minneapolis and the Twin Cities area, but the organization has said they do not believe they are properly serving a representative audience of the entire nearby community. Based on a previous Humphrey student report, those who do not engage with the theater consider it “intimidating.” As a nonprofit organization committed to “build[ing] community through the illumination of our common humanity” and to “equity, diversity, and inclusion,” The Guthrie can better live its values if it creates stronger relationships to community partners and in doing so, become more relevant and important to important local stakeholders that currently do not view the Guthrie Theater as their place. Initially, this project was meant to build off of the previous Humphrey School evaluation to enhance the impact of the Guthrie Theater Community Engagement Department, in order to assist the Guthrie Theater generally.

That direction and scope shifted dramatically after COVID-19 outbreaks occurred throughout the United States, leading to a “Stay-at-Home” order issued by many states, including Minnesota, in March. Almost

overnight, the Guthrie Theater faced previously unimaginable questions related to programs, staffing, finances, and organizational direction. ***In response, the planned evaluation project was discarded in order to provide audience-based, actionable data to help Guthrie Leadership make crucial decisions at this critical time.***

Initial Project Direction: Community Engagement Department

Since 2016, the Guthrie has operated a community engagement program, meant to build relationships and foster meaningful connections between the theater and diverse, often marginalized, groups who otherwise would not interact with the theater. Funded initially by a grant, the community engagement department is currently funded by Guthrie's general operating funds. The department has one full time staff member, Director of Community Engagement Rebecca Noon, and a part time assistant, Community Engagement Assistant Daisuke Kawachi.

According to Rebecca Noon, the community engagement department is meant to connect the Guthrie to communities. Noon's strategy is to build these relationships across other departments, as well as continually develop intentional, meaningful relationships with organizations that work with and for oftentimes marginalized communities in the Twin Cities area. Primarily, Rebecca works with an identified 'community organization' to participate in a show at the Guthrie that has connected themes to the work the community organization does. Actual partnerships vary, but normally include community organization participation in after show 'post-show conversations,' as well as working with other Guthrie departments such as marketing, production, education, communications and development. The initial evaluation focused entirely on the Community Engagement Department. A complete evaluation design and analysis plan for this initial direction can be found in Appendix A.

Context & Setting

Even before various states issued "Shelter-in-place" or "Stay-at-home" orders, the arts industry was grappling with the effects from the COVID-19 pandemic. In early March, *The New York Times* detailed the financial and logistical challenges theaters were dealing with--how to generate revenue while guaranteeing the safety of their performers, staff, and attendees, as well as general uncertainty regarding programming calendars.ⁱ Later on in March, theatre-specific publications were discussing more existential questions, like what the sector would even look like six months from now.ⁱⁱ Publications focused on specific theatre communities reported how the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic will lead to severe financial challenges for arts institutions, including staff layoffs and long-term changes for the sector.ⁱⁱⁱ These challenges and pressures were impacting all fine arts institutions across the country, including the Guthrie Theater. This context was the driving influence behind the evaluation pivot.

Pivot Following COVID-19 & New Evaluation Questions

As a fine arts theater, the Guthrie was devastated by the COVID pandemic. As such, organizational priorities shifted dramatically, away from questions about the effectiveness of community engagement and towards more fundamental questions of organizational survival. The health and economic well-being of staff—correctly—became the chief focus. For a short period in March, it appeared as though the Guthrie would not be able to continue working with the Humphrey Capstone team.

On March 20th however, the client indicated a desire to continue in some form. Rebecca stressed that the original direction was no longer possible or appropriate, but wanted to brainstorm ideas. The capstone team presented several options, including developing a new evaluation plan that would not be

implemented due to time constraints, or rapidly developing one survey that could provide insight in critical areas for the Guthrie during this difficult time. The client opted for the second option. The indicated a need to better understand “is community central to the work of this theater?”

At this point, the capstone team began generating possible survey questions and designs that could best answer this question. After continuous communication throughout March and early April, Rebecca informed us that Guthrie Senior Leadership wanted to engage their audience instead of staff:

*“The big question involves whether or not we could change the survey to being **audience-focused rather than staff-focused.**”*

In particular, Guthrie leaders wanted to learn about potential online content that could be developed during the quarantine. Rebecca and Daisuke however, still had a strong interest in including a ‘community through arts organizations’ theme, even extending beyond the Guthrie Theater. Finally, the Artistic Director wanted to understand how Guthrie-produced shows were perceived by audiences. Together, these ideas formed the basis of the new survey direction, which aims to answer the following questions:

- 1. How does the Guthrie audience perceive arts, storytelling, and the Guthrie Theater at this current time? (considering anxiety, uncertainty, unique challenges, and social distancing)*
- 2. Are self-produced shows important to the Guthrie audience?*
- 3. How important is online artistic content for the Guthrie audience now?*

In the new survey, each question is the focus of a distinct part of the survey (previously listed). Also, in each part, there is at least one question that connects to the idea of community. While we intend to provide clear answers to each question, we also hope to deepen the Guthrie’s understanding of how the idea of community intersects with each dimension. In this way, we’re attempting to link the necessary new direction—largely influenced by Senior Leadership—with the needs of our initial client, the Community Engagement Department.

Methodology for Evaluation Design

Methodology

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Guthrie Theater is seeking a new evaluation plan to support them in better understanding how they can continue to connect with audiences and how they can capture clear, actionable data to assist Guthrie Leadership in navigating this new environment. This evaluation draws upon the audience, who experienced visiting the Guthrie Theater and uses the audience focused survey as the new survey direction to provide insight in critical areas for the Guthrie during the new circumstances.

Research Questions

The current evaluation seeks answers to the following research questions:

- 1. How does the Guthrie audience perceive arts, storytelling, and the Guthrie Theater at this*

current time (considering anxiety, uncertainty, unique challenges, and social distancing)?

2. Are self-produced shows important to the Guthrie audience?

3. How important is online artistic content for the Guthrie audience now?

In the audience focused survey includes 14 questions, each question is the focus of a distinct part of the survey. Also, in each part, there is at least one question that connects to the idea of community. The Humphrey School Capstone team intends to provide clear answers to each question and to deepen the Guthrie's understanding of how the idea of community intersects with each dimension. By answering these questions, the Humphrey School Capstone team could develop a set of recommendations for the Guthrie Senior Leadership Team in the immediate term and long-term.

Positionality & Bias

The current evaluation team is not without the Humphrey School Capstone team's own biases, assumptions, and positionality. One evaluator is a white, US-born male of privilege. Another evaluator is an Asian female who previously worked as a budget analyst from Thailand. While we strive for objectivity in our analysis, and have been trained to rigorous standards in evaluation design, data collection, and analysis, we recognize that our individual experiences shape our perspectives.

Data Collection Tools & Analysis Plan

The shifts in the analysis plan reflect the significant changes to the project, both in the project goals and timeline. Initially, the Humphrey School Capstone team had planned to triangulate our data from a variety of data sources, along with collected data from a previous Humphrey School evaluation team. In addition, the Humphrey School Capstone team had planned to rely largely on qualitative data analysis in the form of interview data and open-ended survey responses. However, because the project now exclusively focuses on the Guthrie's audience in this present moment and there is a significant time constraint, the data analysis plan has shifted considerably. At present, the Humphrey School Capstone team collects data from one source and the vast majority of data will be in the form of Likert scale or ranked responses, which will be quantitatively analyzed. One exception is a question that asks for a one word open ended response, which will be analyzed in terms of frequency. For that question, the Humphrey School Capstone team had prepared a Word Cloud visualization that graphically represents the most frequent answers. Then, the Humphrey School Capstone team will conduct basic quantitative analysis around the most frequent open-ended responses.

Another dimension to our intended data analysis is to understand the difference between single-event ticket buyers and season ticket holders. The Humphrey School Capstone team will be able to analyze responses for each mutually exclusive group, and compare results. This was identified as critical by stratifying by Guthrie leadership. While this new analysis plan is less rigorous than the initial plan, it effectively responds to feasibility constraints among the COVID-19 pandemic and client's needs.

The new evaluation will utilize a single survey to collect the Guthrie audience members' opinions and attitudes, to see how they perceive arts, storytelling, and the Guthrie Theater at this current time, and to see whether self-produced shows and online artistic content are important to them. Participants can answer the questions using a link, emailed by the Guthrie Theater, on their phone or computer to get

access to the Google Forms: The Guthrie Theater's Audience Survey.

The survey combines Likert scale format (1-5) questions, ranked choice questions, and one open-ended question, in order to collect quantitative data. For the Likert scale data, descriptive statistics analysis will be used to measure respondents' attitudes to a particular question or statement. It can be analyzed as interval data in order to provide some response options of the participants and their opinions toward the statements provided in the surveys. While inductive analysis will be used for the open-ended survey question that allows respondents to provide one-word answers. The ranked choices will be analyzed quantitatively, and the results will be presented as a word cloud. These results will be analyzed by identifying the most common answers as core themes for the audience. Other questions will be analyzed using descriptive methods, including mean scores. All response data will produce an Excel table with all of the survey responses. Summary and analysis of survey data will be facilitated by the Humphrey School Capstone team. The Guthrie staff can get access and download the data to further analysis for more complex data visualization. All summary data will download the aggregate survey responses, similar to the way the data is presented in the Google Forms online view. The Guthrie staff can download these as a PDF, PowerPoint, or Excel file, depending on their needs for using the charts or graphs.

The audience focused survey was distributed during the week of April 13th and was distributed to the Guthrie Theater audience members on April 21st, 2020. Due to project time constraints, the survey closed on April 24th. Data collection was taking place in the last week of April, while data analysis was taking place from late April to early May with findings and conclusions presented in early May.

Results

Survey Sample Validity

Although the response rate for the Guthrie audience survey was rather low relative to Guthrie's normal response rates, the number of total responses was high enough for both Season Ticket Holders and Single Ticket Purchasers to be considered valid for extrapolating to the larger Guthrie Audience. There were 7,363 total Season Ticket Holders, and 990 responded to the survey. In order to be 95% confident that the survey results reflect reality within 5%, a standard statistical test for validity, there needed to be 366 respondents. Because responses were greater than 366, the survey is considered valid for Season Ticket Holders. There were 20,428 total Single Ticket Purchasers, and 637 responded to the survey. In order to achieve the same degree of confidence, there needed to be at least 378 responses. Because responses were greater than 378, the survey is considered valid for Single Ticket Purchasers. **The number of responses relative to the total number in each group were higher than the minimum sample size required to make generalizations.**

Survey Results

There were 1,627 Guthrie audience members who responded to the survey, with an overall response

rate of 6%. In figure 1, the sample was segmented by ‘Season Ticket Holders’ and ‘Single Ticket Purchasers.’ This sample largely reflects season subscribers with a 60.8% of response rate (990 responses), among single ticket households, we received a 39.2% response rate (637 responses).

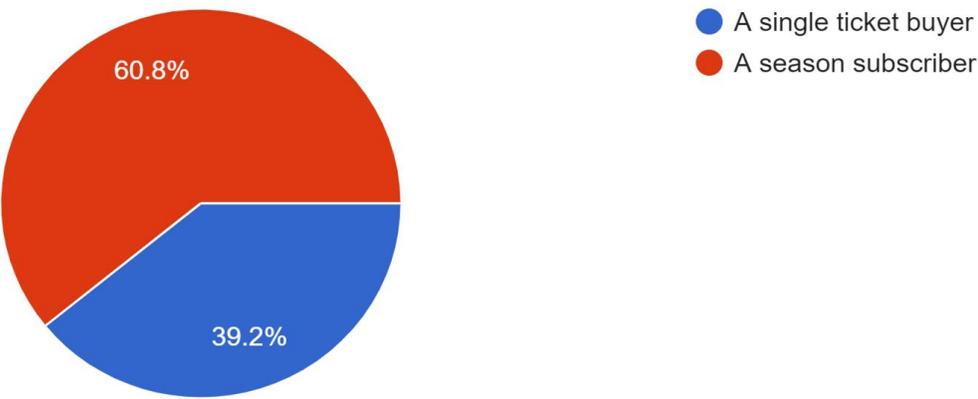


Figure 1: Types of Guthrie audience

Overall, season ticket holders attended more shows annually than single ticket purchasers, with 41% of season ticket holders attending events once a month, compared to only 10% of single event ticket purchasers (Figure 2). However, it will be difficult to analyze where Guthrie audience attend events. By 50% of respondents indicated that they see shows in all spaces equally, but comments on the survey indicate some confusion on that. The Thrust, seems to be the most popular individual option, with 33% of respondents indicating they mainly go there to see shows. While there were only 0.7% of respondents indicated that they mainly go to Level 9, which hosts touring productions. It can be concluded that touring productions are not nearly as important to the Guthrie audience as in-house productions (Figure 3).

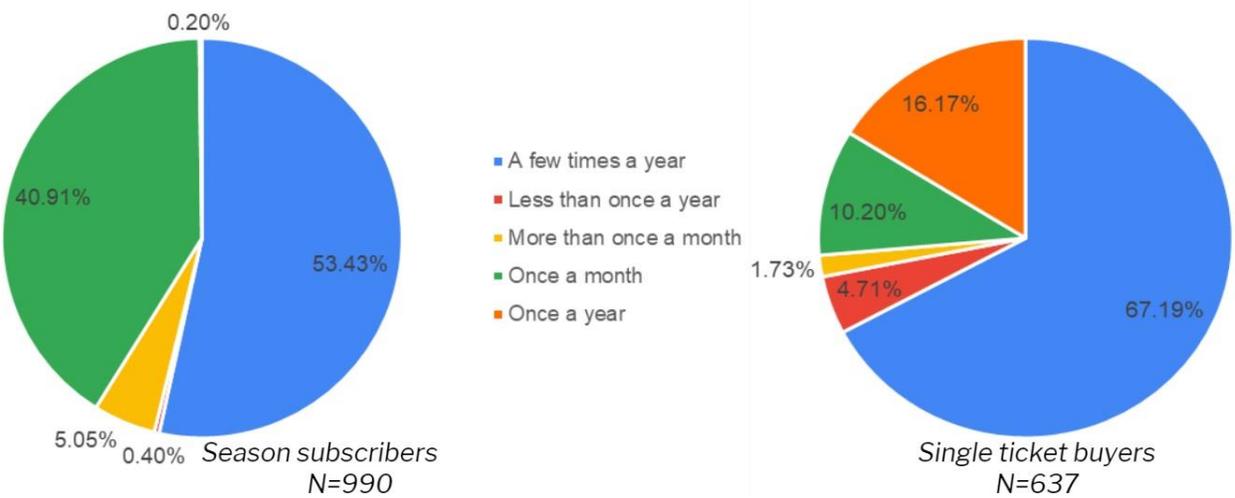


Figure 2: Guthrie attendance by sub-group

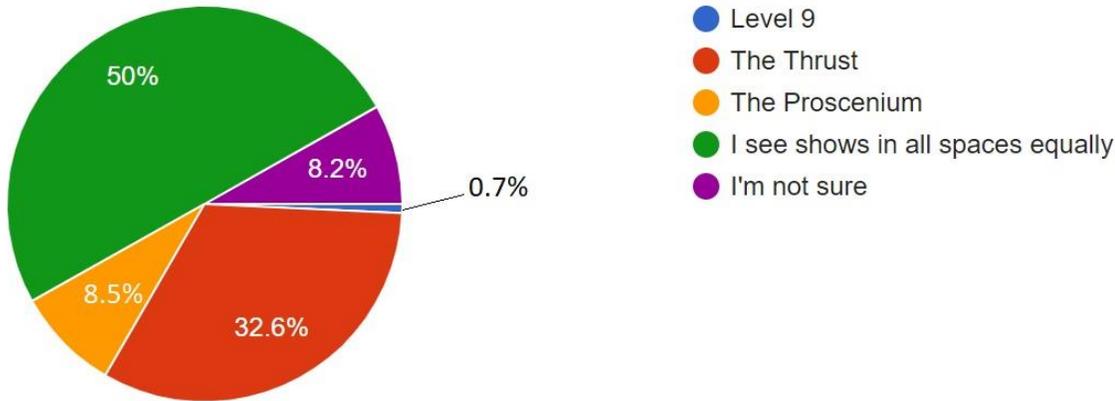


Figure 3: Where Guthrie audience attend events

Part A: Guthrie-produced acts matter to dedicated audience members

A very strong majority (91.5% of respondents) indicated that they go to the Guthrie mainly to see Guthrie-produced shows, performances, and musical acts. 5.2% indicated that they weren't sure, and 3.3% indicated that they go to the Guthrie to see touring acts (Figure 4).

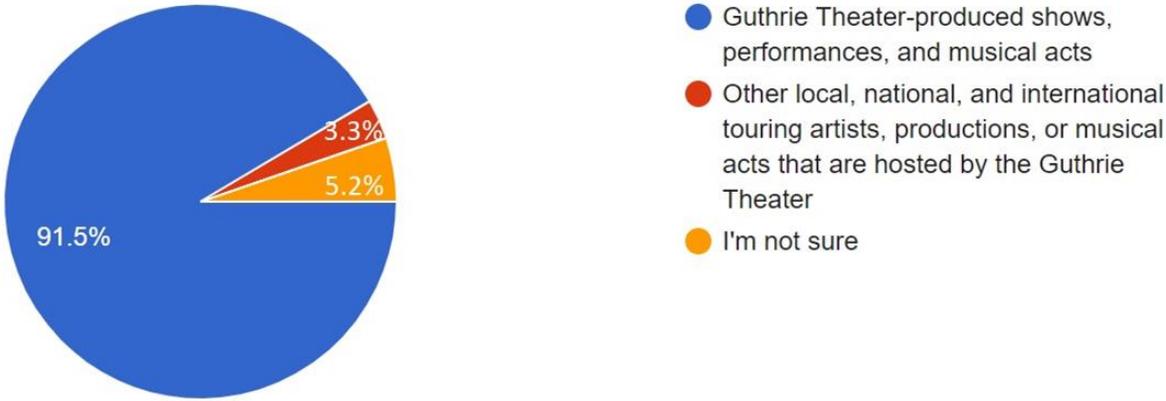


Figure 4: Audience go to the Guthrie mainly to see

The tendency was reaffirmed with very strong majorities indicating that Guthrie's self produced shows were important factors in their patronage of the Guthrie, and that 'seeing Guthrie-produced shows' makes them feel more connected to the Twin Cities artistic community. While in-house production is important for both groups, it is more important for Season ticket holders. Still 44% of single ticket holders answered 5, which was listed as "Strongly Agree" for this question. In aggregate, this data strongly suggested that in-house production is important for the Guthrie Theater's audience. Even as the Guthrie must make difficult economic decisions moving forward, maintaining in-house production should be a priority for management (Figures 5 and 6).

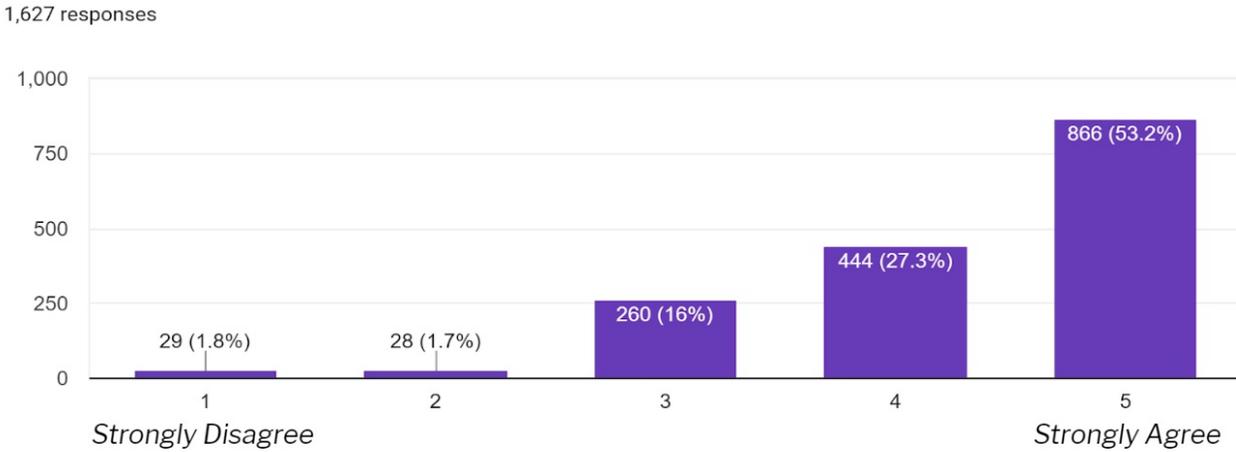


Figure 5: The fact that the Guthrie Theater produces its own shows is an important motivator to audience to purchase tickets

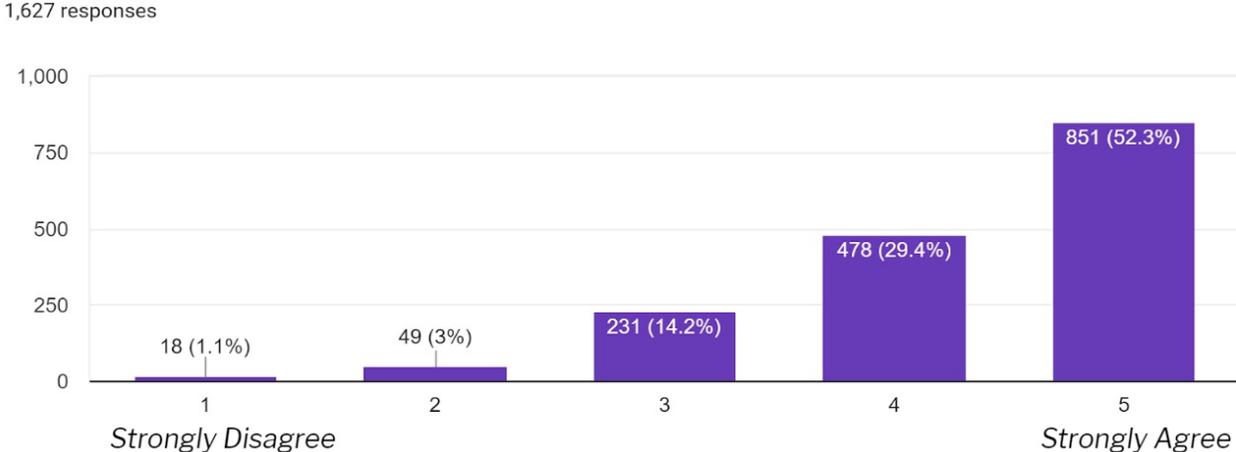


Figure 6: Seeing Guthrie-produced shows makes audience feel more connected to the Twin Cities artistic community

The conclusion in part A showed that the Guthrie audience seemed to care deeply about ‘in-house’ productions, and believed it deepens their connection to the wider Twin Cities artistic community. This can answer our second evaluation question: *Are self-produced shows important to the Guthrie audience?*

Part B: Arts are relevant to people and community right now, according to the Guthrie audience

There were 20% of season ticket holders who wrote the word “connected,” while 15% of single ticket purchasers did the same. Engaged, inspired, entertained, happy, comforted, good and hopeful were both semi frequent responses for both groups as well. Interestingly, season ticket holders had more

“non-positive” words appear including “unsure, sad, and neutral.” This may be due to the higher number of responses from season ticket holders with 990 respondents, compared to 637 single ticket respondents.

There were a handful of responses longer than one word, which could not be counted in the Word Cloud. Still, these responses tended to focus on ideas of connectivity as well. Select responses are listed below:

“It’s an important way to stay connected to the outside world with the stay at home order in place.”

“It connects me to other humans when I can’t be with them”

“It is a lifeline to understanding what we are experiencing right now.”

Along with the Word Clouds themselves, these results suggest that for the Guthrie audience, storytelling helps them feel connected to other people and the greater world during a time where isolation has become much more prevalent in all of our lives.

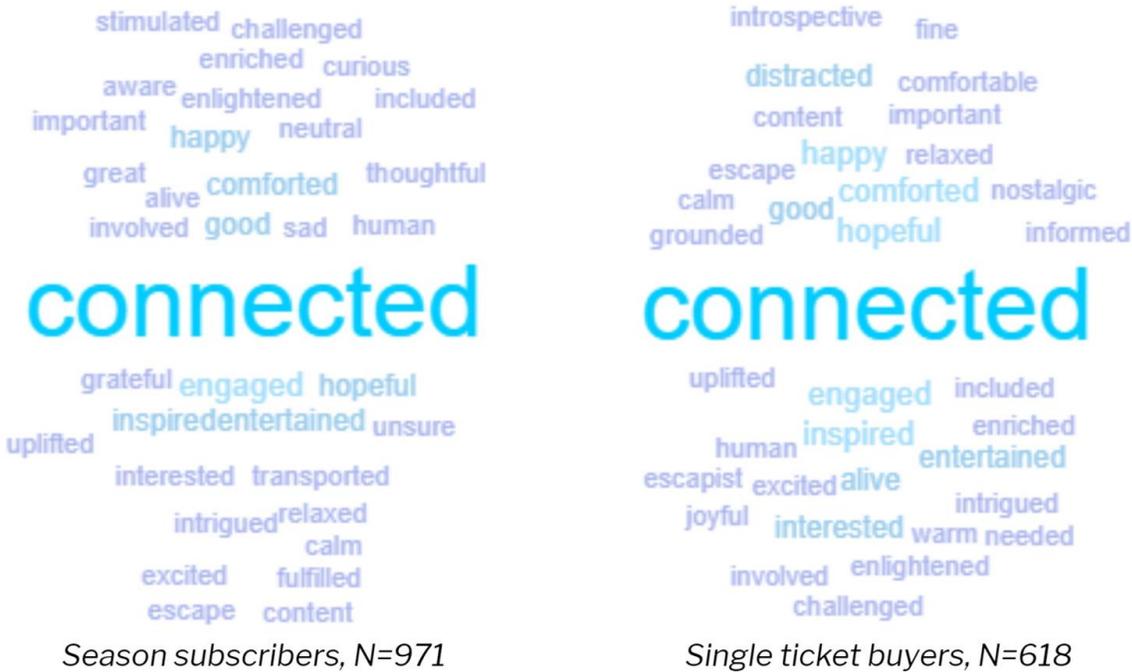


Figure 7: Word cloud analysis, how storytelling make Guthrie audience feel at this time

Table 1A - 1C showed, by far, the thing people miss most about the Guthrie being open is seeing plays. (up to 95% of respondents listed that as the number one thing they miss). While visiting the building was the second most missed thing with 49% of respondents, followed by special events (28% of respondents), and then connecting with a unique community.

Table 1A: What do the audience miss most about the Guthrie not being open? (1st choice)

Single ticket buyers	Season subscribers	Overall
Seeing plays (92%)	Seeing plays (97%)	Seeing plays (95%)
Visiting the building (4%)	Community connection (2%)	Visiting the building (2%)
Community connection (1%)	Other (0.7%)	Community connection (1.5%)

Table 1B: What do the audience miss most about the Guthrie not being open? (2nd choice)

Single ticket buyers	Season subscribers	Overall
Visiting the building (54%)	Visiting the building (45%)	Visiting the building (49%)
Special events (21%)	Community connection (25%)	Community connection (21%)
Community connection (13%)	Special events (18.5%)	Special events (19%)

Table 1C: What do the audience miss most about the Guthrie not being open? (3rd choice)

Single ticket buyers	Season subscribers	Overall
Special events (34%)	Visiting the building (29%)	Special events (28%)
Visiting the building (26%)	Community connection (26%)	Visiting the building (28%)
Community connection (22%)	Special events (24%) Other (20%)	Community connection (24%) Other (17%)

For the “Other” responses, survey respondents were able to write in what they miss about the Guthrie not being open. Most of the responses focused on the social aspects of a live theatre experience, but grounded it within seeing plays and visiting the Guthrie building. Two representative responses are below:

“Seeing a show with my two good friends and discussing it with them afterwards”
“an evening out” (dinner, drinks, gift shopping...)

A strong majority (81% of respondents, including the audience who answered 4 or 5, where 5 was listed as “Extremely relevant” for this question) indicated that the arts are relevant to them at this moment (Figure 9). About 83.3% of respondents indicated that arts and cultural institutions are relevant to the Twin Cities community in this current moment (Figure 10).

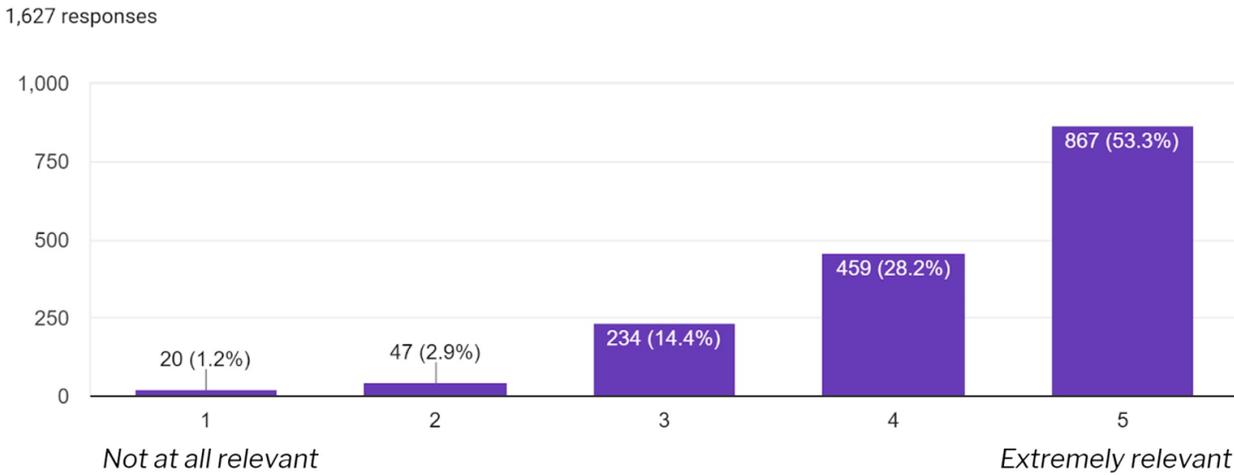


Figure 9: How relevant are the arts to Guthrie audience in this current moment

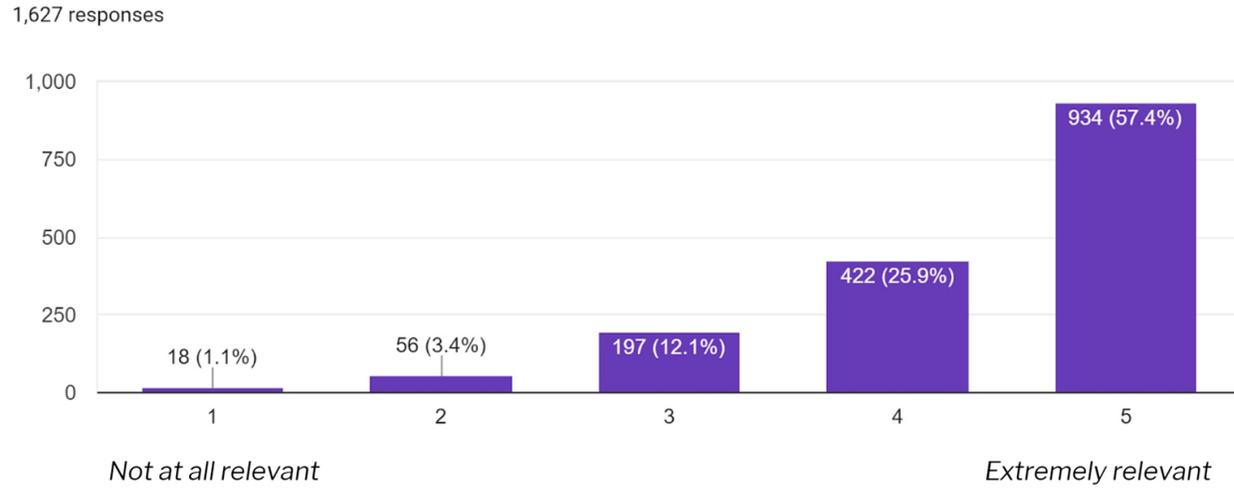


Figure 10: How relevant Guthrie audience feel arts & cultural institutions are for the Twin Cities community in this current moment

The conclusion in part B showed that, The Guthrie audience primarily miss seeing plays, the physical space of the theater, and social components that accompany live theater. For the Guthrie audience, arts are relevant to themselves and the Twin Cities community at this current moment. In addition, arts and storytelling helps them feel connected at this time and this can answer our first evaluation question: *How does the Guthrie audience perceive arts, storytelling, and the Guthrie Theater at this current time (considering anxiety, uncertainty, unique challenges, and social distancing)?*

Part C: While storytelling and arts are important right now, and used by Guthrie audience, social media engagement with the Guthrie is not, nor is digital engagement with other arts institutions.

Figure 11 presented how much engagement there is with storytelling at this time. While there were similar responses across both groups that around 50% of them engaged with arts/storytelling (including literature, film, podcasts, etc) dailys, single ticket purchasers seemed to engage with storytelling slightly more often than season ticket holders. Moreover, it appeared that season ticket holders seemed to feel more relevancy to the Twin Cities artistic community and ‘arts,’ but single ticket purchasers slightly more with broader forms of art and storytelling. The primary takeaway is that the arts are relevant to the audience.

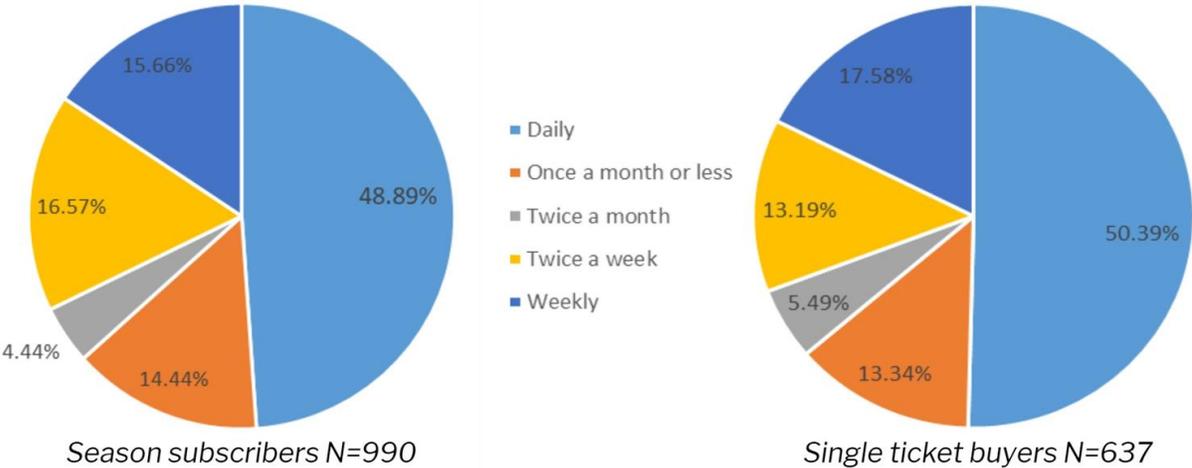


Figure 11: Since the Stay-at-Home orders, how often Guthrie audience, by sub-group, engage with arts/storytelling (including literature, film, podcasts, etc)

There were up to 73.6% of audience members engaging with Guthrie social media content “once a month of less.” While there were only 1.1% of all respondents engaging with Guthrie social media daily. Only 1.7% of single ticket purchasers and less than 1% of season ticket holders engaged daily with Guthrie social media content (Figure 12).

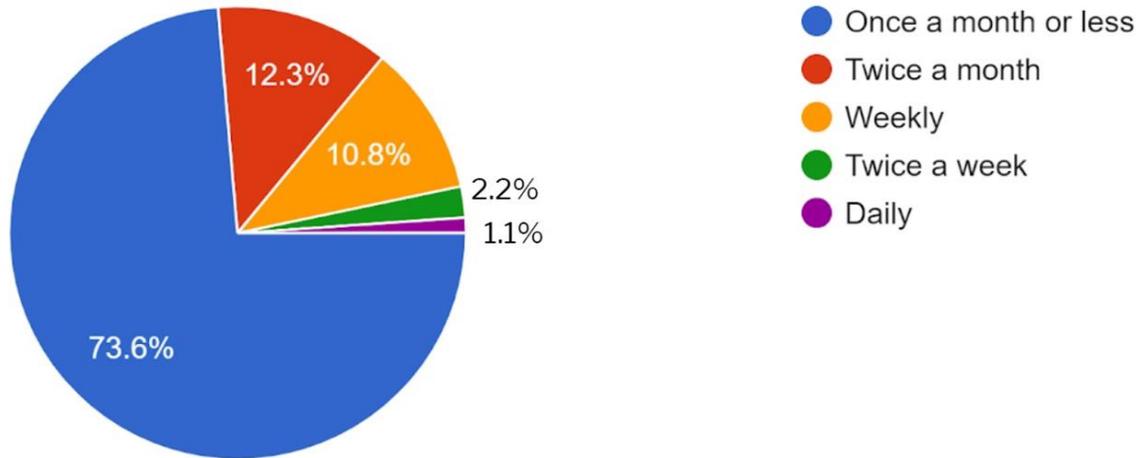


Figure 12: How often the audience engage with Guthrie’s social media content

Figure 13 showed that the majority of Guthrie audience members (32.2% of respondents) were not engaging digitally with institutions they engaged with in-person. Our data presented that single ticket buyers’ mean was 2.4 (1 was listed as “Not at all” and 5 was listed as “very frequently” for this question) and there were only 7.7% of single ticket buyers answered “very frequently.” While season ticket holders’ mean was 2.2 and there were only 5% of season ticket holders answered “very frequently.”

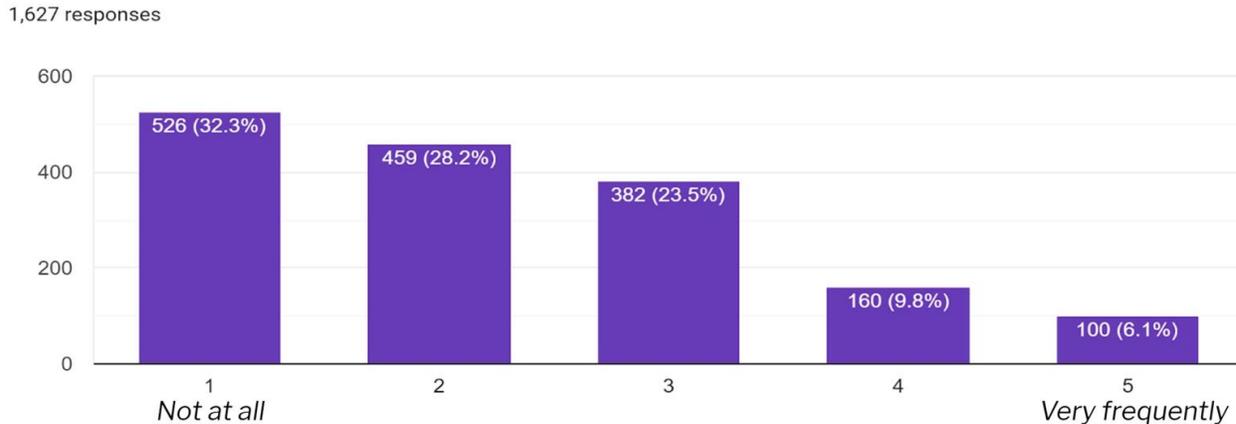


Figure 13: Since the Stay-at-Home orders, how often Guthrie audience have engaged digitally with arts institutions that you used to engage with in-person

“Figure 14: If the Guthrie Theater were to offer online programming, Guthrie audience wanted to see” presented the results that Archival material was by far the most popular option among the Guthrie audience for online programming with 70.9% of respondents. Followed by short videos highlighting the current work of our staff and artists and written or audio interviews with artists.

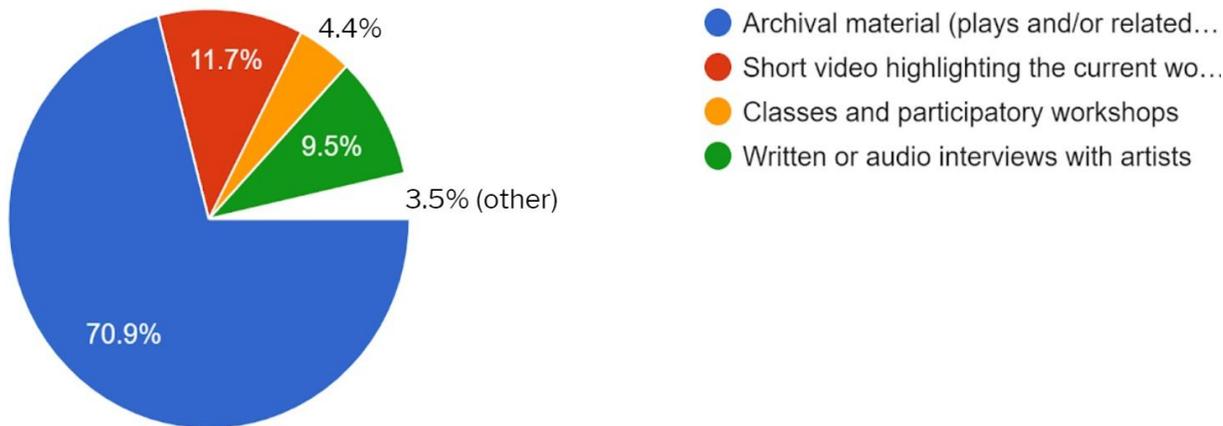


Figure 14: If the Guthrie Theater were to offer online programming, Guthrie audience wanted to see

Additionally, responses in the “Other” category can be summarized as a combination of noting barriers to online engagement, general disinterest with online programming, and some excitement among a small number of respondents, particularly by involving local celebrities like Sally Wingert.

The conclusion in part C showed that, for the Guthrie audience, many of them engaged with storytelling, but not with Guthrie’s Facebook contents or with other institutions they previously engaged with in-person. While storytelling and arts are important for them at this current moment, social media engagement with the Guthrie is not, nor is digital engagement with other arts institutions. This can answer our last evaluation question: *How important is online artistic content for the Guthrie audience now?*

Conclusions

1) For the Guthrie audience, arts are relevant for themselves and the Twin Cities community right now. On a five point scale, respondents were asked how relevant the arts were to themselves at this time and how relevant arts institutions were for the Twin Cities community (5=“Extremely Relevant”). Of the entire sample, 53% considered the arts “extremely relevant” while only 1.2% responded “Not at all relevant.” 57% answered that they felt arts & cultural institutions are “extremely relevant” for the Twin Cities community right now. While both groups were fairly consistent in their responses, the Season Ticket Holders segment had a higher average score, indicating that Season Ticket Holders feel the arts are more relevant to themselves and the Twin Cities community than Single Ticket Purchasers.

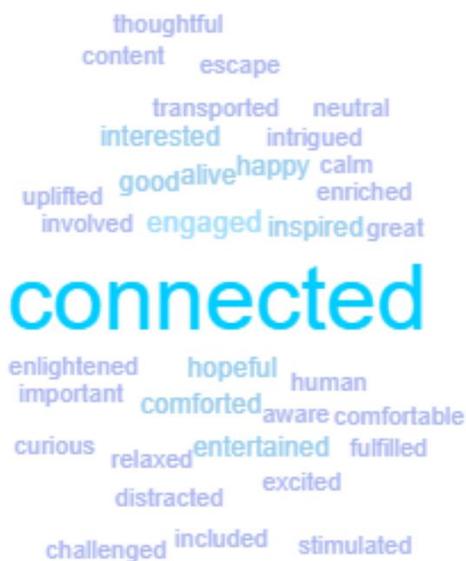
2) The Guthrie Audience primarily miss seeing plays, the physical space of the theater, and social components that accompany live theater. Over 90% of both audience segments answered that seeing plays were the number one thing they missed most about the Guthrie Theater not being open. For both audience segments, “visiting the building” was the second thing most missed, (54% of Single Ticket Purchasers and 45% of Season Ticket Purchasers).

“Connecting with a unique community” was not a central aspect missed by either audience segment, but was selected by more Season Ticket Holders than Single Ticket Purchasers as both a second choice (25% for Season Ticket Holders, 13% for Single Ticket Purchasers) and third choice (26% for Season Ticket Holders, 22% for Single Ticket Purchasers).

17% of the total sample selected “Other” for their third choice, where respondents had an opportunity to write in what they missed. These answers tended to focus on the *social aspect* of attending live theater, including answers like:

“seeing a show with my two good friends and discussing it with them afterwards.”

This suggests that the communal aspect may be more important for the Guthrie audience than initially apparent in the survey data, it’s just wrapped in a more holistic live theater experience.



3) Arts and storytelling helps the Guthrie audience feel connected at this time. The survey asked respondents to provide their own one word answer to “how does storytelling make you feel at this time?”

For both audience segments, the most common word was “connected,” with 20% of Season Ticket Holders and 15% of Single Ticket Purchasers writing the word. Because respondents could write any word at all, it is notable that so many individuals wrote the same word. Other more common words for both groups included “engaged”, “comforted”, “inspired”, and “hopeful.”

Figure 15: Full Sample Word Cloud, N=1,589

4) The Guthrie audience seems to care deeply about ‘in-house’ productions, and believes it deepens their connection to the wider Twin Cities artistic community. 95% of Season Ticket Holders and 85% of Single Ticket Purchasers said they “go to the Guthrie mainly to see Guthrie-produced shows, performances, and musical acts.” Guthrie’s in-house production is also an important motivator for audience members to purchase tickets, and this is especially true among Season Ticket Holders. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 meant “Strongly Agree” that in-house production was an “important motivator to purchase tickets to the Guthrie,” the mean response for Season Ticket Holders was 4.42; for Single Ticket Purchasers it was 4.08. For both groups, in-house production is clearly important, but it is especially so for the Season Ticket Holders.

On the same scale, respondents were asked if “seeing Guthrie-produced shows makes [them] feel more connected to the Twin Cities artistic community,” and there were similar results across audience segments. The mean response for Season Ticket Holders was 4.39; for Single Ticket Purchasers it was 4.12. For the entire Guthrie audience, seeing in-house productions makes them feel more connected to the broader arts community, and this is especially true for Season Ticket Holders.

5) Many engage with storytelling, but not with Guthrie’s social content or with other institutions they previously engaged with in-person. There is little interest in new online content from the Guthrie Theater. While 49-50% of both Season Ticket Holders and Single Ticket Purchasers engage with some form of art or storytelling every day during the Stay-at-Home orders, 74% of all respondents said they engage “once a month or less” with the Guthrie’s social media content. In addition, 71% said that if the Guthrie offered online programming, they would most want to see archival

material, while only 26% selected an option that requires creating new online programming. 3.5% selected “Other” and were allowed to write in a response. Major themes from those responses were:

Barriers to regular online engagement: *“We have limited internet as we live rurally so we are unable to participate”*

Disinterest: *“I prefer to wait until I can see live performances”*

Some excitement, particularly for Sally Wingert: *“All of the above! During this time we need you! I would watch Sally Wingert recite the alphabet right now.”*

While some audience members are interested in more online programming from the Guthrie, the core takeaway from the aggregate data suggests that the Guthrie audience is a general lack of interest for a variety of reasons.

Insights for the Community Engagement Department (CED)

In-house productions seem to link to a sense of community among the Guthrie audience. Based mainly on conclusion 4, there is evidence that Guthrie audience members link in-house production to a feeling of community with the wider Twin Cities arts landscape. The Community Engagement Department may want to consider that as it plans its work following the COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps, this could mean linking wider engagement practices to in-house productions, and attempting to broaden who the ‘community’ is for the Guthrie audience by making in-house productions more equitable and representative of the Twin Cities community.

Arts and storytelling makes the Guthrie audience feel connected during a time where isolation is common. Drawing upon conclusion 3, Guthrie audience members are turning to arts and storytelling to maintain a feeling of connectivity during a time period characterized by various levels of isolation. This speaks to the heart of the initial question asked by Rebecca Noon and her department, “is community central to the work of this theater?” Because storytelling helps audience members feel connected, and they consider arts relevant at this time, it seems that community, at least in a broad sense, is fundamentally important to Guthrie audience members.

Connecting with a unique community is something people miss about the Guthrie being closed, but it isn’t a top reason. It is a bit more important for season ticket holders than single ticket purchasers. Still, open-ended responses demonstrate that the Guthrie audience misses a holistic theatre

experience, which includes a social component. Conclusion 2 presents important insights for the Community Engagement Department. While the nature of community is important for the Guthrie audience, it is not 'top of mind' for most audience members. However, open-ended responses suggest that the social aspect of live theater is a key component of what people miss about the Guthrie. For the Community Engagement Department, this is important to consider because it may inform programming strategies. If the CED wants the Guthrie Theater to expand who feels welcome at its events, they should make sure to include a social aspect in their programs, in order to make sure that all audience members have the opportunity to participate in this important component of a live theatre experience.

Recommendations for Guthrie Leadership

Maintain in-house productions as much as possible. Drawing from conclusion 4, it is clear that in-house production is fundamentally important for the Guthrie audience. Not only do the vast majority of both Season Ticket Holders and Single Ticket Purchasers primarily attend in-house productions, they are also an important motivator for audience members to purchase tickets. While difficult financial decisions will have to be made in the coming months, based on gathered data we believe reducing in-house productions would be a mistake, potentially alienating some of the Guthrie Theater's most committed audience members. It appears that from the perspective of audience members, in-house production is a critical part of the Guthrie Theater's identity.

Do not invest heavily in creating new online programming. While arts institutions are weighing various alternative methods of programming in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we caution against investing too heavily into creating new online programs. Based on conclusion 5, it appears that while the Guthrie audience considers arts, storytelling, and arts institutions relevant at this time, there is not a strong desire for new online programming. Instead, it appears that the Guthrie audience would prefer archival material to be released in an online format. This may be a less resource intensive way to continue to engage audience members online without creating new programs. The Guthrie audience is clearly looking forward to being able to participate in live arts programming, however.

Coordinate with other arts institutions during this time to communicate with a wider audience about what they can get excited about when programming may resume. Based on conclusions 1, 2, and 5, we recommend strategically building excitement for the return of live arts programming by coordinating communications with other Twin Cities arts institutions. The combination of the following conclusions inform this recommendation:

- *The Guthrie audience feels arts are relevant right now;*
- *Arts institutions are relevant for the Twin Cities community, according to the Guthrie audience;*
- *The live theatre experience is what audience members are missing most;*
- *It doesn't appear that online programming is an effective substitute for live programming.*

By sharing plans for future programs, or even simply sharing a coordinated message of optimism among arts institutions, the Guthrie Theater could send a message that resonates with their audience, driving audience engagement and helping to boost revenues in terms of advance ticket sales and increased donations.

Overall, the conclusions from this report suggest that arts, storytelling, and arts institutions matter to the Guthrie audience during this difficult period. By maintaining in-house productions and driving audience engagement by looking forward to a return to live arts programs, the Guthrie Theater can remain a vital institution for its most committed audience members.

Contextual media reports cited:

ⁱ<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/06/arts/covid-19-movies-theaters-concerts-museums.html>

ⁱⁱhttps://www.americantheatre.org/2020/03/18/will-there-even-be-theatre-six-months-from-now/?fbclid=IwAR2z73fCyeUiBKlUV_XQHx6nbN4te1swESYbn9jVshgDpWcG9r9NOgiDM8

ⁱⁱⁱ<http://www.theaterjones.com/ntx/news/20200313071929/2020-03-27/How-COVID-19-is-Affecting-the-Arts>