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Opera Enormous: Arias in the Cinema

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OPERA ENORMOUS:

ARIAS IN THE CINEMA

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OPERA ENORMOUS:

ARIAS IN THE CINEMA

By Benjamin Jon Speed

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Nathan Stormer

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
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For this thesis, I ask why people are coming to the Grand, a local independent cinema in Maine, for the Metropolitan Opera *Live in HD* simulcasts? I take the reader through historical and critical context of the program and the Grand along with framing the simulcasts as either media events, phenomenological experiences and/or performance rituals for audience members. Finally, I ask how can this research inform the Grand about its programming decisions? To answer these questions, a mixed method approach was employed. I am conducting a study composed of several different essays that explore the research question from different points of view. I will employ several sources of evidence, including interview, participant observation, historical sources, critical literature on *Live in HD,* and media theory. The chapters move from historical to critical context of the program, to looking at the audience experience as a possible *media event*. After looking at the larger universal frameworks, I finish by investigating specific subjective audience member accounts and how the program influences attendance. Why

people are attending the opera simulcasts from the Met in New York at the Grand in Ellsworth is complicated. Grand opera goers are drawn to the simulcasts for the love of the music, the tradition, the grandeur, the performances that are larger than life and the communal witnessing amongst other opera lovers. It is the Saturday afternoon ritual that brings audiences back. It is the program as a potential *media event* that provides an arena for simultaneity, sociability and engagement with the Grand audience. It is the behind the scenes programming that draws the audiences curiosity to become more intimate with their idols. While there is much lost in transmission, there is also much gained such as democratizing opera to this small art house in Ellsworth, Maine. However, it all comes back to the quality content and the communal experience of that content that ties it all together. Audiences love the music of the orchestra and the focus on the voice as a musical instrument that can drive a story. They walk out feeling like they have learned something about themselves and the humanity of the world. And they do this while in the company of their neighbors in whom they share a communal ritual of digital opera going in the 21st century. Audiences know that they are not attending the opera, but they feel like they are, and in some ways it is even better than being in the actual opera house. It is both ritual and natural. It is not a ritual. It is not natural. It is caught in between. It is the *liminality* of the interstitial moments that draws the audience member in and holds them there like Euridice in the Underworld. The Met and the Grand should never look back, or else they would lose an audience at both houses.

DEDICATION

The following paper is dedicated to my grandfather, F. Dale Speed, who passed away on December 27th, 2011. He was a role model for my entire family and will be greatly missed.

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I want to acknowledge my wife Sarina for her unending support and encouragement while attending Graduate School. There were many weekends that Sarina would take our children to her parents so that I could work on my studies. Your time will come on the slopes honey once I get my degree, I promise. I want to thank my son and daughter, Noah and Larkin, for keeping me grounded in all things non-academic.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The opera has long been a fascination of the cinema, and now finds itself being transmitted live and in high definition video and surround sound to cinemas around the globe. At The Grand Theater in Ellsworth, Maine the audio/visual components of live transmission simulcasts to cinemas from the Metropolitan Opera at Lincoln Center are bringing remote audience members together in tandem with audience members in New York. *The Met: Live in HD* program encompasses multiple layers of audience to performer interaction. Those that have experienced The Metropolitan Opera at Lincoln Center in New York City and at The Grand Theater are both drawn to opera for the love of the tradition, the grandeur and spectacle, and the performances that are larger than life. However, Peter Gelb the Executive Director, concedes that The Metropolitan Opera audience is aging. Five years ago, his average audience was sixty years old. Now, five years later, his audience is sixty-five years old (Froemke, 2007). In order to reinvent opera for new audiences, Gelb saw that he must present operas to the masses by offering live opera simulcasts from New York to cinemas worldwide. The operas that are chosen have mass appeal, but also allow new viewers to catch up with the best of opera. With this program there is a collision of high cultured art and popular culture that is offered to smaller cinemas such as the Grand in Ellsworth, Maine.

Attendance at the opera simulcasts at The Grand Theater is particularly interesting because the increase in audience members comes at a time when attendance to other 35mm films and music programs at the theater are declining. Nationally, 35mm films are

on their way out as digital projection is transitioning as the leading vehicle for motion picture exhibition. This is all happening at the same time that international opera is declining as a viable art form. Attendance at the simulcasts also captures insight into a cultural shift from high art to popular culture, large hall performance to small art house cinema, and media on demand to *media event*. It is fascinating that so many people give up their Saturday afternoons to go to an opera where the singers and orchestra are not physically in the hall. It is astounding that people are coming in droves to experience a performance that turns a large opera hall in New York City into a cinematic close-up at a small art house in Ellsworth, Maine.

The Met: Live in HD

In 2008 The Metropolitan Opera: *Live in HD* series won a Peabody Award "with vividly designed, smartly annotated productions" that used "state-of-the-art digital technology to reinvent presentation of a classic art form" (UGA, 2009). Live transmissions from New York that year were sent via satellite to 44 countries in over 1,000 movie theaters and performing arts centers, universities and museums worldwide (The Metropolitan Opera, 2010). In 2010 the total number of tickets sold for simulcasts was 2.2 million tickets. *The Met: Live in HD* program in 2011 reached 2.4 million people in one season as it transmitted opera by satellite in high-definition video and surround sound to 1500 theaters in 46 countries (The Metropolitan Opera, 2011). *The Met: Live in HD* uses robotic cameras to capture action from various angles in order to heighten attention to narrative elements of both performance and production. Integrating behind-the-scenes features and live interviews with cast and crew, the program offers "an

unprecedented look at what goes into the staging of an opera at one of the world's great houses" (The Metropolitan Opera, 2009). On November 5th, 2011, with a running time of 5 and 1/2 hours, *Siegfried* brought in $1.54 million dollars in North America as the single largest paying audience ever for the *Live in HD* program to date (The Metropolitan Opera Press Release, 2011). The simulcast was seen on more than 850 screens in North America for an estimated 70,000 people plus an additional 600 screens in 39 different countries and 53,000 people in Europe, Latin America, Morocco and the Bahamas. Combined, there were an estimated 123,000 audience members at an estimated 1,450 locations across the globe. These estimates are for the live simulcasts alone. Including the delayed showings in Asia, Australia, Europe, New Zealand, and South Africa, attendance exceeded 150,000 (The Metropolitan Opera Press Release, 2011).

If patrons cannot make it to the event, and missed the presentation at various cinemas, audiences can view reproduced operas from The Met on PBS, DVD, BluRay or the "Met Player," the online streaming subscription service for the public (The Metropolitan Opera, 2009). *Live in HD in Schools* offers free opera transmissions to urban schools and has reached 7,000 public school students in one season alone and reached 18 cities and communities nationwide (The Metropolitan Opera, 2008). Metropolitan Opera Radio on SIRIUS is a subscription-based audio service broadcasting live and rare performances, in addition to the Met on Rhapsody on-demand service through RealNetworks (The Metropolitan Opera, 2008). Of course, radio has featured live broadcasts of The Metropolitan Opera for nearly 80 years on Saturday afternoons

(The Metropolitan Opera, 2009). Now the Met has developed "Met Opera on Demand" for opera lovers to watch *Live in HD* performances on their home computer or iPad. Audiences can go on Facebook or Twitter to recount their favorite opera moments. These converging medias have aided each others cause as they attempt to reinvigorate opera lovers who no longer make their way to the traditional opera house, or have restricted access due to geography or finances.

Peter Gelb has seen simulcasting reach a new class of audience members at the multiplex outside of Lincoln Center. "Carmen" reached 330,000 people at 1,000 screens in 36 countries, in which 10% were new to opera, while at the Met, capacity is up to 88% from 76% in recent years (Paine, 2010). Gelb says the Met was "suffering from an aging audience and a declining one" as he decided to break down its image of "being veiled in elitism" (Paine, 2010). After negotiating agreements with 16 unions representing workers at the Met, Gelb is attempting to "reconnect [the Met] with the public" (Paine, 2010). Opera performers are taking advantage of this opportunity to connect with a global audience as they see their stars rising due to the simulcasts. Similar to the 1931 radio transmission of Editha Fleisher in *Hansel and Gretel* by Humperdinck , audiences want to feel that they are there at Lincoln Center while at the same time being in the comfort of their hometown (Johnson, 2008).

In a *New York Times* interview by Daniel Wakin and Kevin Flynn (2011), Peter Gelb admits that the opera simulcasts have perhaps cannibalized ticket sales at the opera house, but the excitement for the new way of going to the opera has rebuilt confidence in the Met, as philanthropic contributions exceeded $180 million dollars last season, and the

simulcasts brought in a profit of $11 million dollars (p. 1). This record amount of giving comes in tough economic times, yet is 50 percent higher than the previous year and the Met finds its budget balanced for the first time in seven years, in large part because of the success and excitement built around the HD movie theater transmissions. The Met, whose budgets have soared by 50 percent in the past five years, has taken the risk of spending more on productions in order to revitalize the Met and box office declines. The artistic quality has contributed to the quantity of large gifts that supports 43 percent of the overall $325 million dollar budget, but there remains a $41 million dollar debt for the most expensive performing arts program in the country (p. 2).

Robert Flanagan, a retired Stanford University economics professor questions whether the tastes of people who like opera are strong enough to repeat the amount of giving seen for the 2010-2011 fiscal year. Peter Gelb vowed to raise the profile and potential and David G. Knott, a Met board member, who contributed $600,000 of support stated that they "wanted to be part of, 'Let's renew the art form, let's connect opera to new generations of audience, and let's make this part of everyday lives,'" that follows Gelb's vision of "democratizing opera" through the opera simulcasts. Including *Siegfried,* in the 2012 season, the *Live in HD* program reaches 1,600 theaters in 54 countries to an audience of 3 million total, compared to 800,000 at the opera house (p. 2). The program reaches Italy for the first time this year, the birthplace of opera, and Russia, where a number of performers at the Met are recruited from.

The Met employs 1,000 people, and during its 128 year history has struggled financially in the 1930s, mid-1980s, and in the years after the 9/11 attacks. The risk

seems to be paying off for the Met, as it spends more than the next eight largest companies in the country combined. It continues to withdraw from its $253 million endowment at the rate of 7.1 percent last year, and 8.6 percent the year before that. In 2007, the endowment was 25 percent higher at $336 million dollars. While the HD simulcasts have shown growth, ticket sales in the opera house have dropped, despite the inclusion of a $4.9 million dollar donation to subsidize ticket seats (p. 4). While folks from New England may be staying in "Bean-town" (Boston) to enjoy the Met at the cinema, Peter Gelb claims the financial loss of box office income was offset by contributions generated by the excitement of the simulcasts. The Met is betting largely on small cinemas like the Grand to work for them in this *Live in HD* campaign.

Wakin and Flynn (2011) of *The New York Times* compares Peter Gelb's future to a hamster on a gilded wheel, "running to keep financial pace with the expanded ambitions of his company at a time when many of his best donors may be feeling pinched" (p. 5). While admitting that it will be difficult to sustain, Peter Gelb feels optimistic that large donors will give larger gifts going forward as he attempts to balance earned revenue and donations. Gelb contends that he is not a miracle worker and that they are not in the business of making iPads, but rather of making opera. He adds, "we're trying to use intelligent business practices on behalf of an art form that is not businesslike" (p. 5). Perhaps Gelb and the Met are building audiences similar to how baseball teams build a nation of fans, but will he be able to sell out at The Met, like the Red Sox do at Fenway Park, while also attracting remote audiences outside the arena? The Ben Cherington of the opera world, Peter Gelb finds himself between the curse of a dying art form and the

promise of manufacturing a commodity for the masses, that draws aging opera-goers to art houses, like the Grand Theater in Ellsworth, Maine. The aforementioned theater is a small art house that began as a mainstream movie theater in 1939. After evolving into a non-profit that featured live performances and movies, it has transitioned into showing more digital simulcasts than any other event.

During the simulcast intermission at the Grand an on-screen host makes an appeal to remote audiences to experience live opera. Verbatim, regardless of who the host is that week, will tell you, "nothing compares to the experience of live opera." Yet this new form of opera going is pulling audiences away from the premiere opera stage and into the cinemas. *The Met: Live in HD* program has changed the social space that opera inhabits on a large and small scale, with a remote audience at the Grand who benefits from it.

Research Questions

Why are people coming to the Grand, a local independent cinema in Maine, for Metropolitan Opera *Live in HD* simulcasts? Does this group of audience members come to the opera simulcast due to the historical traditions that the Grand and the Met represent? Do critics reactions to the program mirror the experience of the Grand audience? Is *Live in HD* a *media event*, a phenomenological experience and/or a performance ritual by audience members and if so, is this why audience members are attending the opera simulcasts at the Grand? Finally, how can this research inform the Grand about its programming decisions?

Methods

I am conducting a mixed-method study and this thesis is composed of different chapters that explore the research question from different points of view. I will employ several sources of evidence, including interview, participant observation, historical sources, critical literature on *Live in HD,* and media theory. The chapters move from historical to critical contexts of the program, to looking at the audience experience as a possible media event. After looking at the larger universal frameworks, I finish by investigating specific subjective audience member accounts and how the program influences attendance.

Valid questions arise, such as, does the opera lose anything in transmission? Does it lose its *aura*? Does it lose its authenticity? Does it offer *symbolic capital* to audiences that are at a distance to the actual position of production? Is the experience of watching opera less valuable than experiencing the opera in the actual opera house? Does the *Live in HD* series participate in a *habitus* that cultivates tastes and distinctions for audience members? Or is it just a big spectacle that represents the illusion of novelty? Does the *Live in HD* program offer a form of symbolic capital in an age of digital reproduction or is it an act of disembodiment that narcissistically takes away an audience's autonomy? While each of these questions are relevant to the program, and could be their own studies alone, my primary question is why are people coming to the Grand for these opera simulcasts and I approach it from different methods. I will entertain these questions in my examination but only if it applies to this topic and my primary question.

This thesis aims to investigate how the *Live in HD* opera simulcast experience provides a performance ritual that brings its audience back to the theater. It brings up such questions as how do audience members "do the opera" at these events? What stories about their experiences do they tell? How do "little stories" emerge from audience members and how do they constitute this particular opera-going? It also asks whether this constitutes a *media event*? For the audiences that come, does it provide an identity that completes a *circuit of culture*? Is the program authentic? Does it provide a sociability that problematizes the *liminal* experience of opera and cinema in regard to here versus there, and now versus then? What engagement does the audience have with the live program and what does this tell us about why audiences are attending the opera simulcasts at the Grand in Ellsworth, Maine?

I will draw on Walter Benjamin's writings on mechanical reproduction of art, Dayan and Katz's analysis of *media events* and Paddy Scannell's phenomenological approach to programs. From this I attempt to extrapolate prior theory that is relevant to the program and can help us understand the position that the audience finds itself in.

I focus on tying the historical context and the theory to individual audience member interviews that I conducted and then transcribed. For these interviews, I undertook semi-structured questioning that followed a similar methodology employed by Jenny L. Nelson (1987) in her article "Critical Responses: On Media and Existence." Like Nelson, I wanted participants to contextualize their experience in their own words with minimal influence from myself as the researcher (p. 315). I recorded six of the interviews by audio recording and transcribed them in whole. Six additional interviews

were received by either mail or email correspondence. While a few of the text-based interviews were used, the audio recordings resulted in a greater quality of discourse, and can be found mostly in Chapter 5, where I shift the lens of my study from the universal to the particular. The questions provided a topical guide, but also allowed for spontaneous discourse, yet still within the desired continuity of the study (the names used for interviews in this article are pseudonyms). I asked the participants the following questions: Why do you come? What does this mean to you? What does it mean for The Grand? What pleasure do you get? What is lost in the simulcast? How do you feel about the event being live? What do you give up in order to be here? What do you gain? How do you describe this event to others? From these interviews I was able to pull personal stories that were told about doing the opera in this new way, and what it meant to audience members at the Grand.

I have also documented my observations as a participant-observer at The Grand by focusing specifically on observing audience engagement with each other and with the live media. I used the Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990) study on optimal experience as a model to study the audience immersion into the event to the point of disregard for concerns of time, food or ego-self, as well as when this immersion is broken by unexpected conditions, such as satellite interference of audio and video, or spatial interruptions such as lights, heating or other utilities. I observed interactions and paid close attention to when individuals appear to immerse themselves in the experience, whether it be during the host introductions, interviews, or the opera performance. This was noted in two notebooks that I had with me during the simulcasts as I cited when

people applauded, laughed or cheered, as well as anything that was said verbatim towards or about the media. The notations on the interactivity of the audience to media gave me information on the communal aspects of audiences during shared event-based consumption in order to form a general sense of why audiences are drawn to this live *media event* (O'Sullivan, 2009, p. 209). From these notes I was able to construct a description for the reader, what a day at the at the Grand is like during an opera simulcast, as well as what is being said about the operas on the day of the opera and in which manner.

It should be noted that when I reference the Grand "audience" members or "audience" reaction, I am referring to the audience interviews that were conducted, which were twelve in total (six responses over mail and email correspondence and six face-to-face interviews documented by audio recordings). Throughout the essay, when the term "audience" is used in reference to the Grand audience reaction to the opera simulcasts, it should be understood that these reactions are "based on audience interviews" conducted with a limited number of audience members. While this small sample of interviews may be seen as a great limitation to any study, I prefer to highlight the powerful accounts that these few individuals offer in their particular experience of opera going. While they may not represent a significant statistical representation of the potential participants, their individual accounts are significant in their retellings and are nonetheless very crucial in telling the story of digital opera-going at the Grand. I attempt to let the interviews speak for themselves and guide the research towards the particular audience experience at the Grand. However, when I speak of "audiences" at the Grand, I am also referring to the

field notes I took on audiences at the Grand, which covered over 40 different opera simulcasts as well as over 40 different simulcast encores, with nearly 15,000 potential ticket holders under examination. While the field notes were general observations, any specific observation will be provided verbatim. Any and all accounts will be presented in a style akin to performance studies methods, vis-a-vis Dwight Conquergood (2002), Kristin Langellier and Eric Peterson (2004). This method of transcription attempts to provide an accurate rendering in its retelling and iteration in text. The hope is that the original voice that told the stories will be captured on the page. While I could have gone further with this, I chose not to include a method that noted participants breath and pauses, and would require a key to decipher. This mirrors the transcription process that I acquired from the Met. I felt this was a good balance of form and content, yet still true to the speaker.

In this thesis, I will start the reader with the objective points of view. Beginning with the historical, contextual, critical and empirical and then moving into the phenomenological, ending with a subjective framing of specific audience member experiences with the program in order to address why Grand audiences are attending these events. I do this in order to build a context for the reader so that by the time we dive into the personal stories of digital opera going at the Grand, we can appreciate how those stories were influenced by historical contexts, critical responses, program conditions, and other factors affecting the audience.

The next chapter will put into context the historical influences of opera as a whole and the Met. I will look at the history of the Grand in order to explore the circumstances

of how this local art house came to this point in history and how it converges with the history of opera, leading up to the opera simulcasts presented from New York, New York to Ellsworth, Maine. Similar to the paper as a whole, the chapter moves from the universal to the particular as I present, from my own point of view, how a typical day at an opera simulcast unfolds. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a backstory from the program in order to understand how this audience arrived at the Grand for this event and all that led up to it from both institutions.

The subsequent chapter backs up from the particular and once again goes to a broader view of how other cinemas are experiencing the program from the Met. This chapter looks at critical responses to the program and attempts to situate them in context to the experience at the Grand. The motive for this approach is to consider what others are saying about the program and why the program works or does not work throughout the country and think about whether this is similar or not to what is happening in Ellsworth, Maine.

This leads us to the next chapter on the program as a *media event* as well as a phenomenological experience of the opera simulcasts. I look at the Dayan and Katz study on media events of the 20th and 21st centuries and whether these televisual recordings of competitions and coronations can be applied to *The Met: Live in HD* program at the Grand. While this explores the empirical approach to programming for audiences, I counter this with considering the phenomenological approach to programming for audiences by placing the opera simulcasts at the Grand within the framework of Paddy Scannell's work on programs as direct experiences that build an

audience consciousness. The reason this chapter is included is to once again think of the program at the Grand from a universal and a particular way of opera going as well as a basis for justifying the impact of the program collectively on audience members.

These collective vantage points move us into a chapter on the individual experience of audience members at the Grand. This final chapter before my conclusion completes the overall arch of the study that has moved from wide shot to close-up. I present how individual patrons tell stories of their experiences at the opera simulcasts, and describe how they are experiencing this program at the Grand. The transcripts from interviews drives this chapter and gives distinct and specific observations of doing opera in this digital context.

All of these chapters separately approach the same question from different vantage points, in order to address why people are attending the *Live in HD* program at the Grand. While the individual chapters do not holistically approach the question, there are connections between the chapters that cross-stitch the paper as a whole. This approach is employed because the *Live in HD* program is simultaneously universal and particular in its arrival to the cinema. It is both large and small in its distribution worldwide. While in this small art house, it is intimate, yet the high distribution is huge outside of the cinema walls. That concurrency is felt by the audience. The end result will extract historical and critical context, as well as event, program and audience member conditions in the hope of providing research that can inform the Grand on its programming choices.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The history and development of the Metropolitan Opera throughout the years, as well as the history of the Grand, will reveal previous practices and structures at these institutions that offer insight into how the two organizations found their way to their current collaboration. The two share similarities in historical events, patronage, financial structure and support, as well as common struggles with programming and competition from varying media formats. As the projectionist at the Grand, I will walk the reader through what an opera simulcast day at the Grand is like, and what one can expect to experience at these events. Looking at these institutions will provide us with a snap shot of what has established them in the past, what they have overcome to unite an audience and why audiences are attending this collaboration of arts programming.

A Snap Shot of Opera and the Met

Opera is a drama in which all or part of the dialog is sung rather than spoken and which also contains instrumental interludes. Clive Griffin (2007) puts it simply that with opera, "drama appeals to our intellect through words while music appeals to our feelings" (p. 6). The combination of the two elements creates a powerful mixture of drama and emotion that is a partnership between performer, conductor, stage director and the orchestra. The roots of opera come from ancient Greek theater where speeches were sung on stage along with choruses set to music. These dramas set the groundwork for the development of opera. What is intriguing about the evolution of the opera audience is that they have been put on display as much as the performance and during earlier eras,

the two intermingled freely. Audiences could be quite animated and at times wild in their support or disapproval of a performance. While contemporary audiences are still passionate about opera and they are not afraid to voice their opinion with a show, they are far more restrained in their expressions and rarely come to blows as some past generations would. While it is not necessary to go into the details of the history and progression of opera throughout cultures and time, it is worth noting that the Met is as much grounded in moving opera forward, as it is grounding itself in the traditional arts that opera emerged from.

With the *Live in HD* program there is an opportunity to integrate many different opera styles and traditions into one. In the 20th century, political upheaval and technological innovations pushed the opera into music that broke with the past. There was a clear split from compositional style as well as staging techniques. Jazz, folk and popular music influenced composers and their styles and opera saw innovations in creativity and reflexivity. In America, the Broadway musical took influences from opera by combining vaudeville, Yiddish theater, ragtime and jazz through the compositions of Scott Joplin, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter and Leonard Bernstein (Griffin, 2007, p. 166). American opera composers, such as John Adams and Philip Glass were influenced by these musicals as well as popular culture. They created minimalistic art with controversial themes that included Richard Nixon, the atomic bomb and Gandhi (pp. 168-169). *The Met: Live in HD* has featured these American composers in their stagings, while also attempting to integrate the traditional operas of Verdi, Puccini and Strauss. Audiences are drawn to all styles of opera, but by box office numbers at The Grand, they

are more likely to attend a Bizet opera than they are a Benjamin Britten piece, meaning audiences will show up for a traditionally popular opera like *Carmen* or *Madame Butterfly,* while they might walk out of an experimental contemporary opera such as *Nixon in China*. Part of what Grand audience members are drawn to, besides the love of music and storytelling, is the architectural achievement that is the Met. But before the Met at Lincoln Center, there was the old Met.

In America it is the old and the new *Met* that defined the style of opera houses for North America. The old Met was built in 1854 as the Academy of Music, and it patronized the upper crust of New York, who were reluctant to admit new members. Members included the Morgans, the Roosevelts, the Vanderbilts and the Astors (Griffin, 2007, p. 180). The auditorium was built for the audience to see opera, but also to be seen at the opera, with a total of 122 box seats. The stage was small and the performances were rather static. In the early years, operas were performed in Italian and then later in German until it was finally decided that operas should be performed in their original language (p. 180). After a fire in 1892, the building was renovated but still felt too small. It was not until 1966 that the new Met was built at Lincoln Center with a seating capacity of four thousand. While the Grand was built for all audiences, not just the wealthy, the auditorium has seen renovations that improved the experience of the theater. The Grand stage is small, and the backstage almost nonexistent. The Ellsworth theater has become an anchor of downtown and a local institution.

Mrs. August Belmont of the Metropolitan Opera Guild said that the Met is one of the few great opera houses of the globe and whether it be through junior performances,

touring performances, lectures and exhibitions, war time activities or its radio program, the Met is a national institution (The Metropolitan Opera Guild, 1944, p. 71). Perhaps though, the most far reaching program to date is its live Saturday radio broadcasts that are an informal means of introducing the less experienced members of the public to the ambitious arias of the opera company. On Christmas Day in 1931, Texaco sponsored the first national opera radio broadcast relayed in its entirety from the Met, which was *Hansel and Gretel*. Opera had been broadcast by radio before in America, but never in its entirety. From coast to coast, a new audience was developed and would continue through contemporary times. The voice of Milton Cross carried the responsibilities of plugging in commentary during intermissions. During the first thirteen years of the radio broadcasts, 267 performances of sixty seven operas went on the air as an estimated ten to thirteen million tuned in during this short introduction to the program that continues today (p. 74). The Met continues its outreach to the public through various programs, and the radio broadcasts still broadcast to this day. These programs that extend beyond the walls of the Met capture the imagination of its audiences and cultivates a fan base outside of the urban center of New York City.

For Paul Jackson (1992), his love affair with opera started in 1940 as he tuned in to the NBC Blue Network in Texas:

> On a snowy afternoon in a small town on Michigan's upper peninsula, a thirteen-year-old randomly twists the Philco dial. His ear, already tuned by a half-dozen years of piano lessons, is caught and held by a lively exchange between a high-flying soprano and a meaty bass: 'Rataplan'

> growls Salvatore Baccaloni, 'Rataplan' echoes Lily Pons in the drum duet from *La Fille du Regiment*. (p. xiii).

Jackson was hooked early and the afternoons he spent with the radio broadcasts stayed with him to this day, as the performers seemed as "familiar as friends." Not only were these radio broadcasts unique aural histories of the Metropolitan Opera, but they were significant factors in building new audiences through the air waves.

Jackson (1992) quotes Mrs. August Belmont, who stated, "Opera has grown from a private luxury to a national necessity" (p. 3). An independent survey in 1939 showed that 10.5 million listeners in America tuned in for the opera each Saturday and during this effort to democratize opera an essay contest called on audiences to define what the Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts meant to them. There were 17,000 responses. A telephone company worker from Cleveland wrote, "On Saturday afternoons, a third-floor walk-up becomes a Seventh Heaven where one listens and lives and grows" (p. 3). What is viewed by many Americans as an elitist art form that does not appeal to middle class sensibilities found its way out of the high class opera house and into the living room of everyday Americans. Now opera is finding its way into cinemas, but it is not the first time opera has been projected onto the screen.

A Snap Shot of Opera on Screen

Having been captured on film since the beginning of the twentieth century, opera has a history on screen that has been both successful and awkward. With appearances on television, opera has been difficult to box in to a screen, whether large or small. Motivation for operas on screen are born out of a desire to showcase talented singers,

promote audio recordings of operas, to add prestige to a commercial venture or to motivate audiences to improve audience education on high-minded taste for culture (Citron, p. 20). Marcia Citron (2000) points to a desire to bring two types of media with differing aesthetic values together. Other reasons may be to widen their audience and of course to entertain. Where some critics see a narrowing effect of opera tastes and audience size, Citron sees a widening. Citron states, "the connection between opera and media (cinema, television, and video) over their century-long history can be characterized as fluctuating relationships of continuation, dependence, enrichment, and competition" (p. 23). Whereas cinema is the successor of opera historically from the late nineteenth-century, they both have a tradition of mass appeal for melodramatic and spectacle-driven performances. This is typified in opera films from the silent era in such works as *Tosca* (1900) that had mass appeal in a way that merges high art and low art found in Italian operas (Citron, p. 24). The interactions across disciplines is complex and subject to commercial, cultural and political influences. In1893 Thomas Edison wrote in the *New York Times* that,

> my intention is to have such a happy combination of photography and electricity that a man can sit in his parlor, see depicted upon a curtain the forms of the players in opera upon a distant stage and hear the voices of the singers. (p. 25)

While foreshadowing television, Edison is also foreshadowing the opera simulcasts from The Met to the Grand in Ellsworth, Maine. Although not private like television, the

operas from New York to cinemas worldwide is seeing a resurgence in the moving image medium, much like the success of soundless operas from 1915.

When sound was introduced to film, screen operas no longer had the separation of sound to image and now had a soundtrack that was married to the visuals. Before there was the actor on screen and the singer in the cinema. In the silent era, there was a clear separation and distinction when live music was emitted to accompany the screen. After that the on-screen performers would lip-sync to pre-recorded performances and the singing was no longer in the cinema with the audience. Citron (2000) declares, "these shadowy likenesses of real people are only miming and resemble ghostly vessels that transmit sound, or rather appear to transmit sound" (p. 29). This space and time-shift not only has an effect on vocal performances but also musical performances. Citron notes that early on music "was needed to overcome the sense of film as a technical apparatus and to breathe life into the ghostly figures on the screen - in other words to humanize the mechanical images and to create the fiction of reality" (p. 30). Opera would serve as an example of how to bridge cuts between camera angles and became a popular vehicle for story adaptations to the screen.

In his 1936 article found in *Etude,* Harrison Lawler predicted a "screen grand opera" that would propel opera into the mainstream. He hoped that acting on the stage would improve and that the world of the Metropolitan Opera and the world of Hollywood would converge to improve both mediums (p. 30). Films from many different countries contributed to opera on the screen, including Italy, the birthplace of opera. However, innovation of the filmic tools remained static while keeping singers at a distance, with

very few close-ups. This glorifies opera in the theater, in the same way that television did.

Performers from opera have long been sought to fill cinematic roles and the Metropolitan Opera has certainly had its share of talent to cross over. Geraldine Farrar of the Met happened to not be on tour in Europe in 1914 and thus found herself lending her prestige to film work. Jeremy Tambling (1987) notes that she was "a woman in the most respected art form, stooping to conquer in film: she was a prima donna: she had had European associations: had been rumored to have been involved with the Crown Prince of Berlin" (p. 41). This type of status was good for opera on the screen. When sound came into the world of film, Lawrence Tibbett, a baritone from the Met was marketed to film audiences as "the greatest voice of the Metropolitan Opera now yours" (p. 41). There is a fascination with performers, such as Grace Moore who had an intriguing career on screen, to come from a medium of prestige and good taste in the opera to a medium of grit and grass roots. Why people come to opera on the screen starts with who is on the screen and where it is coming from.

To translate a theatrical production from the stage to the screen requires adapting to the technological needs of the medium. Most television productions of events tie multiple cameras together with synchronous sound and lighting that suits the medium, and does not necessarily suit a theatrical production. Mass media has the ability to reach large amounts of audience members and has the potential to educate, inspire and build public taste for the arts. Whether the screen opera is a film production, a studio shoot or a relay from the opera house, operas have influenced the structure and performances seen

on television and in the cinema. There is a greater influence from opera to the cinema than to television because of the shared function of the two mediums and the time period that they were simultaneously developed (Citron, 2000, p. 42).

According to Marcia J. Citron (2000) for opera to work on the screen, it must be the right opera in order for it to be suitable for both the stage and the cinema. The author of *Opera on Screen* contends that there are difficulties in translation between live vocal and orchestral performances to a theatrical exhibition. With silent films, the live musical accompaniment allowed for audiences to feel the emotion of the voice. After recorded sound was added to film, the performances felt canned with distilled emotion. Opera also unfolds slower than television or film and often tends to have action that is static (p. 6). Sam Abel finds screen operas historically to efface the "epic quality of opera" and narrow the gap between viewer and performer in a way that increases distance (p. 7). Abel is concerned that the live opera dies when it is contained within a form that can not be reworked. The concern is also that screen opera will replace live opera and that the pressure of reproducing a flawless performance to be archived is unrealistic to the nature of the original piece of art.

Citron argues that screen opera (in which we can apply to opera simulcasts in the cinema) brings the viewer into an intimate relationship with the performers on the big screen that is larger than life (p. 7). She contends that "live and screen opera do not compete with each other but enhance each other" and that screen opera " expands the interpretive potential of opera in all its forms as it makes the genre available to millions who might not otherwise see it (pp. 7-8). She recognizes the hypnotic phenomena of

opera on screen, but refuses to believe that the appeal of each format and their individual aesthetics would hamper the progress of the other, but that it would rather promote the other format in the same spirit that opera has always embraced multiple and diverse disciplines (p. 9). Citron adds, "in our media-saturated culture, the proscenium arch cannot contain this extravagant art form" (p. 9).

Ken Wlaschin (2004) who wrote *Opera on Screen: A Guide to 100 Years of Films and Videos* claims, "we are the heirs of Edison's dream, the first generation to have access in our homes to a century of screen opera" (vi). It is amazing to think about the progress that has taken place over the past 100 plus years in the history of film, the history of opera and the history of opera on film. From the Lumiere brothers, George Melies and D. W. Griffith, who all adapted hundreds of short films of operas. From the many adaptations of Charles Gounod's *Faust* to Len Chaney's MGM release of *The Phantom of the Opera* in 1926 (Tibbetts, 2004, p. 2). John C. Tibbetts (2004) notes that some opera performers found their voice in the production of opera films, as was the case with Giovanni Martinelli, John Charles Thomas and Marion Talley who performed in some of the first films adapted from Verdi and Puccini. Marinelli's performance was said in *Variety* to bring the cinema audiences to their feet cheering. In 1929, Warner Bros. reported to having six hundred operatic short films "in the can" and that seventeen hundred theaters were showing them (p. 3). However, by 1930 the performances were static and canned productions that Tibbetts called

> Neither movies nor operas, but anemic lifeless hybrids. The relentlessly intimate camera eye exposed how ludicrous were operatic conventions

> like stiff poses, stock gestures, fat tenors, and bosomy sopranos. Worse, the primitive microphones made the voices sound cramped, tinny, and dry. (p. 3)

The result being that grand opera films took a back seat to short films, anthologies about opera and the flashy musicals that held higher production values. This fluctuation of success continued, despite at times awkward and laughable moments that were not meant to be awkward.

In popular culture, opera has always been ripe for satire, as in *The Little Rascals*, where Alfalfa played the role of Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*. Warner Bros. also put out an animated spoof with Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd in their version of "The Rabbit of Seville" as well as in their version of "What's Opera Doc?" in 1957 where the entire Ring Cycle was trashed within 6 minutes. Finally, the Marx Bros. did it best in their production of Verdi's *Il Trovatore* in 1935 for the film *A Night at the Opera*, where the scenery was demolished, the conductors were caught in a duel and the brothers found themselves swinging from the fly system into the pit of musicians (p. 5).

The satire of opera in mainstream films and television reveals the differences in American tastes to that of traditional European culture. That attitude may have contributed to the difficulty in funding opera films, as well as the challenges in adapting a full-length opera into a feature program for the screen. The most discouraging feature of adaptation to the screen is the sound-recording techniques. The singing being post-dubbed stitched the sound separately from the live action on screen. Tibbetts (2004) notes how distracting this is as it betrays the ambience of the voice and in its stead

receives too clean of a recording that creates a noticeable distance between the performer and the audience. He adds, "devoted opera goers must be dismayed at this, since so much of the value of an opera performance lies in its immediacy" and that voices "betray the physical conditions of the given moment" (p. 7). This contributes to the loss of the dramatic impact as well as the connection that the voice has to the performance, the story, and the characters interaction. Tibbetts concludes, "the realms of stage, film, and television will lose their distinctive boundaries and implode upon one another, creating a new proscenium of story and song" (p. 8). It is through the *Live in HD* program where voices and performers can achieve the immediacy that early screen operas lacked in a compelling manner to a viewer that feels the excitement and connection to others that one feels when witnessing breaking news.

This implosion and breaking of boundaries is found in the *Live in HD* program with its performances that have synchronous audio and video, technological innovation and a groundbreaking new medium of delivering opera to opera-goers. This is much like what happened when radio broadcasts entered American homes. But the road to the radio was not a simple one. Just as opera HD simulcast organizers, Julie and Robert Borchard-Young convinced Peter Gelb about the possibilities for technological innovations for opera broadcasts with the video simulcasts, Merlin Aylesworth had to convince general manager, Giulio Gatti-Casazza in 1931 that the fidelity and quality of the opera would hold up in transmission. It wasn't until a test during *Madama Butterfly* that Gatti was convinced that once he knew the abilities of the audio engineer to control levels of the singers amplification from the stage to the radio broadcasts that he agreed to go forth

with the national program (Jackson, 1992, p. 8). What almost did not come to fruition has influenced innovation ever since to draw larger audiences to the opera. It paved the way for HD video simulcasts to evolve into the spectacle that it has become today. Peter Gelb, a former executive of Sony, was not as hard to convince as Gatti. Julie Borchard-Young says that the radio station distribution was an important foundation for the opera simulcasts and that "millions worldwide listen to the Met weekly [on the radio], and *Live in HD* is a natural outgrowth of that devotion" (personal communication). The HD simulcasts continue to preserve what Jackson would call "the aura of a time and a place" through the broadcasts of operas from the Met (p. 488).

The intriguing part of knowing the history of the Met is that it can easily be compared to that of The Grand. Both companies have risen from the ashes of a fire to redefine the nature of a community and the art forms that it exhibits. Both companies have seen financially hard times, and an increasing reliance on patron donations and membership support. Both have seen a decline in live performance attendance and have turned to the very medium that threatens to destroy them, to aid in reaching new audiences. What ties them together is the technological innovations that have driven their programming and the intimacy that the audiences feel in their hall to the performers, whether in the flesh or on the screen.

A Snap Shot of the Grand

The historic Grand Theater in Downtown Ellsworth has a mission "to enrich the lives of people in Downeast and Eastern Maine by presenting diverse, unique, high-quality programs that provide entertaining, artistic, educational and social

experiences" (http://www.grandonline.org/about-2). Their vision is to be an anchor for the arts while preserving a cultural landmark that aims to be inclusive and welcoming to its patrons and the performers that grace their stage. They aim to be "a gathering place for meeting friends, forming community and fulfilling the artistic and cultural yearnings within us all" (http://www.grandonline.org/about-2). The director and the board of directors have expressed an interest in celebrating diversity that engages the community at an affordable ticket price, while at the same time maintaining fiscal stewardship for the performing and media arts center. With an average of 15 board members at a time and about 2 full time and 10 part time employees, the Grand welcomes volunteers from the community and solicits funding from ticket sales, sponsors and fundraising appeal campaigns. The financial stability of the theater has fallen and risen with economic cycles and has had to close its doors temporarily on numerous occasions. Now after over 70 years in business, it has been both a tumultuous and inspiring ride for the theater. The theater has had to balance quality of programming with declining budgets. The *Live in HD* program requires an investment in equipment to meet certain specifications, but once established only seeks a percentage of the box office income with the Met. The Grand has the opportunity to offer high quality content at an affordable agreement that has proven to be profitable for both the Grand and the Met. Like the Met, the Grand also rose from the ashes of a large scale fire.

After Norman Moore, a mentally troubled dishwasher heard voices in his head and proceeded to set the entire downtown ablaze in 1933, it only took a couple of years for the city of Ellsworth to reinvent itself. The Grand was a part of that rebuilding

process, as the city elders wanted a movie theater at one end of downtown and a bank at the other. Today, both buildings stand. What was the Union Trust Bank is now owned by Camden National Bank. What was a movie theater is now a performing and media art house. In 1938, the marquee shone through the night sky as the movie, *Holiday*, with Katherine Hepburn and Cary Grant premiered after a brief introduction by the Ellsworth High School band. A local newspaper stated, "devastated beyond recognition a few years ago but which today needs to bow its head to no city of similar size in New England" (p. 3). That newspaper, *The Ellsworth American*, helped to bring newsreels to the theater and during the 1940s and 50s, the golden age of film, introduced a generation to *Gone with the Wind, The Wizard of Oz,* and *Bambi* as parents would drop their children off at Saturday afternoon matinees as they would get their shopping done.

Local author, Sandy Phippen remembers attending the movies at the Grand as a child. He loved cartoons and westerns with stars such as Roy Rodgers and Gene Autry and later as an adult grew to love film noir movies. Phippen exclaimed, "it was so exciting because you could leave Eastern, Maine, ya know, that's why movies are so special. You could go to Algiers. You could go back in history" (Harris & Cole, 2006). Later generations recalled attending such films as *Around the World in 80 Days, The Swiss Family Robinson, In Search of the Castaways* and several showings of *The Sound of Music*. People describe the theater as a community center where people can get together, be entertained and educated while taking them out of their everyday 9 to 5 lives. Phippen remembers that it was a place that families could go to and people would refer to it as the place to go and to meet friends. Actor, Herb Mitchell believes it is "a place

where dreams could be fulfilled", whether it be as a performer or actor, or an audience member (Harris & Cole, 2006). At times though, those dreams were threatened as television and other media eroded audience size in the movie theater.

The theater often found itself financially in the red. At one time, Thomas Leavitt, a local business man went in to buy a sandwich at a local deli and ended up buying the Grand for $30,000. To combat the onslaught of competing media, the theater was desperate to grab the attention of its audiences. There was a time when a boxing ring was installed and there were semi-professional and amateur fights. Not being a promoter, Leavitt tried everything but soon found himself losing money and had plans drawn up to tear the theater down and raise office buildings in its place. Joel Raymond, a local music promoter and lifetime audience member of the Grand expressed the horror of this prospect that would have robbed the area of the greatest cultural influence of its time. Raymond asked whether the community wanted something that would bring it some light, or a downtown shrouded with office buildings (Harris and Cole, 2006). Harris Strong, a local actor felt the same way, and after an article in a local newspaper, the *Tuesday Weekly*, he led a group to save the theater by purchasing it as a non-profit for $20,000 in 1975. This event cemented the bond that the community had with this theater and showed that they cared about its history and its presence as an anchor for downtown.

The theater needed a lot of work, but after the community pulled together, Noel Paul Stookey of *Peter, Paul and Mary*, re-opened the theater that had improved its space by putting in a 12 foot thrust that allowed for better theatrical performances. Since then live music, live theater, children's programming, films and special events have seen

varying levels of success at the theater. Joel Raymond states, "the Grand is what the public makes of it" and that "everyone can have their time in the spotlight" (Harris and Cole, 2006). Journalist, Stephen Pappas, who wrote a feature on the history of the Grand says the theater makes audience members feel like a part of small time America, which he sees as something that we have lost in the rat race of life. He states, "it's nice to walk into a place, where you know that generations of people have walked in and you know have felt the same thing" (Harris and Cole, 2006). Sandy Phippen is glad to see that the performances continue, as he feels that means a lot to the older generation. He calls the theater "a place of magic" (Harris and Cole, 2006). Former Executive Director, Lee McWilliams sees a little glamour in the older building and says, "it's got a little touch of gold here and there; it has a certain style and uh, a certain swooshiness" (Harris and Cole, 2006).

The style, glamour and magic of this art-deco theater from the 1930s received new seats in 2006 courtesy of board member, Jim Pendergist. The theater also dedicated a new proscenium curtain to long time stage director Ken Stack, around the same time that it received a new paint job, updated rest rooms and acquired new lighting and sound equipment. The Marquee has been rebuilt and more renovations are coming as the theater goes through the application process of receiving placement on the register of National Historic Places. Soon after the death of long-time film program director, Skip Baker, passed away, the 35mm film projectors were retired to make way for the age of digital cinemas. While a new 35mm film projector was purchased to bridge the gap to the next generation, it has seen little use due to technical problems and the cost of

exhibiting 35 mm prints. The film program primarily shows movies on DVDs, BluRay discs and at one time even off of a server from film distributors in New York. While the theatrical productions have receded in recent years, and live music audience sizes declined, the film program has diminished itself to special holiday events and video festivals like the *Manhattan SHORTS* and *Banff Mountain Film Festival*.

The *Live in HD* program from the Met came to the Grand a year after it had been in Rockland, Maine at the Strand Theater during its inaugural season. The intrigue built as people from the Ellsworth area would travel up to two hours one way to attend the simulcasts to Rockland that first year the Met offered its simulcasts. During that time, the Grand pitched itself as a prime venue for the series to be held at the theater for the second season. A new digital projector was purchased, surround sound speakers, amps and a new sound processor were put into place, all in hopes that the Met would choose to come to Ellsworth. I worked closely with the board on the collaboration with the Met and spent my evenings during a vacation in Kansas City in the hotel lobby until midnight some nights to relay correspondences between the parties. When the deal came through and the contract was sent, there was much excitement amongst the board and employees of the Grand. There was a new hope for a theater that just recently had been in a great amount of debt, and had just seen a director leave abruptly only to leave a trail of uncertainty. Patrons regularly told me the first year of the program that this was the best thing to happen to Ellsworth in years, and the buzz built as folks from miles away would come to see some of the greatest opera singers and orchestra on earth in a close-up on the screen. While the attendance was at a high during the first two seasons, it has since

leveled off and continues to fill at least half of the theater at all simulcasts. The operas have also seen an increase in the number of shows of its type being exhibited.

Between the years of 2008 and 2011, the numbers behind the opera simulcasts in comparison with other programs at the Grand reveal that *Live in HD* from the Met has brought in a total of 10,601 tickets sold (See Figure 2.1 - Total Ticket Sales & Figure 2.2 - Percentage of Total Ticket Sales). Of those ticket sales, youth represent 90 tickets sold and .81% of the demographic, adults represent 2,854 tickets sold and 26.14% of the demographic, and senior citizens represent 7,657 tickets at 73.05% of the overall demographic. The program has seen a slight ebb and flow in ticket sales after the second season, which was by far the most successful (likely due to the initial excitement about the program), while season three saw less audience members in the house (likely due to an aging demographic and market saturation of the opera simulcasts popping up at venues only an hour away from the Grand). While the ticket sales for the *Live in HD* program (not including the encore performances that are not live) over 32 shows saw an average of 331 tickets sold at each event, the most successful run of operas came in the second season between *Tosca, Aida, Turandot* and *Carmen* that all saw over 450 seats sold out of 480 possible tickets, with the most ticket sales being a tie between *Carmen* and *Madama Butterfly* with 466 tickets sold. The lowest attended live opera simulcast was the contemporary opera, *Nixon in China* with 208 tickets sold. The most intriguing bit of data is the large support of an elderly population and the minuscule representation of youth at these opera performances. Most likely the few youth audience members are being brought in by their grandparents or parents for a cultural lesson, but it is obvious

from these numbers that the demographic that most supports and is most enthusiastic about opera in Ellsworth, Maine is an aging one late in their years. The advantage of this for the Grand is that these folks represent a group underserved by its other programming. While bringing in people with the monetary support to buy season tickets there is also the opportunity for philanthropic donors to contribute to the non-profit auditorium. The disadvantage is that these folks struggle to make it to the theater because of physical limitations, and they also are dying off each year.

The Met receives a percentage of box office revenue, so the Grand sees a significant amount of ticket sale revenue. It is unknown as to whether the Grand represents a typical venue for the opera simulcasts, but one can easily see the potential for profit due the the large number of venues throughout the world that participate in this venture. But how does it compare with other programming at this art house in Ellsworth, Maine during the same time span that it has been around?

The opera simulcasts from the Met have become a significant source of income for the theater with the most tickets sold of any event and 25% of the total revenue for the theater (See Figure 2.3 - Percentage of Total Revenue). Noteworthy is that these figures do not include the other live simulcast events that include the *National Theater Live* from London program, opera encore rebroadcasts, which represent 8% of the total revenue. It is worth separating these groups, not only for the argument of live versus rebroadcast (which is a significant factor for later chapters) but also due to the different audience that draws live straight theater and live opera performances. While it is not a perfect comparison, due to the multiple runs of most of the other events (besides most music

concerts), it is fair to say that the live opera simulcasts combined with the other simulcast events and encores provide the theater with a large portion of performance income for the theater (See Figure 2.4 - Number of Shows).

Figure 2.1 - Total Ticket Sales

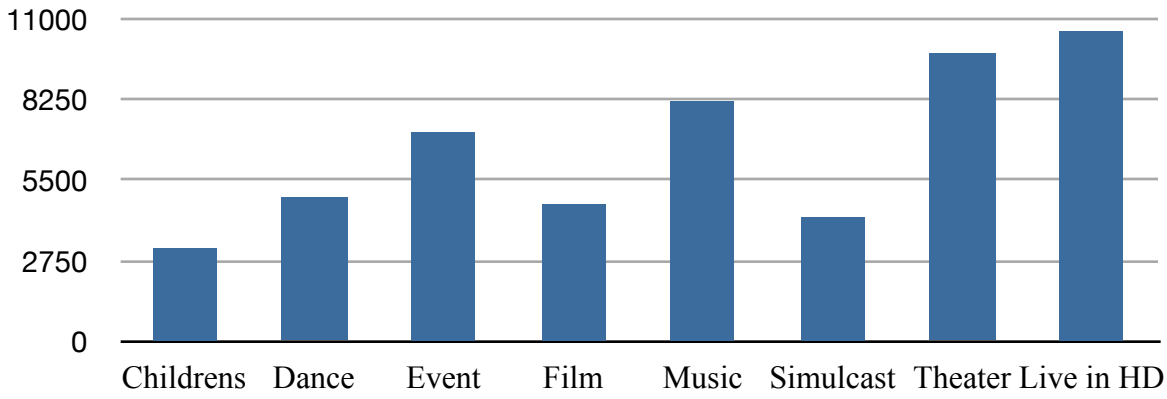


Figure 2.2 - Percentage of Total Ticket Sales

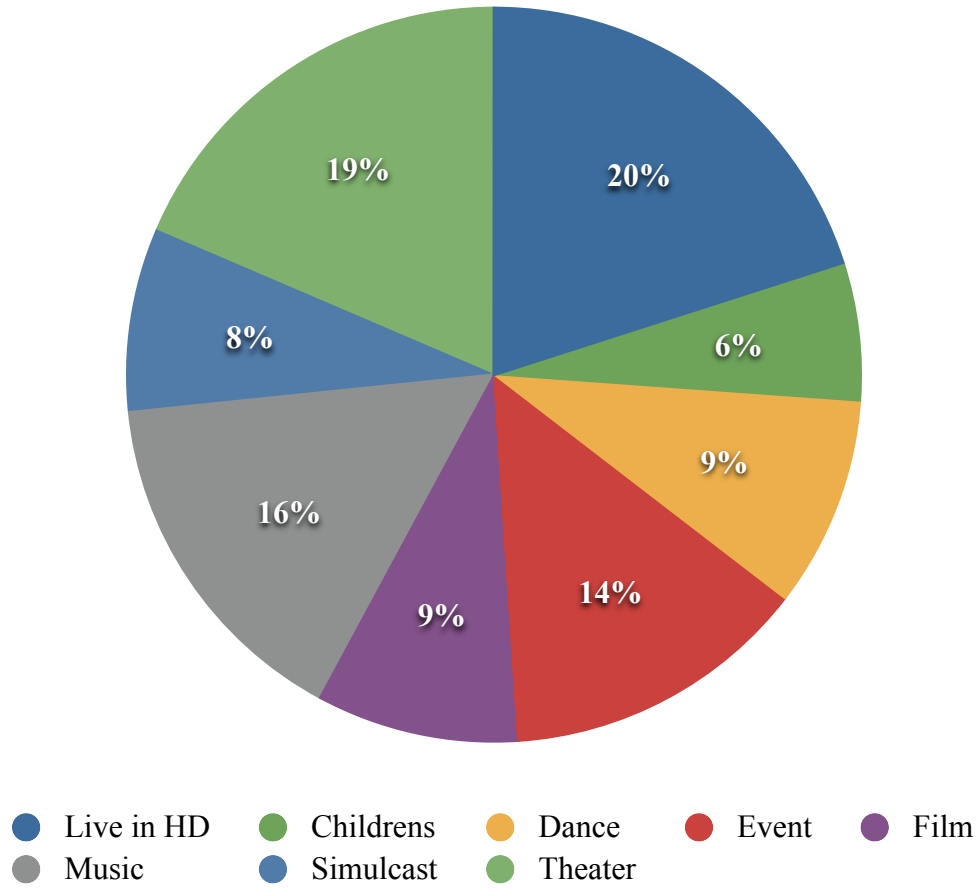


Figure 2.3 - Percentage of Total Revenue

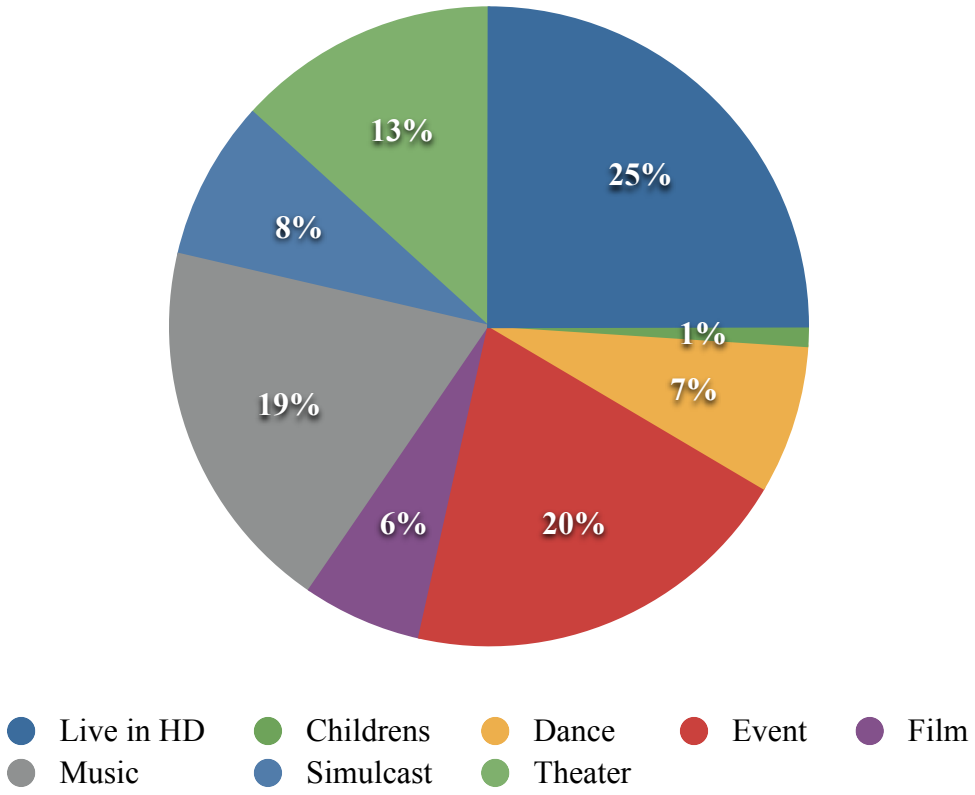
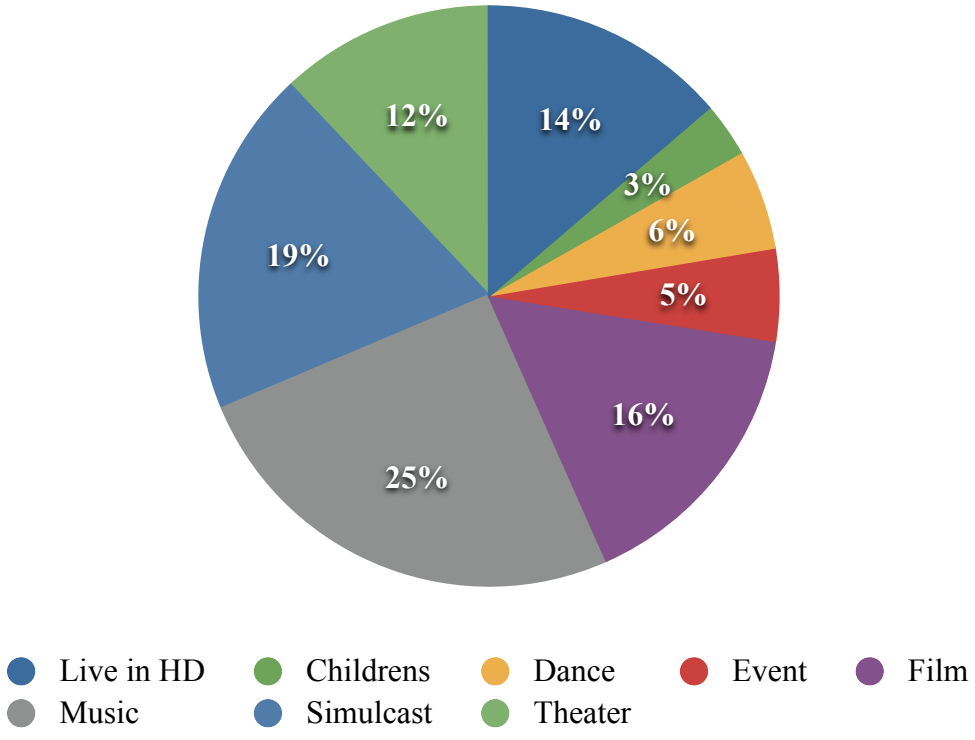


Figure 2.4 - Number of Shows



The ticket sale averages are greater for Events such as comedy acts and community fundraisers, Children's performances and live Theater, but these ticket sale averages may be inadequate to compare to the live simulcasts due to multiple shows for those events versus the single live opera screening that we are focusing on in this research. While those ticket sale averages may be skewed, it is clear that the *Live in HD* program has a larger portion of income for the number of shows that it puts on. Comparatively the live opera simulcasts represent only 14% of the total number of shows over this time period, while the encore rebroadcasts represent 19% of the total number of shows. Beating out both of these are live musical concerts, which represent 25% of the total number of shows. The special events are worth noting for their overall average success with ticket sales and revenue over a small number of shows, but these special events are an exception to the rule when it comes to typical events at the theater. However, for this study, these numbers reveal not only the popularity of the live opera simulcasts, but the audience pull that it has for a theater that has resurrected itself over the years and continues to redefine itself as the cultural hub of the Downeast, Maine region. While this provides data that can quantify the success of the program this study also requires a qualitative approach to understanding why people are attending the opera simulcasts. For those that have not been to an opera simulcast the next section should offer a snap shot of a typical day at this Downeast, Maine art house during the *Live in HD* program.

A Snap Shot of *The Met: Live in HD* at The Grand

On a blustery October morning, I approach the Grand Theater for the first time of the opera simulcast season. It has been two months since the "Best of the Met" summer series ended. The box office manager and cleaning man greet me with smiles and anticipation for the day. They tell me that there are close to 300 pre-sold seats and they are anticipating walk-ups. The theater is empty and the echos of my footsteps ring all the way back to 1938 when the theater was built. As I walk up the winder stairs to the projection booth I always feel a presence over my shoulder that forces me to look back, like Orpheus, to his deceased bride. As I start up the digital projection equipment I feel the breath of Skip Baker, the founder of the film program at The Grand. Skip passed away 3 years after training me on the retired 35 mm film projectors. I stroll backstage to turn on the amps for the speakers and take in the smell of old sets and costumes, cables and ropes, curtains and paint. There used to be a light on a stand that remained on for the evening that was referred to as a "ghost lamp." That no longer burns, but since then the theater has been refinished for paint, seats and a new marquee, and is applying to be on the national historic register.

I walk out to the roof of the theater to check on the condition of the satellites. There are two of them, each three meters in circumference, their bases weighted down by cement blocks. I catch the spectacular view of downtown Ellsworth as shoppers go by below and filter into and out of the local farmers market, where folks are holding down the canopies to their stands from large gusts of wind. The Union River runs in the distance, and City Hall and the Hancock County Courthouse stand vigilantly on the

hillside. The smell of restaurants and bakeries fill the air as I close the door to the roof and descend into the projection booth to test the surround speakers to the theater. After testing the video signal quality and strength, I sit and wait quietly in the empty house that will soon fill up with aging opera enthusiasts, eager to revisit the spectacle of live opera on screen transmitted from the Metropolitan Opera in New York City.

The popcorn machine stands quietly in the corner of the concession stand. There will be no popcorn today, yet the remains from last nights movie sit placidly as the audience fills in, and the buzz builds amidst friends and neighbors finding their seats, and settling into the fourth season. Patrons welcome back old friends like school kids in the fall, giddy and laughing. With this group, there is a sense of relief as they have made it to yet another year. Though not everyone has returned for the season. There are audience members who have passed away, or cannot make it out of their homes, and are surely listening on their radio to the live broadcast on National Public Radio.

After a series of slides from the Grand about sponsors and upcoming shows, there is a switchover to the live slides coming from the Met, interspersed with shots of the audience in New York. Those that are here watch the audience at the Met as they find their seats, and listen as the orchestra warms up at Lincoln Center in New York City. Like any other series of events that are regularly attended by season ticket holders, faces at the Met and faces at the Grand are familiar, friendly and welcoming.

Chloe laughs wildly in excitement over seeing old friends returning from the previous season. Steve, who brought his mother early, volunteers for every opera simulcast, and today is no different. Kathy brings in sandwiches that she donates to the

theater for hungry opera-goers. Like many things at the Grand, if someone would like to see something happen at the Grand (like sandwiches for sale during intermissions), then they best get busy to make it happen. Sheri, a local real estate agent and Daniel, a former employee at the Grand, exchange notes on the upcoming season lineup in the lobby. Tom and Richard approach me with big smiles and handshakes as we chat about each others adventures throughout the summer months, since we last saw each other in the spring. They tell me that they are looking forward to another season of the live simulcasts. Tom proclaims that this is the best act in town for these months, referring to the time of year that New England prepares for winter, and seasonal shops and restaurants close down until June, and the brilliant fall colors invite tourists for the last visit of the year. The year round Downeast Mainers, the ones who have not turned into snowbirds headed for Florida, are here for the winter, the wood stoves, and the breathtaking blankets of snow that bowl in with a Nor'east wind.

The Grand's director saunters down the slightly inclined aisle as she makes her way to the stage. She turned her own light on, and like clockwork, her spotlight switches off on its own for five seconds as she approaches the stage. She waves her hand towards the microphone stand that awaits her, and the light re-appears (she tells me that it is the ghost of Skip Baker playing tricks on her). She thanks her season sponsor, who has a table set up in the lobby for folks at intermission, and invites audience members to upcoming shows, including the *National Theater Live* simulcast events from England (which unfortunately are not as well attended). As she descends the stairs of the stage, I

bring the sound of the Met up, the lights fade down, and another season begins for the *Live in HD* program from the Met at the Grand Theater in Ellsworth, Maine.

Soprano Renee Fleming introduces General Manager, Peter Gelb, who is backstage in the dressing room with Anna Netrebko, the star of Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*, a company premiere, and the premiere of the 2011-2012 Live at the Met season. The backstage host, typically an opera star as well, the staff at the Met, the conductors and the Met Orchestra have become characters throughout the previous seasons, and now the Grand Audience have established an almost parasocial interaction with the host. These personas are critical in telling the story of opera on screen, and are part of the reason that audiences return to the opera simulcasts at the cinemas. The audience at the Grand performs an act every time it enters the doors and they carry out a tradition that goes back in time. What is unique about this audience is that they have a parasocial bond with the on-screen performers and a connection to the music and the story, but they also have a bond with each other that is nurtured and incubated.

This chapter has put into context the historical influences of opera as a whole and the Met. We looked at the history of the Grand leading up to the *Live in HD* program in order to provide a backstory for both institutions. It is the mixture of national culture and local history that brings folks to this program for a common fellowship. But how do other audiences and critics react to the program and what can that tell us about why they are attending opera simulcasts in their towns and theaters? If we were to look at what critics and other audiences are saying about the program it may allow us insight into whether they share similar or different experiences.

CHAPTER 3

A BIG CLOSE-UP ON THE STAGE

Critics and opera goers have reacted to the simulcasts in powerful ways. This new way of opera going at the Grand opens up critical issues that other art houses and cinemas have confronted as well. Analyzing existing criticisms and reactions will shed light on similar and differing points of view from the perspective of the Grand patron. These reviews and accounts allow us to explore universal matters of the opera simulcast experience when considering why audiences are attending these events at the Grand. While diving into the critics reactions, we can contrast them with Grand opera-goers as well as my own interpretations of the program and ultimately set the stage for later chapters on the Live at the Met as a potential media event and as a Performance Ritual. This chapter will move through critical responses to the program and attempt to situate them in context to the Grand. I want to consider what others are saying about the program and what the program is achieving throughout the country and what impact it is having on opera goers like those at the Grand. The first section will consider whether culture is better processed locally, which leads into the following section on the audiences position and privileges to the program. Questions of fidelity and intimacy arise, as I consider how critics are framing the program as opera porn, which leads us into discussing the cinematic influence on style and presentation, and how that might influence audiences in attendance. All of these sections address the audience relationship to the program, and how the technology influences the cultural experience of opera.

"Every Note Utterly Human, Simultaneously Imperfect and Flawless"

Robert and Julie Borchard-Young are behind the technology that makes the simulcasts for the *Live in HD* programs possible. The two began broadcasting live events in 2003 when they worked together on bringing a Melissa Etheridge concert to audiences in Germany and Holland (Thielman, 2010). Julie says that "it's great if we all make money, but [this is] a little more mission driven. It's about bringing great art to people" (Thielman, 2010). Their company, BY Experience, also has brought audiences electronically together with Ira Glass, Robbie Williams, Garrison Keillor, as well as live simulcasts from the National Theater in London. Similar to the Metropolitan Opera live broadcasts to movie theaters, The National Theater series (*NT Live*) transmits high definition camera angles and surround sound to international audiences. When *NT Live* premiered with Helen Mirren in *Phedre*, a theater owner in California said, "what people are excited about and why they want to go see it is for a little town like Larkspur, Helen Mirren's just not coming. We're just not going to see her live onstage in our town" (Gamerman, 2009). Helen Mirren still hasn't come to Larkspur, but the likeness of Miss Mirren is enough for many. This is true for Ellsworth, Maine as well. Audience members will not have access to stars like Helen Mirren, Renee Fleming or Placido Domingo, but can vicariously share a virtual moment of presence with such talent at the cinema. It is a privilege to be in the actual presence of Helen Mirren, but the live simulcasts are privileged enough to feel special to audiences. It is as much about them being there with other local patrons, as it is about who is not there; those that are not

experiencing this special moment, do not share even this slice of culture. And if they cannot share the same space as Renee Fleming, then at least they can share the same time.

To reach the public on a grander scale, transmissions have been a device to bring people to come to the Met. More people will be able to enjoy the work of artists, despite it not being in person. It is live, and just as the popularity of opera was waning, this event has peaked in economically depressing times just as in 1931 when radio broadcasts of the Met were introduced. Again in the 21st century, technology has driven innovation (Johnson, 2008). The San Francisco Opera (SFO) has followed the Met in this modern presentation of opera, but have not been as successful. The SFO broadcasts are not live and are post-produced. SFO General Director, David Gockley, is not convinced that the lack of being live was as much of an impact on ticket sales as was the Mets quick dominance and exclusive partnerships with international distributors. Gockley admits, "the most powerful thing about the Met's live broadcast is that it mirrors the radio broadcasts that have happened for 75 years (Johnson, 2008). Gockley recognizes that previously built national audiences, carved out over decades on Saturday afternoons, prove to be difficult to compete with. However, the company has the ability to post-produce out glitches and circumvent the difficulties of live transmissions that have at times hounded the Met. Ultimately, Gockley sees an opportunity to offer offbeat works and unusual repertory, whereas the Met has stuck with more traditional fare (Johnson, 2008). Instead of Carmen and Madama Butterfly, the SFO features Stewart Wallace's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, based on an Amy Tan novel. But will this over-saturate the market? It has not in Ellsworth at the Grand. While there may be a crowd for

untraditional opera pieces, they have not come out as strongly as audiences that are looking for traditional pieces. The contract that the Grand has with the Met also controls what opera content, both live and video, that can be exhibited so that means the SFO does not have a chance to be presented at the Grand. The Met is staking out a corner market at cinemas. If there is a movie house that does not have a contract with the Met because they are too close to another theater that does, then there are a couple of other options, but they are limited, and most are not live options. Art houses that are competing for live simulcasts, also are balancing other traditional performing arts pieces, and there are patrons that are concerned with the inundation of mediated video performances.

Lawrence Johnson (2008) questions whether close-ups, backstage POVs, dolly shots, and buttered popcorn will abandon the traditions of live opera performances. Peter Gelb believes it to be like Monday Night Football as "you're getting extra information and commentary, but there is still no replacement for the visceral thrill, excitement, and sound of being in the actual opera house" (Johnson, 2008). Gelb sees the high-wire tension of a live opera performance as having a quality that cannot be replaced by post-production. Gelb adds:

> It's about the true impression that's being conveyed rather than something that has been made surgically perfect. These are not movies. These are live events on a giant screen, which is an appropriate forum for the larger-than-life art form that is opera. (Johnson, 2008)

However, the fact that simulcasts offer such filmic techniques that alter the performers approach to opera will naturally alter the way cinema audiences experience opera, which is beamed through close-ups and surround sound.

Multiple camera angles mean that performers must always be on their game. Daniel J. Wakin (2009) points out that singers now must worry about things that are usually invisible to house audiences such as spraying saliva, straining to hit a high note or turning upstage to clear their throat (p. AR1). Susan Graham, a mezzo-soprano, says that "sometimes opera is not an up-close spectator sport", but admits "we go the extra mile with realism" when applying less exaggerated makeup for live HD simulcasts (p. AR1). High-Definition technology can allow viewers to see tears well up, but it can also reveal vacant piercings in ears, and wandering eyes of bored or distracted chorus members (Tracy, 2008). But what if performers do not wish to have everything so up close and personal? Opera purists argue that the invasive mediated simulcasts of opera in cinema may be what kills the opera house.

A small number of patrons at the Grand are skeptical of this in your face approach. One disgruntled simulcast audience member wrote directly to General Manager, Peter Gelb and expressed that this "wasn't opera as it is heard in live performance", and despite the number of people that are able to hear the Met performances in all their glory, that "the glory is far too exaggerated by the time we receive it" (personal communication, March 21, 2009). The frustrated patron admits that a friend recently was let down by a live performance by Renee Fleming because it did not match the quality put out by the live simulcasts. He fears that new prospective audiences

will be ruined by the digital transmissions, and that there should be an effort to make the cinema experience as realistic as possible. The writer confesses his lifelong affection toward The Met, and shares various firsthand experiences in New York. While he is excited by the possibilities, he confesses, "I have mixed feelings about the HD stuff. I love being able to connect to the Met from this distant place; but please, encourage them to turn down the volume" (personal communication, March 21, 2009). It is apparent that this audience member is comparing his lifetime of experience as a Lincoln Center patron to his short-lived experience at the cinema. What is not apparent is his confidence in the mission of the digital simulcast to introduce opera to new fans on cinematic terms. The simulcasts set expectations of opera-going that have purists worried. It has Ann Patchett of *The Wall Street Journal* speculating whether opera goers should be shopping locally for their culture.

Patchett (2008) notes how the opera simulcast is transforming the experience of culture and diffusing art in new ways. Raised in Nashville on the Grand Ole Opry, Patchett needed to research opera for a book she was writing. She would purchase plane tickets, hotel rooms and cab fares to get her to New York City, and found herself enthralled in a new habit. She could have listened in on the radio, but she realized what hooked her were the visual elements that caught her eye. Then Patchett could experience live broadcasts in high-definition and surround sound at various movie theaters across the country. For $20 she watched Anna Netrebko perform the Bellini opera, *I Puritani*. Patchett exclaims,

> I was seeing it on a screen so large that the smallest gesture of a hand, the delicate embroidery on a skirt, was clearly visible. I could see Ms. Netrebko's tongue inside her mouth and see how it shaped the air that made the note. I could see the conductor, yes, the crisp gesture of his wrist, but my God, I could see the French horn player as well. I could look into the eyes of the chorus one by one, every man and woman focused in their part. It was Opera Enormous, every note utterly human, simultaneously imperfect and flawless. (p. W1)

Beyond the new way of seeing and hearing the opera, audience members avoid high ticket prices, long cues to the facilities and lines to get a drink at intermission. They also are able to peep in on backstage conversations between artists. At the Grand, the "utterly human" and "simultaneously imperfect and flawless" aspect of the simulcasts is very intriguing to the audience. It is both appealing and revolting all at once. The music, like any digital format is stunning, but almost too clean. The visuals are crisp, but sometimes too revealing. Like at the Grand, it is not only the media that brings Patchett back to her cinema in Nashville. It is her own local community.

Patchett has a relationship with the people that are seated by her. She is a simulcast season ticket holder. She gets to know those audience members around her, and they would in turn watch the Lincoln Center audience do likewise, but on the big screen. Intriguing though Patchett reveals, "like the audience in New York we clap for both arias and curtain calls", yet unlike them, "we are mostly shy about calling out Brava!" (p. W1). It is easy to get wrapped up in the world mediated for them through

surround sound and high-definition video. The Grand audience experiences similar dichotomies of experience, where audience members are removed from performers by geography, but not time, while they are also connected to their fellow audience members at the cinema in both geography and time. However, three out of four ain't bad.

Patchett admits that if she were living in New York, she might not attend some of the operas that she does at her cinema in Nashville. Yet she also addresses how she worries that culture is like vegetables and are better eaten from a local grocer. She ponders, "could I have learned to embrace the Opry the way I have managed to come to peace with okra?" (p. W1). Doubtful, yet optimistic that she is receiving the best of city life, she thanks modern technology for that. She equates her access to opera similar to her access to yoga podcasts, and concludes that there is little reason to travel, if she can get her culture through technology. Which beckons the question of whether opera is better live at Lincoln Center or as transmitted to cinemas. What is the danger of bringing art to the people versus bringing people to the art? Grand audiences are experiencing opera in a new way through its presentation and its engagement with the program, and it too is effecting whether they shop locally or globally for their opera.

"Had We Become the True or Better Audience"

W. Anthony Sheppard (2007), in his review of the Metropolitan Opera HD movie theater broadcasts, lauds the Met for their attempts to "make opera new in America" with their attempt to associate opera with film as well as turn towards film directors and film techniques to embrace opera in a cinematic world. He discusses the engagement with the program as being influenced by the different formats, different performances, different

production elements, our physical location as well as our perception of all these elements (p. 383). Sheppard sees the events to hold some of the same communal effects of the opera house as they attempt to pull theater audiences in through shots of the opera house and its audience members.

Sheppard recalls an experience at the opera house where he was brought in with proper dress and protocol for the occasion, but was dismayed by the caddy and critical comments of certain "stuck up" patrons, as well as loud boos and bad reviews the next week. The occasion was ruined for him, and he did not expect much from his first experience of the opera simulcasts as he made his way up the escalator and through the mall to his stadium style seat.

> However, as I entered the hallway to the darkened theater, sound transformed my surroundings and made me feel as though I was entering the opera house itself. Hearing the orchestra warming up and the hum of the Met audience, it sounded like "being there," only a good bit louder. Having paid $19 for my ticket, and finding that most of the 300 audience members had already settled in, I chose a seat six rows back from the expansive screen. (p. 384)

Sheppard was immersed in the production as he admitted feeling like he was spying on the event, "watching in real time but at a definite remove" (p. 384). Though there were some impediments to the experience, such as a taped introduction before the live event, the clear audibility of the prompter to Placido Domingo (suggesting that he felt almost too close to the performer), a brief appearance of text referencing camera directions that

reinforced the distance created by technology (that also drew laughter from the audience), and finally the shots backstage at the end of the Act when the performers were seen waving to the cameras and congratulating each other (p. 384).

During intermission, Sheppard realized that the audiences position had changed drastically. Instead of an immediate intermission where the audience could mingle and formulate discussions on the performance, the lights remained off as a featurette documentary on the making of the production was shown, and thus framed a response for the audience. The director of the opera, Tan Dun, was the same director that Sheppard had heard booed at the opera house years ago, and now was being positioned as the hero during the short documentary at intermission. While also revealing the secret to the plot, the film influenced the audience reaction to Tan Dun, as they applauded the director for the start of second act. Through this difference in opera going, Sheppard asks the question, "had we become the true or better audience?" (p. 385). While this is not the major question of this research, it may help understand why folks are changing the way they go to the opera and why they are coming to the opera simulcasts at The Grand.

What Sheppard is asking is was the simulcast opera audience a part of a communal performance despite the simulcast being an event of its own. While not having merged with the Met audience, they had been accorded a privileged spectator position. Sheppard states, "at the start we may well have felt "presence envy" as we watched the Met audience arrive in the house" but, "by the end we appeared satisfied with the uniqueness of our own performance event" (p. 385). Besides the stadium seating, this is a good comparison to the experience at the Grand in Ellsworth. There are

things that immerse you into the program, but there are equally things that negate that immersion and remind audience members of their positioning. Being removed from the location sets Grand Audiences at a second hand position, but the fact that it is live and immediate, makes up for this and simultaneously puts us at an advantage while reminding us of our disadvantage.

Jeremy Tambling claimed that the video of the performances involve a "fetishizing of the opera house" in which the "opera house remains the privileged site", thus implying that the event taking place at Lincoln Center is important enough to experience vicariously and possibly make a pilgrimage to the source in New York (p. 386). When considering whether the movie theater transmissions will serve as a substitute for "being there" with closer proximity to home, relaxed dress code, popcorn (at certain sites, not the Grand), cheaper ticket prices, louder sound, backstage access, close-ups and bonus features, it may be that they will only be accepted as an alternative "there" (p. 386). Sheppard asserts that the opera simulcasts could influence aspects of production as well as acting styles. Where Marcia Citron believes that live opera and screen opera compliment each other, Sheppard thinks American opera-goers will be hard pressed to find a more intriguing way of going to the opera, and questions whether the HD transmissions offer a superior form of live operatic experience that still takes place in the presence of a live audience in the movie theater, yet could also risk the danger of becoming an everyday movie screening like the encores have the feel of (p. 387). The crafting of an opera that is relayed to a simulcast audience has a great influence on the audience members at the Grand.

Marcia Citron (Sheppard, 2007) points out that an opera relay is a "carefully crafted construction that is distinct from the performance it is recording" (p. 385). The choice of medium shots and close-ups over sweeping wide shots changes the emphasis on the company and keys in on the stars of the show, creating what Sheppard sees as a "more kinetic and even disorienting and thus further exoticized impression" that serves "to make the performers appear more monumental rather than intimate" and by cross-cutting to the composer, creating an excitement for the person behind the music as a hero of the performance that is the opera (p. 386). These monumental approaches to opera also emphasize the importance of place in an attempt to secure the presence, and perhaps the privilege of the opera house. It could also be argued that the operas at the Grand hold a privileged state, on a local level. The Grand audience member is impressed with the largeness of the opera stars, but it does appear to be both monumental and intimate at the same time. There is both an excitement for the music and the people behind the music. Unlike the radio, it is aurally and visually stunning, and the kinesis that makes it work, adds to the human element of perception and performance.

Dissenters see cinemas as threatening the way audiences see and hear opera as newcomers become trained to react to the electronic sound rather than the live performance. Wakin points to how some worry that vocal training will change, "and that the Met's effort is a deal with the Devil, because it will divert audiences from local opera houses to make the easier, cheaper trip to the mall" (p. AR1). So why should audiences go to the opera house when they can go to the cinema for their opera? Gerard Mortier addressed this to an audience of opera managers and stated, "it's about the live

experience of singing people on stage," as he referred to Orpheus who "went himself to the underworld to sing. He didn't send his videocassette" (p. AR1).

Opera as Porn

Despite this fantasy world layered on top of another fantasy world and an audience that continues to buy into the attraction of the next best thing to being there, and in some peoples opinion, better than being there, there remains a suspicion to video presentations for their mediations and betrayal of live performance. It is evident in this blog posting cited by Emanuele Senici (2010):

> We miss so much anyway, watching these HD broadcasts. The cameras frequently aren't showing what I would like to see. I would like always to see everything on the stage, please. My own eyes will follow and focus as required. Would that they had one camera angle only, fixed somewhere in the house to broadcast the production exactly as a live audience sees it. The fancy camera work (zooming, hovering, etc.) is sometimes visually interesting, but it detracts from the experience. The camera thinks for me and decides for me where my interests lay, and I don't appreciate that. So much is lost when a camera zooms in, when, really, a character needs to be seen and heard as part of the whole and not focused upon, porn style, in the most exciting moments. (p. 63)

This post, in response to the absence of the protagonists fully naked body at the end of the Dance of Seven Veils for the *Live in HD* simulcast of Strauss's *Salome* is found to be fairly typical from the most vocal audience members who find the presentations dubious.

There are some in the Grand that would agree with this, but are unlikely to go as far as wishing one fixed camera position. Those folks are more likely to prefer only the opera house as an option or stay home and listen in on the radio than sit through an opera with a single archaic angle. The point of this program is a cinematic offering of an opera, not a home movie of an opera. The question of censorship is a good one and it is something that was talked about at the Grand during the aforementioned opera simulcast.

In *Salome,* cameras cut away from Karita Mattila as she went full frontal at the end of the dance of the seven veils. If anything, this opera proved that highbrow art can be downright trashy, as later proved by a make-out scene with a decapitated head. So why was it decided that cinemas should be spared the bare breasts of Miss Mattila as typical Lincoln Center audiences were not? Perhaps this usually daring soprano did not care to have her breasts magnified and transmitted around the world (Tracy, 2008). What was a buzz around the cinema pre-show at the Grand, was soon squashed by the announcement that there would be no frontal nudity for the live simulcast. Karita Mattila might have become as synonymous as Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct*, had she transmitted the same performance to cinemas that she had to Lincoln Center audiences, which obviously was not her intentions. Perhaps the director could have taken a cue from those concerned with treating opera like porn and fetishizing on parts rather than a whole. Perhaps at the moment Miss Mattila drops her last veil, the director could have cut to a wide shot of the stage. Although, perhaps the temptation to go to a close-up would have been too much. By censoring performances, the Met negotiates the art that it brings to new audiences and alters the way audiences experience the true art form that purists

defend. Perhaps producers were concerned that cinema audiences would not be able to appreciate the artistic expression of such a display and that their voyeuristic gaze would cheapen the art. It would appear that producers of highbrow art have found a new way to extend barriers beyond the Lincoln Center doors that continue the elitist rift between the classes. This rift fuels the debate about how audiences should experience opera. It is yet another reminder to the cinema opera goer that you are a second-hand patron, and not worthy of everything the opera house offers. What is a fleeting moment in the opera house, is captured and archived on camera, and that is a scary thing for the opera purist. It turns from art to pornography by its infidelity of transmission. The technological medium also fuels that fear of infidelity with the art form.

However, Senici (2010) hopes to go beyond the rhetoric of "fidelity" by focusing on an interest in the relationship between live videos and the technology that carries this media. He is also addressing the multiple meanings of "liveness" as it is claimed, the distinction between live opera simulcasts and studio productions or even opera films, and lastly, the visual, cultural and social contexts in which live operas are produced and consumed (p. 64). The role of the spectator in this program creates an ontology unique to experiencing the nature of a performance. The pleasure of gazing upon a performer in a televisual sense is different from watching a performer on stage. It is much more intimate. Perhaps too intimate.

Melissa Esse (2010) reveals how disturbed critics are by the intrusive physicality and presence of performers in simulcast operas as the singer exposes their technique, as well as what Philip Kennicott says, is their tongues and teeth (p. 81). Henry Pleasants

asks, “what makes them think that the enjoyment of opera is assisted by an examination of a prima donna’s molars or the mole on her cheek or the agitation of her tongue and soft palate?” (p. 81). While the opera illusion often breaks down, Esse points out that opera is inherently a fantastical medium and agrees with Kennicott that opera on the screen should avoid realism at all costs (p. 82). Esse calls attention to what other scholars have lingered on with the themes of presence, distance, intimacy, and liveness, and further questions who is in charge of the utterance of opera and the complications that layer the instability of the structure that opera creates for its listeners.

The physical experience of the spectator with screen operas depends upon the nature of the technologies that reproduce the means by which the source is accessed. Esse suggests that the most problematic technology of reproduction is the work concept of performers detached from the characters they portray on stage and that only when the audience itself is revealed as a part of the performance like a mirror, can the fantasy, illusion and distance be abolished (p. 92). Referencing the character Jean Paul from *Orfeo and Euridice*, Esse points out the distances of time, space and death bring us full circle to the romantic distance that critics of screen operas attempt to maintain. Jean Paul exclaims, “Ah, how much we love one another in the distance, whether it be the distance of space, the distance of the future or the past, or, more than all, that double distance beyond the earth!” (p. 93). These layers of distance can bring out the purist in theater practitioners when concerning video recordings of performances. It also calls further attention to the pleasurable gaze of the spectator at a distance. Performance is to opera what sex is to porn. What should be intimate is exposed and watched by opera voyeurs.

Audiences at the Grand become the voyeurs that gaze upon the aboriginal opera goer and opera performer and that is partly why the come. There is distance, and the camera is also invasive. The time that they share ties all parties together and re-creates a different type of intimacy.

"Striking Cinematic Touches"

One of the operas that made it to the big screen was directed by Anthony Minghella, an esteemed film director, who, with the help of his wife, redesigned the presentation of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. W. Anthony Sheppard (2008) reviewed this performance in *Opera Quarterly.* While I do not wish to linger on one particular simulcast over another, *Butterfly* is worth mentioning for a couple of reasons. Primarily, it is intriguing that a film director returns to the theater to produce a live opera that has become so popular with simulcast audiences and has been replayed more than any other simulcast opera. Secondly, it is an opera that most people who are outside of the realm of the opera world are familiar with, and thus serves as a performance that would arguably be considered popular rather than serious opera music by a composer that plays well to the untrained masses. Thirdly, in backstage interviews during the simulcast, actors reference how Minghella directed them for the camera rather than the opera house in their performance.

Reviews of the opera include commentary on the director's "striking cinematic touches" which Sheppard calls attention to the use of colored lighting and lighting effects, minimalistic staging resources, use of fantasy in building moments in the production, stylized movement and dance, the manipulation of perspective by the use of

mirrors that are captured best from a birds eye view camera angle, and lastly an extended opening moment of silence that draws the audience to the visuals rather than what is heard. Where most operas emphasize the power of sound, this opera emphasizes the power of sight and how seeing the opera makes a drastic difference over simply hearing it.

Before the opera began at The Grand, the Executive Director was asked by The Met to assure the audience that the long silence at the beginning was intentional and was not a technical error. The result of the opening to the opera was a powerful theatrical moment captured best on film due to the stunning design seen from the front and the extremely high angle that only a camera could capture.

Sheppard (2008) finds Minghella's production complicated when trying to pinpoint what qualifies as cinematic and what qualifies as operatic. Minghella has been quoted as stating that he was not trying to show up to the opera house as a filmmaker trying to do a movie, but he also explained how he can draw the eye of the film audience with the camera, whereas in theater it is done with stillness, movement and lighting so that he can "shape the stage space in ways that were cinematic - creating wide, epic shots in which a single character dominates the entire stage and then narrowing the space down to provide an opera-house version of a close-up" (p. 142). The lack of sets and use of sliding screens used by Minghella are ways to frame a shot for the audience both in the opera house and in the movie house through cinematic techniques.

The fantasy world created in this opera is stylized and cinematic and uses multiple flashbacks and shifts in time. While the opera world is not as literal as the cinematic one

when it comes to casting, Minghella dove into this theatrical fantasy world that allows the little boy to be played by a puppet (which was an amazingly convincing performance) and a Caucasian lead instead of a 15 year old Japanese girl (p. 145). Sheppard (2008) admits that since the production avoids commitment to any specific approach to theater, that it finds an aesthetic balance that offers multiple approaches, and that it "may even be a key to success in contemporary operatic staging at the "new Met""(p. 146).

This is a specific example of how audiences at the Grand are coming to understand the evolving nature of opera as presented on the screen. They continue to come because they are enthralled by the talent and the performance, but also by the voyeuristic point of view that they gain in the cinema. The purpose of this chapter was to show how audiences are responding to the program as mediated by technology, and how that compares to local opera goers at the Grand. The audience at the Grand is effected by their distance from the performers, and their position to the program. There is a question of false intimacy and fidelity to the program. Patrons are influenced by the cameras eye and the focus on the individual performers, and even individual parts of the performer. There is a cinematic influence on this very theatrical medium. These perspectives have taught us that there are certain things gained and certain things lost in transmission, but opera on screen is a fascination with opera goers, and is something that attracts audiences to the Grand. Opera on screen has a history to it, and it is worth addressing in order to find out how it has evolved and why or why not audiences are drawn to it. This will allow us to think about the opera on screen as a potential *media event* that can draw

audiences, like those at the Grand, to the *Live in HD* program. We will also consider the *Live in HD* program as a phenomenological audience consciousness.

CHAPTER 4:

THE EVENT

The Met on the big screen breaks boundaries of a live audience for a live event inside the realm of the cinema in a way that creates a new type of performance event. This program creates its own identity and opportunity for sociability among opera goers. It challenges the *circuit of culture*, the authenticity of the event and the sincerity of the performers to its audience. It problematizes the social norms of opera-going and the question of presence at a performance that demands its audience to be here and now rather than there and then. But do these considerations qualify The Met opera simulcasts as a media event? How is the program building a phenomenological consciousness for audience members, and what does this tell us about why people are attending the simulcasts at the Grand?

The Met as Media Event

As Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992) discuss the contest, conquest and coronation elements of media events, they begin by asking what would have happened without television. When performing ceremonies, competitions and historically important happenings, Dayan and Katz claim the participants of these events are on an international stage for an event that interrupts the everyday routine that people follow. Despite television being the focus of these researchers, it is worth discussing whether *The Met: Live in HD* program qualify for such said media events and if so, when and where.

Dayan and Katz (1992) argue that broadcasting enfranchises and media events offer a national, sometimes international, "sense of occasion" (p. viii). They admit

though that danger is found when these liminal moments serve as substitutes or replace the structure that it celebrates. Dayan and Katz argue that these media events spotlight central values or collective memorials that are authenticated by the public that not only celebrate unity but also pluralism that are both ceremonial and parliamentary (p. ix). Dayan and Katz frame media events as transplants of reality that relocate the public space, with legitimate authority that is negotiated, performed and celebrated in a way that transforms the original into something different (pp. x-xi). The Grand audiences escape the reality of a location that is comparatively isolated economically and culturally. These events offer a sense of occasion for local opera lovers that desire high cultured art. For that moment in the dark cinema, they can become a part of a larger national and international audience. Therefore the *Live in HD* only qualifies as a potential *media event* if sold out.

These occasions interrupt our daily lives. Where media events are put into the context of television, the Met takes on both a hybrid between broadcast and cinema. With the *Live in HD* program, there are elements of television and film. As a *media event*, the opera simulcasts fall somewhere between the Olympics and the Oscars. There is pageantry. There is tradition. There is spectacle and there is the live witnessing of an important event that people block off 6 hours on a Saturday for to see an opera like *Siegfried*. This kind of interruption is what Dayan and Katz call *monopolistic* (p. 5). Audiences are primed for the media event (p. 7). With *Live in HD*, art cards prepare an audience for the story as well as the performers in it. An on-screen host previews the show before it happens, and there is a pre-packaged video on upcoming events.

A media event must be live and remote, and it must draw attention from all corners of society. It is preplanned and it is presented with reverence and ceremony (p. 7). Hosts push aside journalistic intentions and stand at awe to the spectacle. The viewers are transported to a sacred center of society and the courtly ceremony of the event reconciles any doubt or conflict while also electrifying an entire audience (p. 8). Some would argue this to be hegemonic as the performers turn to the audience for a renewal of loyalty in a way that the audience serves them, rather than they serving the audience (p. 8). This is a possible reason for attendance. The opera simulcasts do not necessarily pull an audience at the Grand from all corners of the community, but rather a focused group of opera lovers, and those close to them. Grand audiences witness these live opera simulcasts with reverence as on-screen hosts are swept up by the spectacle of the Met stage. Underneath this presentation of world class opera, is a campaign for loyal members to come into the fold of opera goers that can become members and donors.

What appears to be on the spot live performances are meticulously rehearsed. The performers, the musicians and composer, the backstage crew, the on-camera host and the camera operators and director have all painstakingly rehearsed their parts and roles in this ceremony that will be digitally preserved with motion pictures. The Grand audience as well has rehearsed their part by dressing up for the occasion, sitting in their season ticket holder seats, conversing with their neighbors who too have season tickets, applauding and celebrating the performers on screen (despite the performers not being able to hear them) and consuming foods fit for the opera with the audience on hand.

Dayan and Katz (1992) believe that it comes down to the syntactic, the semantic and the pragmatic when describing media events (p. 13). They contest that media events are, "a ceremony (that) interrupts the flow of daily life (syntactics); it deals reverently with sacred matters (semantics); and it involves the response (pragmatics) of a committed audience" (p. 14). While this definition would not work for a soap opera on television, does it work for an opera on the screen? Let us take the opera simulcast of *Siegfried*, which is the third installment of *The Ring Cycle* by Wagner, directed by Robert LePage, as a test case. We can compare it to the criteria that Dayan and Katz produce for media events. We also want to know why a potential media event like *Live in HD* would draw audiences to the Grand

Siegfried in 2011 saw the largest paying audience that brought in 70,000 ticket holders in North America and 123,000 ticket holders worldwide. At the Grand, there were 215 audience members. Now to hold those numbers up to standards for defining a *media event* set by Dayan and Katz, we need to consider the possible reach of the program to the potential exhibition halls. Dayan and Katz (1992) expect the largest potential audience in the history of the world. Television audiences for these media events reach as large as 500 million people for simultaneous stimulus (p. 14). Obviously the numbers of *Siegfried* do not meet these standards, but they do meet the largest potential audience to date for this program that is only in its sixth year and only in specific theaters that have deals with the Met. As for the Grand, this opera filled half of the seats in the house, so the potential was not completely met. Still there was the sense of occasion with this opera. Dayan and Katz believe that the power of these events lies in

the rare "realization of the full potential of electronic media technology" where the effect of the media that distributes the program has full potential to meet an unrestricted audience in a way that sends the intended message unmediated and uninterrupted (p. 15).

The opera simulcasts suspend the use of commercial interruptions or breaks within the operas themselves. The performances are uninterrupted, except by the rare drop in satellite signal. The sponsor advertisement by *Bloomberg* before each opera is only seen once at the beginning of the program, and the backstage interviews are at intermissions, and do not hold up the performance, but they do hold up the audience from longer intermissions. Dayan and Katz see this change in typical structure of advertising breaks built into programing as a momentary opportunity for media events to atomize, integrate and design a different social structure. That does not mean that those that carry the signal (in this case The Met themselves) do not interject their own framing of the event at every potential moment. These events have the power to conquer both time and space, similar to producers declaring their own holiday, like a "civil religion" (p. 16). The Met simulcasts have the potential to supersede or interrupt community events to create their own holiday or civil religion. In fact, in Ellsworth, around the December holidays there is usually a collision of programming where an opera is on the same day as the local holiday parade, and two different events crash into each other creating a parking nightmare for differing groups. This is true for the annual performance of *The Nutcracker* at the Grand by a local ballet company, where the dates booked for the ballet conflict with the live simulcast. While opera fans may rather see their opera live, they have to settle for a week delay. However, perhaps they are not aware of this delay and

perceive it to be live. This reality reveals the competition of other media and performance productions that opera contends with, and does not always prevail as the priority. In that case, some of the simulcasts do not quite stand up to the test of being a media event, while others that take precedence over all other programs do. In those cases, the simulcast has the potential to be bigger than the original performance at the opera house and a transforming event.

Walter Benjamin, (Dayan and Katz, 1992) in 1968 revealed in his popular academic article on "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that in the era of television, the reproduction is as important as the original, and in the Met's case, perhaps the reproduction is more important than the original (p. 17). Sometimes media events are taking place in inaccessible locations such as New York, London or even the moon, and at times in multiple inaccessible locations. Not one person can see all of it. As Dayan and Katz point out, producing these events and the process of storytelling involved relates to "the arts of television, journalism and narration" and the projection of ritual and ceremony communicates festivity, enlists participation and mobilizes consensus (pp. 17-18). The Met understands this recipe as it emphasizes aesthetics, manpower and technological innovation to advance its message to its audience. The Grand audience is aware of the apparatus that reproduces these media events and wants its audience to be enthralled by its enormity. This enormity can sometimes resemble a political machine.

Media events have shades of political spectacle in that they resemble rallies that focus eyes and ears on a monopolistic center. They require public approval in the form of gatherings of individuals into a group that can share in the judgement (p. 19). There are

definitely shades of political spectacle with the opera simulcasts as they pull the attention of their viewers to the central power of the Met and the clout that it holds in the industry. The program is manipulated in a way that skews viewers perception of the opera world. In the production of *Siegfried*, backstage interviews and short documentaries shape the audiences perception of the central message that reinforce the political power that the Met has in producing extravagant productions and being one of the few opera houses in North America that can afford to put on the *Ring Cycle* each year. Audiences at the Grand can appreciate that investment, just by mere contrast to the lack of theatrical productions in the area. In Ellsworth there are very few opportunities to attend a classical vocal concert let alone a professional theater production with serious investment behind it. There are only a handful of artists locally with the talent for a national stage, and Grand audiences support them by their patronage, with the hope that someday they may see them on the Met stage by simulcast. Until then, they are devoted to the Met, an international powerhouse exhibited at their local institution.

The Labor of the Artist and the Audience

The rise of the artist from local talent to international star may never come from the Ellsworth area, but the Grand audiences are intrigued by other performers story to fame. The age old story of a performer falling ill and a budding star emerging from the shadows is a common and often told story, as was the case for the tenor role of *The Ring Cycle*, where the tenor, Jay Hunter Morris, one of only three tenors in the country that can sing the role of *Siegfried*, was called up from Paris, Texas to perform the role. It seems that every opera star tells a version of this story, and every one bows down to the machine

and the general managers that gave them their chance. In response to this, the audience is fascinated by the *great man* story of an individual, much like similar stories told in political campaigns or sporting matches. The audience becomes fans of individuals rather than of the company as a whole, or the story itself. They gaze upon *Siegfried,* the main character of the film, but also Jay Hunter Morris, the Texan underdog that finds himself the center of political spectacle for this day in the great machine known as the Met. Jay Hunter Morris finds himself exhausted by the 4 years of extensive and grueling rehearsals. The journey of this performer reminds audiences of the labor involved in creating an opera performance. While it does not show us the actual prior labor of rehearsals, it does show us the exhaustion of the performer as a result of the performance when cameras reveal him in his dressing room backstage.

> Christopher Morris (2010) relates the labor put into performances by stating,
>
> The re-intervention of labor is required to transform them into an event, a happening, yet they live anyway, if only in a transcendental guise. Productions carry a memory and a promise, but they can remain that way - in fact, their aura may be enhanced if they remain unrealized, unblemished by reality. (pp. 101-102)

Morris believes that video carries a memory and a promise, that as a commodity and an inert object can be transformed into an event. Jay Hunter Morris is a player within a set of performances that are performed annually and link audiences to prior events at the Met, thus re-instituting the company history and prestige. This element of the artist adds to the story within the media event. The *Ring Cycle* that Morris participates in has a

commemorative function that serves as an anniversary of a social event. This challenges its performers like that of a contest, praises the deeds of the great powerful opera house like that of a conquest and celebrates consensual values of opera going like that of a coronation (p. 20). This all adds up to the excitement and intrigue of the digital opera-goer.

According to Dayan and Katz (1992) media events have transformative power that can be intrinsically liberating (p. 20). Whether they are hegemonic or not, these events invite reexamination of their status and function. They fall under the liminal context of intense reflexivity. Victor Turner characterizes this as the "subjunctive mode of culture" (p. 20). The audience at the Grand, exit the everyday world and experiences a shattering of perceptions and certainties when it engages in the program of the Met opera simulcasts. They are immersed in this liminal space where they find themselves between reality and a physiological and mental state of awareness of a desirable alternative that develops the tastes on culture even in this fragmented state. There is an interaction between the audience and the tradition of opera in what Dayan and Katz see as a "neo-romantic desire for heroic action" by great performers followed by the spontaneity of mass action (p. 21). The audience volunteers their time and presence in the space. The *Live in HD* program has elements of democratic action and popular culture. However, it also continues in the traditional practice of ceremonies that are totalitarian, and drop all pretenses of journalistic academia. In *Siegfried*, the introduction of the composer, the curtain calls and the structure of the house itself reveal the traditional ceremonies that opera has followed for centuries. The backstage interviews

and intermission documentaries break down some walls of transparency but still promote the majesty and superiority of the company. While the performances are a celebration of the music, performers and designers (individually and collectively), the intermissions are persuasive occasions attempting to enlist mass support like that of a political contest (p. 21).

Conquering Cinema

Whereas most media events privilege the home, in this case, *The Met: Live in HD* privileges the cinema, and in the case of the Grand, the art house. Dayan and Katz contend, "this is where the "historic" version of the event is on view, the one that will be entered into collective memory" (p. 22). Where the Grand typically represents an exclusive private happening (for ticket holders) originating from that space that cannot be shared with anyone outside of those physical walls, the *Live in HD* program troubles this by making the Grand a public space that the Met reaches into and shares an international ceremony with through live deliberations that people within other theater walls experience simultaneously. Dayan and Katz ask in the context of television, when is a home a private home and when is it a public space (p. 23)? We could ask the same thing of the cinemas. When is the Grand a private viewing of a performance, and when is it a public space where public opinions and tastes are formed by remote influences? This question is pushed by the technological possibilities of satellite transmissions of live media events. Where radio subdivided audiences by age and education, and television created a space of national integration through network broadcasts, the satellite simulcasts integrates multiple communities across nations for the sole purpose of

appreciating the art of opera. However, if the future of this trend continues and more satellite transmissions appear in cinemas (much like cable television), there may be a segmentation of audiences. As demonstrated in *Siegfried* though, this is not the only opera company trying to get into the cinema, but it is the dominant one in this new market, and it is transforming how we think of media events in the form of a ceremony like a series of bouts that crowns the triumphant opera company known as the Met. Instead of falling to the likes of cinema, *Siegfried* aims to conquer them.

To further understand the potential of the opera simulcasts as a media event, I think it is worth looking at the program in the context of the work of Paddy Scannell who conducted research on a phenomenological approach to radio, television and modern life. *Live in HD* has the potential to be a media event for a certain group of people, but does not necessarily fit the Dayan and Katz model perfectly unless the opera sells out. It may be better to frame the program on a more particular audience experience that builds a phenomenological consciousness. This once again moves us from the universal to the particular, which may be elements that make the *Live in HD* program tick.

The Met as a Phenomenological Program

Paddy Scannell (1996) addresses intentionality, sociability, sincerity, eventfulness, authenticity, identity, and dailiness for a media program, which can be applied to our understanding of the opera simulcasts at the Grand as a media event from a phenomenological standpoint. Within this framework, intentionality points to how a program appears for whom it is produced and the effect of positioning the experience on audience members through broadcasts. Which begs the question, who are simulcasts for?

Are they meant for new audiences or for aging audiences who can not make it to Lincoln Center in New York City anymore?

Intentionality

Scannell (1996) states that broadcasting "transposes the norms of everyday interpersonal existence into public life" (p. 172) and that this splits time between the "magical liveness of a here-and-there, now-and-then" (p. 173). In the case of the *Live in HD* program, simulcasts offer a conversation between the live performance and the simulcast audience that requires performers to adjust to opera in high definition video and surround sound. Though sometimes interrupted by technical glitches, the program offers a liveness that is authenticated through personal audience retellings and are legitimized through the identity created by the persona of the on-air host. The ritual that is opera is established through Saturday afternoon routines that transform the delivery of culture outside of urban life. This transformation of a highbrow art form to lowbrow cinemas creates a divide represented by casual dress codes at cinemas and the introduction of popcorn to some theater screenings. The personal and public experiences of live and cinema simulcasts are transposing audience relationships to opera. Regardless of the mission to bring opera to new audiences, aging audiences are for whom the simulcasts are hitting.

Sociability

Sociability, like art, is served by the self-interest of shared experiences played between human beings. The conversation created between producers and audiences is a social one that struggles over control with what is projected and how it is projected

(Scannell, 1996, pp. 22-23). These events that bring people together seem spontaneous and natural, yet High-Definition simulcasts come with pre-produced bonus features backstage, as well as technical glitches that interrupt the conversation for cinema audiences. Audience equality is determined not merely by what is shown, but how it is shown.

Just as the seat that you sit in at the Lincoln Center may affect the lived experience of the opera, so does the relationship between the Grand and the satellite that transmits the simulcast of the live opera. Depending upon where you sit in the live opera house will affect not only the perspective and enjoyment of the opera, but also the shared experience of those around you in relationship of where you are, to where the orchestra and performers are, and the acoustics of the hall. These lived experiences at the Grand are similar in relation to where you sit, but also where the screen is and how the speakers in the house are positioned. The experience as an audience member in the Grand is also varied by the satellite position, weather patterns, and particular solar flares generated by the sun. All of these conditions can effect the satellite signal strength and quality, and thus create a momentary glitch or a stop in the continuous action.

Despite these potential glitches, which do not happen often at all, there is a sense of excitement that comes from the liveness of the transmissions. Not only could you be witness to an original performance unfolding, but there is also an added risk of the signal dropping in the middle of a climactic aria. Audience members find themselves asking not only whether Juan Diego Florez will hit the 9 high C notes, but also will the satellite transmission hold up.

While signal loss is rare, there is an awareness of the danger of not being able to experience the event as others around the world might be. In fact during a November 7, 2009 simulcast of the Puccini opera *Turandot*, there were so many solar flares interfering with the transmission that audiences became restless with the interruptions. A rebroadcast was scheduled that would be played from the original performance. However, there is not the same sense of liveness that is experienced as on the original simulcast date and time. It is the equivalent of a rerun on television. What is it about a live uninterrupted experience that make audiences feel that they are sharing a collective witnessing of art unfolding? It is the sociability of the opera simulcasts on a local level, as well as an international level that bind audiences together during this collective witnessing.

To address this issue, I believe we need to consider what Scannell frames as 'sincerity' of a program. When stories are performed for an audience they are either perceived as genuine or as insincere.

Sincerity

Paddy Scannell thematizes Sincerity as involving performative suppositions that create a relationship with audiences that are intimate and true. While opera can lack sincerity in a large performance hall for those in the front row, it can harness it for those at a distance. In the cinema it can either regain it through the close-up or it can magnify it as insincere. Vocal ornamentation and artifice have been evident in opera from an early stage in history. Then low notes and greater volume was needed as opera houses grew. As Scannell (1996) points out, "the voice of the singer had more work to do" (p. 61).

The German *lieder* moved solo singing back into the music hall, and offered an intimacy in singing. For the *Live in HD* program, the opera house is shrinking as performers adjust to the angle of the camera instead of the position of those sitting in the hall. Performers must also convince cinema audiences that they believe what they are singing as fresh, natural and true (p. 67). They must adapt their voices to the microphones rather than the acoustics of the hall. Otherwise the performance will come off as insincere, impersonal, hypocritical, and more like a grandiose public performance than a private one intended for cinema audiences. Scannell states, "the song can be detached from any singer or any performance: heard melodies are sweet but those unheard are sweeter" (p. 73). Opera house audiences will ask whether the opera is 'beautiful', while the cinema audiences will ask whether the opera is 'true'? Yet HD simulcasts can turn a song and performance sour if insincerity intrudes upon what we expect as real and genuine. Is this expectation fair and how will changing the way opera is heard, seen and performed affect the art form?

The volume levels that accompany the close-ups create a cinematic experience that no one would experience at Lincoln Center, except maybe Maestro Fabio Luisi in the pit. What is evident is that live opera at Lincoln Center is not the same as in the cinemas. As obvious as this sounds, some audience members work hard to convince themselves that the two should be the same experience despite the mediation of technology. Vocalists and musicians are not amplified in the opera house, but for the simulcast microphones capture the audio from Lincoln Center. This is pre-mixed and then transmitted to cinemas, equalized (EQ) and post-mixed for the surround sound in the

cinemas. Depending upon whether the cinema has a 2,000 pixel projector or a 5,000 pixel projector can also vary an audiences relationship to the performers. There are many layers "in between" the live performance at Lincoln Center before it reaches the eyes and ears of audience members in cinemas that can magnify as well as constrain audience experience. This may keep some purists away from the Grand, but it may also draw others in.

The unfolding of the opera creates a mood of expectancy of being-there, of being involved (caught up) in the here-and-now of the occasion (Scannell, 1996, p. 84). The ceremony known as opera is being compressed into new possibilities of time and space. Audience members are able to be in two places at once, or two times at once (p. 91). Simulcasts offer accessibility to new audiences, but it also risks losing its dignity and good taste. The simulcast is a live event that Paddy Scannell would consider "magical, edged, unfolding, self-disclosing, unpredictable, mood-creating" (p. 92). Eventfulness is what the public makes of the spectacle of performers for media events but also reproduces it through simultaneous broadcasts seen and heard "in two different places: the place of the event itself and that in which it is watched and heard" (p. 76). This doubling challenges producers to lose control over an audience they cannot see? Will cinema audiences dress casually or will they mimic the social elite at the opera house? Will they wait until intermission to get refreshments or will they chomp down popcorn to the annoyance of opera purists? Will the vulgar intruders from the cinema undermine the "sacredness, the mystery, of the occasion" as television audiences were feared to do during the BBC's coronation of the Queen in 1953 (pp. 80-81)? These questions will be

addressed in the next chapter, but they do lead to the subject of authenticity within a program.

Authenticity

Where sincerity is believed, authenticity is observable, like facts. The two are interconnected for Scannell, but what delineates authenticity is a performances ability to be 'story-able', familiar, yet extraordinary. There are certain events that happen that are not believable even if experienced first hand. It is in the retelling or third-party telling that authenticates first-hand observances. In the case of *Live in HD*, cinema audiences can feel that they are privy to the performance of the opera, just as the live audience is, yet because of its magnification, they can observe more detail than their counterparts. Simulcast audiences can experience authentic moments, just as live audiences can, yet on a different level. Both are responding to the lights, costumes, music and staging of the opera. And in both cases, it is during the sociable conversations at intermissions that authenticate those experiences as discussed between patrons. If there was any doubt amongst cinema audiences, the host will confirm or reinforce their experience from the opera house, yet no effort has been made to reciprocate the sentiment. What the simulcast loses is anything outside the recording of the microphones or the view of the camera lenses that the director chooses to punch up. But that is the role of the artist to mediate their message to an audience. In this case, a much larger audience is reached because of this ground-breaking technological advancement.

Walter Benjamin would see these moments of production in the circuit of culture to be a liberating tool that has the potential to reach great success. In his prologue to

"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Benjamin (1969) looks to Paul Valery who sees that "we must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art" (p. 217). Benjamin admits that reproductions of the original as seen in photography and film can lose the authentic aura, but it can also build new audiences and reproduce an inseparable link from nostalgia, which is a very powerful association. Benjamin seeks to understand how this practice can emancipate work from established rituals and charges that "reproduction as offered by picture magazine[s] and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye", thus creating a uniqueness and permanence that is an "adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality [and] is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception" (p. 223). By taking the human eye and the mind to new frontiers of exhibition and discourse, art presented through reproduction offers new opportunities of expression that explore public forms of culture by exposing the private and the particular. Benjamin no longer calls on intellectuals to solve the problems of cultural production because of the emancipatory potential of reproducible art despite it sometimes lacking authenticity. This democratization no longer brings culture to 'the happy few', but is "transforming the nature of perception" and making forms that were unavailable now accessible (p. 56). The Grand audience benefits from this democratization as an older audience that is already familiar with opera and the live opera house. The Grand audiences are a community of believers in the Met operas, and understand that they

would prefer to be at the actual opera house, but come to the Grand for the convenience of the location and the low cost of tickets.

Senici (2010) believes that the layers of verbal text, music, mise-en-scene along with the video construct a relationship worth assessing unto itself. Despite the degree of separation linked between video to the mise-en-scene, it remains a layer connected to the verbal text and the music, which in turn is connected to the video (p. 77). In these terms Senici points to what can be gained from thinking about videos on their own terms rather than poor substitutes for a live performance, where camera work does not detract from the experience unless audiences would prefer to fool themselves into believing they are actually in the opera house, and accusing screened opera as adopting a "porn style" approach. On the contrary, Senici would prefer to reflect on the videos own "poetics, their own aesthetics, and their own ways of signifying"
(p. 78).

The stories that are authenticated by Grand audience members will need to be worthy of telling as valuable to the patron, whether witnessed directly or indirectly (Scannell, 1996, p. 98-101). Was it the best opera, and how did it compare to others? Likewise, authenticity is reinforced, or at times coaxed into being 'story-able' when brought up during backstage interviews. The delivery, or performance of the retelling is vital in order to prove the audience members experience. In the retelling, the stories are first recalling the actual performance (from the performer and the broadcast), secondly their own experience of the performance, and lastly their performance of retelling that experience. Naturally what becomes a part of that retelling is the witnessing of live

audiences who by default have become a part of the performance. Scannell calls this the objectification of a subjective experience (p. 114). Each audience member has their own subjective experience, but when retold to others, the experience becomes a publicly objective one.

It is a performance to begin with that suspends disbelief from the outset, and asks audiences to venture into a fantasy world outside of reality. The authenticity of the live performance is painstakingly researched, rehearsed, repeated and polished before being presented to a live audience. The video director works hand in hand with the stage director to produce a product so that it can be as faithful as possible to the specific vision of the performance. Michel Veilleux finds that, "the theater directors' particular view of his work risks being sidelined by another one, which can even go so far as to contradict some original aesthetic choices" (Senici, 2010, p. 65). Brian Large, a director of hundreds of opera videos says that he intends to interpret and document the performance for posterity reasons and is convinced that "one needed to go out and simply document, not as a piece of reportage, but to try to create an interpretation that would benefit both the performance and the public, and try not to get in the way by being a 'director'" (p. 65). The director has a great effect on the overall program, which can enthrall an audience or leave them disappointed and more aware of their separation from the source.

The degree of separation between a live performance and its video recording defines the success of a director communicating the "spirit" to which it was originally produced. However, Senici (2010) finds that even researchers who recognize the video event as a separate ontological performance, still consider it from the point of view of its

relationship to the performance. He cites Jurgen Kuhnel, who proposes the separation between opera film and what director Gotz Friedrich call "reportage of a performance." Kuhnel states:

> While the opera film as filmic transformation of an opera is one medialization among others of this opera, the "reportage of a performance" as intermedial trans- position represents the medialization of a medialization: mise-en-sc`ene and per- formance are a medialization of an opera, video recording or live broadcast of the performance are a medialization of this medialization.... The opera film "nar- rates" an opera. . . . The "reportage of a performance" does not "narrate" an opera, but rather "relates" [referiert] a performance of an opera, it "re-narrates" it [sie "erza˙hlt" diese nach]. (p. 64)

Senici wonders why such a radical distinction is needed and wonders why a video recording could not "narrate" a performance by its own means of transformation, rather than simply transposing it. He goes on to suggest, "that the need to contain and even belittle the transformative potential of a video recording of a live performance is connected to the need to safeguard the belief in its capacity to convey the liveness of this performance" (p. 65). The question becomes then, is the suspicion of authenticity justified, if the original live performance lacks authenticity to begin with and is based off of a fabrication? The Grand audience recognizes the opera simulcast as its own piece of art, separate from being in New York. Authenticity is built by their own witnessing of

this unfolding *media event*. It is authenticated in their public discussions about the opera simulcasts. An identity for the program is born out of these authenticated distinctions.

Identity

These opera simulcasts at the Grand generate an identity through its elements, which are mediated by the on-screen host, who projects a mark on the specific opera, as well as their assessment of the opera and its performers (p. 118). There are ritual events during the opera that are common to every performance. There is the shot of the chandelier at Lincoln Center, there is the sound of the orchestra warming up in the pit, there is the conductor who is called to the pit by the stage manager. It is expected that there will be live interviews at each intermission followed by features of upcoming operas. This temporal order of unfolding events builds an identity that the cinema audiences can follow and expect before diving into the opera itself. This legitimizes the weightiness of The Met and its liveness, before and during the performance.

As evident in the following exchange between Placido Domingo and Susan Graham, backstage at an intermission of *Der Rosenkavalier* by Richard Strauss, the persona of host and performer creates an identity that is both professional and personal:

> PLACIDO DOMINGO: Well, I think you enjoy the – your – the tough – you know, the trouser roles.
>
> SUSAN GRAHAM: (overlapping) This is the greatest costume. I do. I love these trouser roles.
>
> PLACIDO DOMINGO: Oh, okay.

SUSAN GRAHAM: And, and this is the – this is the top of the heap of these trouser roles. I mean, you – look at this costume. This is spectacular.

PLACIDO DOMINGO: Oh my God, it is.

SUSAN GRAHAM: It's the most gorgeous thing. I call it the sort of human disco ball of costumes.

PLACIDO DOMINGO: Absolutely. (laughs)

SUSAN GRAHAM: It's fantas – and to appear with that rose at the top of those stairs is just the most heart stopping moment in my career.

PLACIDO DOMINGO: That's what I was going to ask you now.

SUSAN GRAHAM: Oh.

PLACIDO DOMINGO: Octavian's extraordinary entrance in the next act may be his greatest scene in the opera.

SUSAN GRAHAM: I think it's the greatest scene in any opera. I mean, my heart stops when that music stops and the tremolos are going on and I look out into that beautiful opera house –

PLACIDO DOMINGO: Yeah.

SUSAN GRAHAM: And I just hope that I can remember the first word and the first note. (laughs) (2010, January 8)

The host holds a persona that is held together by their experience and expertise in the arena of opera. Whether it be Renee Fleming, Placido Domingo or Natalie Dessay, the host is as much performing their identity as those they interview. The voices go from

authoritative when speaking on technical operations of performance, to natural when they are interacting on personal levels. Their voices are upbeat when speaking personally about the experience of the performance, and lower in pitch when asserting their own technical knowledge and expertise (p. 125). Praise is thrown back and forth between on-air talent and those being interviewed as they tightrope between professional and personal relationships. This identity invigorates its base of opera goers, who then feel a part of something greater. Like fans of a sporting team, opera goers turn this identity into a ritual.

The frisson between colliding rituals of old and new are solidified by the exploitation of previous models that allow for new models to emerge. The strongest of these is the 75 plus year establishment of Saturday afternoon broadcasts on the radio that pave the way for carving out time for a pre-established audience. Whether broadcast by radio or video simulcast, the *Live in HD* program is an evolution of the merging of intertextual media that form a media event. The road that opera took to the screen, now builds into a media event that must contend with the questions of authenticity and sincerity as it builds into a digital ritual for opera going audiences at the Grand in Ellsworth, Maine. Audiences are attending the opera simulcasts in Ellsworth for the spectacle of a media event. Next we will explore how this ritualistic practice builds a social pageant, offers cultural capital, and is an example of performance ritual by audience members. We have looked at how Grand audiences are influenced by the institution of opera, the Met as an institution, the Grand as an institution, the technology that mediates opera on the screen into a media event. We have considered what other

critics and patrons outside of the Grand feel about the program and why it draws them to the opera simulcasts. Now we will look at how the Grand patrons feel about the matter directly, from the inside and what their stories about this new form of opera-going can tell us about why they attend the *Live in HD* program. Within the circuit of culture, audience members from the Grand tell subjective stories about their particular experience with the opera simulcasts. These stories are an act of a performance ritual.

CHAPTER 5:

DIGITAL RITUAL

Culture runs through our life from birth until death

and I always feel like the venues

-experiences like this are the clothes pins on the clothes line,

and, here we are in Ellsworth, Maine,

being a little clothes pin for

connecting to that culture throughout the world.

It's huge.

-Chloe, *The Met: Live in HD* opera simulcast audience member

Experience begins with the entering of the theater. The moments of experience and their meaning must, as Victor Turner (1982) would say, be "squeezed out of an event, which has either been directly experienced" or "cries out for penetrative, imaginative understanding (Verstehen)", and "an experience is itself a process, which "presses out" to an "expression", which completes it" (p. 13). The interviews that I captured are what Turner would call "the crystallized secretions of once living human experience" (p. 17). They are valuable because they represent a performance ritual of opera-going that is being transformed by live satellite transmissions to theaters around the globe, and particularly to the Grand in Ellsworth, Maine. This chapter will consider the communal ritual that bonds audience members during participation with the opera simulcasts. I consider the pleasure that audience members take from their attendance and how being "live" adds to their experience. Then I explore how the audience expresses this pleasure

through applause for performers who are not present, and are conflicted in whether to practice social norms of an opera house or a cinema. These discussions offer subjective points of view as to why these individuals come to the operas at the Grand and are practicing a digital ritual. I believe that these stories are best framed through the lens of performance studies.

Performance studies allows the "capacity to bridge segregated and differently valued knowledges, drawing together legitimated as well as subjugated modes of inquiry" (Conquergood, 2002, p. 152). Dwight Conquergood frames, with alliterative ease, how analysis needs activity though imagination, inquiry, intervention, artistry, analysis, activism, creativity, critique and citizenship as a way to examine the making of art and remaking of culture, the interpretation of art and culture and the activism, outreach and connection to the community (p. 152). *The Met: Live in HD* has an audience that performs such a framework and it is worth looking at the position they find themselves in as they consume and are consumed by storytelling. This storytelling is contextualized in terms that Peterson and Langellier (2004) situate in "the bodies and voices of participants; in its situated and material conditions; in the discursive regularities that shape language, experience, and identity; and in the consequences storytelling poses for legitimation and critique of personal, social, and cultural norms and institutions" (p. 30). The cultural norms and institutions of opera carry a symbolic process of communication to a ritual that links sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the possession of a common faith to the experience of the audience (Carey, 1989, p. 18). The opera simulcasts at the Grand are a performance by the audience members and their

stories tell their experience of this program and will offer insight into why these audience members are coming in the first place.

The *Live in HD* simulcasts from the Metropolitan Opera are performance rituals born out of the marriage of cinema and opera and the history tied up between those art forms collectively and individually. They generate a powerful practice constituted by social and communal experiences. Grand audiences are "doing opera" in ways that perpetuate the experience of live performances, preserve the pleasures of the opera in a cinematic form but likewise reduce the concert hall experience to a live recording of the media event. This new way of opera going is rooted in the traditional arts, but is constituted in a new medium that is problematized by the applause for performers not present in the Grand, and the debate of whether popcorn and jeans are illegitimate demonstrations for opera in the cinema. The primary mode of communication for audience members at the Grand may be ritualistic, but the program is also a transmission of communication that links and controls vast distances and people (Carey, 1989, p. 15). The program imparts, sends and transmits opera over a network of satellite feeds much like cable lines may traverse geographic boundaries into homes. The *Live in HD* simulcasts are a hybrid model of both transmission and ritual communication. These personal narratives are a study of the contexts that connect identity and experience in the performance ritual (Peterson & Langellier, 1997, p. 148). This digital ritual finds its identity in its communal rites.

Communal Ritual

Both opera and cinema find themselves in decline, and by marriage have hope of a resurgence. When considering an offer of marriage the forms must consider their partners past, their history, their inheritance, their educational background and let us not leave out, what their strategies for fertility are (in this case the offspring is the National Theater of London simulcasts). There must be biological, cultural and social reproduction co-constituted by an impulse of feeling and a call of duty. Pierre Bourdieu (1990) states that in the ritual of marriage, "agents obey impulses of duty more than the calculations of interest", and that there is a common origin in the habitus, which "is a product of structures that it tends to reproduce and which implies a 'spontaneous' submission to the established order and to the orders of the guardians of order" (p. 160).

The stories that audience members share shed light on their experience and how this new way of opera-going is changing the way one does opera. These stories strengthen the union of the arranged marriage between opera and cinema. I will present the stories bound by particular topics of discussion. I will start with the topic of why audience members come to the opera simulcasts out with a sense of ritual and embedded history. Likewise I will reveal how audience members come out of a sense of pleasure and personal gratification. Other topics will consider how the event being live effects the audience experience, what is lost in translation from the site of origin in New York through the simulcasts, why are people applauding for absent performers and whether popcorn could or should enter the opera simulcasts in the movie hall, since it is an icon of the cinema, but would not enter Lincoln Center at the Metropolitan Opera.

In the interviews that will guide discussion, audience members (identified under pseudonyms) felt the opera simulcasts were an interesting blend of live performance and technology that allowed those that do not, or do not want to live in urban areas access to one of the many things that might be missed after living in or near a city, such as the opera, ballet or art museums. There is a desire for monumental voices, monumental sets, perfect costuming, a grand hall of mythic proportions. Audience members shared how visually stunning the operas are, but they stressed their reasons for coming to opera being born out of past experiences that drew them to this one. They also expressed a communal occurrence that allowed them to network and connect with other audience members.

Richard enjoys the sense of community around the event that offers cultural enrichment. He states, "the fact that all of Hancock County seems to be talking about the opera and everybody comes and I just love being in that communal setting." He shared how he would not go to a cineplex to share this experience as he enjoys watching the audience of the Grand and seeing his neighbors during the winter, a time when there are scarce opportunities for such offerings. Author, Terry O'Sullivan (2009) notes how the communal aspects of audience experience reveals "the importance of the temporal, imaginative element of how audiences experience performances (and themselves), which includes those who are absent as well as those who are present at a performance (p. 220). The opera simulcasts bring varying personal histories together that display a camaraderie of communal consumption which can only add posterity (p. 221).

Daniel is a big proponent for theatrical experiences, whether they are staged theater or movies. He wants to be with a bunch of people rather than viewing something on Netflix, DVD or television.

I want to see it

big screen and a lot of people

and hearing their reaction to it

and sometimes being very annoyed with people's reaction to it,

but that's a part of the experience.

Ya know, you think that's funny, that's not funny,

or you don't think that's funny, that's very funny (laughter).

Sharing in the audience laughter or grief adds to the communal effect for Daniel.

Chloe jokes that the champagne at intermission may not be as good as what is found at Lincoln Center, but that the simulcast at the Grand has the quality of a Metropolitan event. She relates, "ya know, you're coming with friends, you're seeing friends, seeing people you don't know but you're seeing the same people a lot of times at the opera. And its um, it is, its like going to the opera. Its a lot like going to the opera." The simulcasts are not operas, but they are projections of the opera, so they are a lot like going to the opera, just as movies are a lot like going to the theater. And just as theater is a lot like life, but not quite. But they are their own entity, with their own thrills and sensory experiences. The sensation is not just the perceptions physically experienced but also the senses of memory. Chloe lived in San Francisco for many years. She attended the opera regularly and did not have enough money to sit in seats she would prefer to, but

would stand at the opera. At intermission somebody would almost always welcome her to sit next to them at an empty seat. Likewise, when the Met visited Detroit, she would sit in the nosebleed seats. Now, through the simulcasts she could catch intimate nuances of this mythic art form that her mother would listen to and that she grew up listening to.

Steve also grew up listening to the opera on the radio, but his father was not so supportive of the practice.

Well I have a great love for opera
actually though I've never seen a Met performance, uh,
um, performed live, uh,
I uh, as a kid, uh probably at around age ten or so,
um, I used to listen every Saturday afternoon to Milton Cross uh,
bring the uh, the Live Metropolitan, uh,
performances and uh, I used to sit there with my ear glued to the radio all
the time and you know my dad really wasn't, really supportive of that,
he uh, thought I should be doing other things, uh (laughs),
you know I just had a, uh, a great love for the music,
even though I didn't understand any of the lyrics, uh, it was, uh the music
that really uh, um, entrapped me.

The music is what drew Steve in to opera as a child, but it was the ritual he performed weekly that further defined how he experienced opera. Now he is participating in a new sensory rich experience and each time he attends an opera simulcast, he performs the act of a communal ritual. These experiences are similar in the art form being experienced,

and they both form imagined communities that are not seen but are felt in their projected audience experience. They differ in that the simulcast audiences at The Grand have a hall of enthusiastic participants that regularly attend the simulcasts.

Sheri sees the simulcast opera going as an enrichment process that gives her time with her in-laws, which she does not have much in common with. The grandmother of her husband loves the opera and now they share the performance of *Turandot* as both of their favorite performance. This experience has had communal but also familial bonds for her. She enjoys all the people that attend the simulcasts at the Grand. That Saturday ritual has effected her perception of experience as well and reminds her of attending movies at the Grand as a child.

> The building is alive on Saturday afternoons during an opera
>
> and I like that feeling.
>
> It reminds me of when I was younger
>
> when the Grand was a movie theater.
>
> Saturday afternoon, that's where we lived.
>
> We lived there every Saturday afternoon,
>
> with our quarters, so um,
>
> it's kind-a like coming home again, which is kind-a nice.
>
> With as much life and enthusiasm,
>
> just we've all gotten a little older (laughter).

The relationship between social and musical enjoyment is at the heart of why the performance ritual of opera going in a digital context has been established over

generations of various experiences (Pitts, 2005, p. 269). Audiences are connecting to the experience and participation in this deeply rooted, and evolving act of going to the opera, in media res, in their own backyard, in the space they feel at home with. They are also connecting their experience of opera-going to their experience of family storytelling as a way to imagine and re-imagine the performance of family identity (Peterson & Langellier, 2004, p. 35). The performance ritual of opera-going conjures up participants connection to their own personal identity.

Whether it is personal or collective, a performance is generally, but not always, involving a display to an audience (Schechner, 1988). The experience of a performance can then be performed as a ritual of repeated habits to seek benefit or gratification. A ritual is performative. It must be performed to become a ritual and there is an embodied doing that takes place.

Richard Grimes (2003) examines how ritual can be a way of "maintaining the social-political status quo and of keeping in power those who are already in power" (p. 34). This definition is rigid, redundant and formal, whereas performance is typically creative, experimental and playful. Grimes calls on George Frederick Brandon for his definition of ritual, which is seen as an imitative or symbolic action "designed to achieve some end, often of a supernatural character, that could not be achieved through normal means by the person who performs it or on behalf of whom it is performed" (p. 35). Here, ritual is cultural, but is also a natural occurrence. The ritual performance of opera going is a cultural activity constructed from a natural human desire to be creative and share creativity (p. 36).

Pleasure

Richard Schechner (1976) sees performance as fanning out into either a rite, ceremony or performance; an act of shamanism; an eruption and resolution of crisis; a performance in everyday life; an act of play; an art-making process; or a ritualization (p. xvi). Schechner notes a community comes together through ritual only when forces outside the community work together to bring about that ritual. And when a community is brought together through ritual, "the exchange of qualities between semantic poles seems, to my observation, to achieve genuinely cathartic effects, causing in some cases real transformations of character and of social relationships" (p. 118). This catharsis is the process of releasing the repressed emotions of the structure that surrounds our lives and that of opera institutions. The opera simulcasts present an opportunity for a release from those structures. This is an opportunity for the true opera-lovers to have their renaissance while in the remote location of Ellsworth, Maine.

Audience members at the Grand have many levels of pleasure from attendance at the opera simulcasts, such as the music, the spectacle, the sets, the costumes, the performers, the video work, the sound, their neighboring audience members and the opera itself. There is a hugeness that translates in the big close-ups and sweeping wide shots. Audience members are in the faces of the performers and the entire experience of the Met is larger than life.

The pleasure one gets from opera music and singing is difficult to explain. Daniel says that it is like being asked why one likes poetry or Beethoven symphonies. He confesses that the operas speak to him, they move him and they also educate him on the

human condition, whether graceful or disgraceful. For him there are three or four simulcasts that he will always remember and that because of the great distance he would be from the stage at Lincoln Center, the simulcasts have brought an immediacy to opera going that is unrivaled from his point of view.

Richard tells people that folks need to come to the simulcast if they do not like opera or have not tried it. He is convinced that they might change their minds. He shares stories of his partner, Tom, who was not familiar with opera and now has fallen in love with it. He points out that some people are hesitant because they are not sure why you would go to a movie of an opera. But Richard asserts that it is much more because of the added value of an over the top theatrical event that should be experienced. Chloe shares this sentiment as she sees it as a remarkable presentation that is a cinematic event, but not quite simply a movie of an opera because of how well done it is and how skilled the technical crew and director of the simulcast are. She concludes, in her own mind, that it is not the same. There is a gap here between the liminal space between cinema and opera, but also the concept of a movie versus cinema.

For Sheri, it is a centering experience. She gets pleasure from the escape that it provides her. It brings her an inner happiness and peace as she allows herself to be absorbed by the music.

> It's just-to sink into those very uncomfortable seats
>
> and just sort of escape, for whatever amount of time it is.
>
> It's amazing, how it relaxes me,
>
> how much I enjoy the music, um,

thank god we have subtitles.

Every, fiftieth or sixtieth word, I (laughing)

do understand, depending upon whose opera it is.

But, just, it's-it's-it's just a great way to transport yourself

to another time and another place.

I-it's a great experience.

Sheri is transported to the play world of opera as transmitted by cinema. It is a rejuvenation process where she can come back into herself. Even the most tragic of operas leave her feeling spiritually full by the depth and richness of the voices. This pleasure of opera going at the Grand is enhanced by the element of liveness.

Live

The struggle between blending two practices is the process of culture moving through, what Victor Turner calls structure and anti-structure. Turner (1982) notes that humankind "grows through anti-structure, and conserves through structure" (p. 114). Where structure is an order that allows members to feel safe about their practice, anti-structure is the dissolution of such sets, statuses or duties. What is created is the liminal or liminoid space that is born out of anti-structure and creates a potential alternative to cultural creativity (p. 28). Liminality is the state of being between structures and finds itself at the state of destruction and creation, and of being neither inside nor outside, but both (Madison, 2005, pp. 158-159). That is the state in which the opera simulcasts finds itself in at the Grand due to the fact that it is both opera and cinema, highbrow-art and

lowbrow-art, serious and light music, not in the immediate presence of its global audience yet live.

The fact that the event is live is important to audience members. Even if it is not live, the perception of liveness is key. The encores bring much less audience members in. Instead of a half-full or full house, the best audience for an encore has been an eighth of the house, which feels empty in the Grand. The music and performance still bring pleasure at encore simulcasts, but there is not the excitement of the event being live.

When opera simulcasts are live, there is a feeling of danger from the fact that solar flares could take out the satellite transmission for an important aria, or for an extended amount of time. With glitches come sighs of despair and boos. Knowing that audiences are seeing the opera with the same people that are shown on screen as the audience at Lincoln Center, as well as with the other theaters worldwide brings a whole other dimension to digital opera going. It is not like watching a movie that has been produced and canned as a fixed state of art. There is something lost in the encore rebroadcast. Sheri loves the excitement of a live performance.

It's all out there.

Ya know, when there, if theres a set problem, it's out there.

If there is a missed line or missed note, it's out there.

And I think that is such a wonderful thing about live performance.

That it-it just enriches the whole experience for me

that it is live.

Um, and having seen um, Carmen in the re-um-broadcast.

I think it lost something.

Ya know that the live performance, ju-

and ultimately the excitement of everybody around you seeing it live.

I think everybody sort of feeds off of everybody else.

The liveness is born out of the communal forces or simultaneity that enriches the experience of opera going, even over satellite to the Grand.

Dress code is a ritual of the formal opera and it adds to the communion of people coming together. Some feel the dress codes are antiquated and a stuffy tradition. Yet, dress codes add to the liveness of the event as Grand opera goers are imitating those they see on the big screen. Richard says he is not big on dress codes, but he loves it when people dress up.

I just think that's really cool.

I, I, I think anything that we can do,

the audience can do, to add to the liveness of the event

adds to the appreciation of everybody

and that goes for the clapping too.

I'm just taken aback by,

I was just totally surprised,

I mean, who do you clap for,

as Tom says, you clap for the actors,

but you don't just clap for the actors, you clap for the audience.

And, and that applause enhances audience appreciation.

It makes them feel like it's live, it's rather cool.

I love to see it.

I would love to encourage it more.

It's really interesting, I think my own experience with it,

I mean the other day at, um, *Fela* [an NT Live simulcast from London],

I really wanted to applaud,

and nobody was applauding,

and, you, you, you don't really want to stand out.

I'm not a starter, but I'm certainly a follower.

If people start to clapping, I'm right behind them.

The applause that is born out of a live event shared with other audience members at the Grand is found in what Victor Turner calls *communitas*. Turner (1982) looks at communitas as a semi-permanent, disappearing structure where a utopian communion is experienced where all individuals are equal and the spontaneous and immediate feelings of communion bring people together. No symbol of that communitas is more powerful than laughter or applause.

Applause

Applause is praise expressed by clapping. The act of clapping is either habitual conditioning by social norms, and is a gesture of enthusiasm that comes from the emotional connection to a performance. Audience members not only are moved to applaud, but they are also moved to tears. The audience at the Grand has applauded for the *Live in HD* operas since the very first program, and although at times hesitant and

self-conscious of the act of clapping, has continued the ritual. There are those that lead and those that follow. Some are more enthusiastic than others. It can be embarrassing if applause comes at an inappropriate time, mid-aria, or if a technical glitch interrupts transmission. There was an occurrence when it appeared the Grand audience stopped clapping just as the audio dropped from New York momentarily, as if Ellsworth does not give themselves permission to express their gratitude without permission from the technology that connects them to the New York audience.

Chloe admits that she is the one in the back hooting and hollering as a way to show her appreciation for the performers with those audience members around her.

> I think it's just seeing spectacular performance that's note perfect,
>
> right on, uh, ehhh, um, you know who knows what moves us,
>
> but it's-it's um it's in the gut,
>
> it's-it's visceral that um-uh,
>
> having-seeing a performer an-n-nd having been I think to the live opera
>
> and knowing what it takes to see a performer
>
> do that, um,
>
> and to see it on the screen, and it's live, and you know they're there doing
>
> that - it's huge.
>
> It's-it's-it's a huge effort
>
> and you applaud, and it's spontaneous.

The effect of the opera being live is a connection to the excitement of an event happening right now, which moves participants to applaud.

Daniel has sensed that at times he may be the only one applauding. Tom only is sure to applaud at the end during the curtain call and says he sometimes feels silly because, "it's *not* live from the Met. It's *live* from the Met, but it's not *live* from the Met." Whereas Richard applauds as much for the performers as he does for the other audience members of the Grand, which enhances audience appreciation, Sheri is convinced that she does not know any other way to express her approval even though it falls on the deaf ears of the performers. She thinks audience members might be more enthusiastic if they thought the performers were hearing them and responding to their applause.

> I wish there was a way that they could do that-
>
> they could open up the sound boards in reverse.
>
> Yes, I clap.
>
> The enjoyment, the excitement, the appreciation of
>
> how truly wonderful it is
>
> and-and to say thank you for bringing it-
>
> almost a thanks to the Grand for bringing it to us,
>
> uh, probably more than the Met bringing it to us.

Sheri would like to put the sound boards in reverse and broadcast their applause back to the Met to make up for the lack of immediate approval for the artists and what the audience draws from that reciprocity. This connection to the Met is not as strong as the connection of the audience to the Grand that is bringing the Met to them. This

performance by audience members enhances the overall experience, but what is missing from this remote performance?

Lost

Sheri believes that the majesty of the decor and the rich colors from Lincoln Center is lost in the transmission as well as the magnitude of the sets, but loves that at the simulcasts she is able to see the set changes. More though, she is convinced that some of the excitement of being directly there and directly getting a response from those in the performing space, is lost in the simulcast. Guy Debord (2006) would argue that the opera simulcasts are a spectacle that is an inversion of life that presents itself as an instrument of unification, but actually separates social activity (p. 117). Debord sees a spectacle as an alienating social relation among people mediated by images (p. 118). The opera simulcast appear to the remote audiences as a way to access privileged culture, but it may actually further separate an audience member from experiencing the original in a way that reinforces oppression. Theodor Adorno (1990) would argue that simulcast audiences are enjoying their own oppression as the art of opera has succumbed to the machine that induces conformity and propagandizes the potential of novelty or innovation (p. 311). I think the audience members at the Grand believe they are getting a great value for the time and money spent on the occasion. This contradicts was Marcia Citron (2000) asserts, which is that screen operas have the ability to bring the two worlds together and enhance both.

It can be said that the cinema has had the same effect on theatrical performances as broadcast television has had on sporting events. It is not the same experience to sit at

home and watch the Super Bowl as it is to be at the football stadium, but it is still its own experience. Likewise, someone can watch a baseball game in a bar with buddies, but it is not the same ritual that is performed as going to the ballpark. Each place has its ritual. At home or in a bar you prepare food, you may get into your comfortable clothes and you may buy alcoholic beverages for the event. At the ballpark, there is more planning involved. There is parking, the hoopla outside the stadium, the smell of the field and the food vendors. There is the sound of the crowd and the sights and sounds of the building. You may be more likely to wear your team jersey, participate in the seventh-inning stretch and the singing of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" and participate in the ceremonial performance at the location. Likewise going to Lincoln Center to witness the Met will not be the same as watching an opera at home or at a simulcast at the Grand. However, at the Grand there is a replication of the actuality of opera-going. Audience members at the Grand too will dress up, take in the sights and sounds of the Grand hall as well as the sights and sounds of the Lincoln Center hall on the screen. Someone may be more likely to dress up or applaud at arias at the Met than at the Grand, but not necessarily for some patrons. The Grand too will participate in intermissions to mingle with acquaintances and fellow opera goers, but they will also get a tour backstage by the on-screen host. Chloe admits that the *Live in HD* program is cinematic, and perhaps like seeing a ball game broadcast.

> It's sort of seeing the whole choreography
>
> and in a simulcast there's a lot of close-ups.
>
> Its-its cinematic so it's a little different -

it's like seeing the ball game on television as opposed to going to the ballgame. It's, it's, it's a different um

it's a slightly different experience.

You don't see, ya don't see the whole thing.

Y-you don't see the outfielders moving in for the squeeze play (laughing),

for the uh, um, uh, when you're watching the simulcast.

This is a good analogy of the power of the close-up, but also the danger of it, as audience members are allowed to go where the human eye never goes when relating to a performer in a theatrical hall, but you miss everything outside of the frame of the camera. Audiences can only react to what is framed for them. They miss the overall choreography of the actors, the sets and the costumes. They may miss lighting nuances as well as the acoustics of the original hall.

Similar to comparing auto racing with attending a Sunday mass, French director Jean-Francois Jung (Seneci, 2010) observes that there is a contrast in the excitement, madness, speed, suspense and celebration of car racing and the "slackness" of its televisual translation. Jung states, "the kind of televisual language conceived for them simply sidesteps rhythm. . . . this is a language without speed" (p. 69). He does admit that when it comes to church going, the elderly, who can no longer attend in person, are happy to watch from a distance. Jung finds that "thanks to their faith, they can reconstruct the illusion of real presence in the cathedral or the chapel. . . . It is their memory that bridges the gap. They remember how it was right there, when they were younger and could still go in person" (p. 69). Jung does not think the live opera

broadcasts should follow this model, as to him it should not be assumed that televisual rhythm, time and language were always present like a 'naturalness' of presence that the cameras showed up for someone to watch. It is assumed that it does not require a rhythm and that the media is in front of this thing, and an audience is in front of this media, something happens and they see it and it all runs together naturally. Jung suggests that the live opera broadcasts should take an "atheistic" stance and strive for a "taut" editing style (p. 69). Senici puts into perspective for us the assumption that opera is for a particular audience and that in this case this audience at the Grand is a community of believers.

Whether a memory of opera from their past life, or a constructed memory from televisual performances, the time and space of opera performances must bridge the gap for opera-goers who attend performances ritually, like they do church or NASCAR. This rhythm will be revealed through the light, sound and camera angle that the video shows. Grand audience members do take the opera simulcasts as its own program, separate from the original, but naturally, the lack of performer presence and the subjectivity of the camera does misplace some quality of the program and there is a trade off for their technological and geographical conveniences.

Christopher Morris (2010) recognizes the issues of presence, spontaneity, the controlling gaze of the camera, but also recognizes that opera has proliferated in so many formats that "belittling it as a second-hand imitation , supplement, or record of something that happened elsewhere begins to seem hopelessly inadequate: its here and now is increasingly found in its remediated form" (p. 99). While pointing to opera's

conservative values as well as its narrow and aging canon, dependence on government support, philanthropy, corporate sponsorship and subscription campaigns, Morris makes a case that video could reinforce the general laws and principles of the opera world while reinvigorating the prestige and aura that opera professes, which could efface the mediality of the debate between performance and video (p. 99).

Morris writes in *The Opera Quarterly*, that video is seen by purists as the ever fading record of human memory that reveals the faintest trace of something lost. As documented by Gay McAuley, Annabelle Melzer, Denise Varney and Rachel Fensham (2010) in the *New Theatre Quarterly*, video recordings are seen to rob the spectator of a choice of perspective, the loss of the live displayed in a representation of the past and a lack of presence from the performer (p. 96). This is seen as an incompatibility between video and theater. While these authors are willing to resign to the usefulness of video as a research and teaching tool as a document, they insist that it requires transparency from the performance. Director, Richard Kalisz argues video should adopt an approach that does not attempt to deceive the viewer into thinking the broadcast is the real theater performance because unlike cinema, the theater distrusts realism and desires theatricality (p. 97). There are distinctions being drawn between live performance and video that draw upon tastes here that are using presence and the phenomenology and ontology of being in a space as a barrier thrown up to discard the possibilities of the experience received during a live simulcast. These possibilities point to a democratization of opera

This democratization of art is a result of the destruction of the aura that opera holds in a live venue. Walter Benjamin (1969) would see such a practice as a way to

build new audiences through the reproducibility of the original but he would also claim that audiences are identifying with the camera rather than the performer (pp. 322-323). This art for the masses emancipates work from a theatrical ritual, but it builds a new theatrical ritual mediated by technology for cinema audiences. While surveys show that new audiences are being built, they are still modest. Most audiences of simulcasts have been to live opera before, and thus this "democratizing" claim may be exaggerated (Wakin, 2009, p. AR1), if they only reinforce the ritual already established.

For Walter Benjamin (1968) the opera simulcasts would shatter the traditions that it represents by substituting multiple copies of a unique experience out to the beholder who witnesses a reproduction of the original (p. 223). Whereas the theater audience is in the presence of the actors and the hall of the performance, the cinema adaptation of the opera is a mechanical reproduction that audiences respond to the contrivance of media (p. 231). The audience is responding to the camera and the technology of the opera simulcasts and loses the aura of the performers and the space they inhabit. However, there is an aura from the presence of the audience members in the hall at the Grand and the Ellsworth theater itself.

Richard says that the sense of the Lincoln Center hall is lost with its architecture, chandeliers and five story lobby. He compares it to a great cathedral. Richard does not believe the artistry is lost, but rather enhanced. Instead of being in the nose bleed section as he would be at the Met, and looking down at the stage, he enjoys the simulcast for the fact that he can really see distinguishing features of the actors and the stage.

Daniel feels that the sound at the Grand is very good but it is not the same as hearing the live orchestra. He feels the vocals are not lost in quality when digitally recorded, mixed and amplified, but the live orchestra certainly would be better in the original performance. The major downside for him is the enormous space that the Metropolitan Opera is in at the Lincoln Center with the large number of people and the huge lobby that is not present at the local art house. At the Met, he enjoys getting a glass of champagne and mingling with the people in their furs and jewels. While people do dress up at the Grand to get in the spirit of the opera, there is not the same caliber of ritual that requires a distinct dress code and ceremony of drink as at the Met.

Popcorn

Perhaps no other schism at the opera is evident between purists and newcomers as the introduction of casual dress and popcorn. Ryan Tracy (2008) writes in his New York Press article, "HDivas", that audiences are divided between those who "enjoy shoving fistfuls of popcorn into our mouths while Juan Diego Florez launches nine high Cs into the air, and others who think the popcorn is distracting, déclassé and a downright nuisance." Apparently there are pro and anti-popcorn crowds. For purists in attendance, opera is like a religion that love HD simulcasts but hate the noise of the popcorn. What these purists fail to mention is how noisemakers in the opera house are wrestling shopping bags and talking over singing and disrupting performances just as readily. While anti-popcorn crowds demand respect for the art, they may need to lighten up (Tracy, 2008).

Tracy does concede that popcorn lovers should be mindful not to chomp during pianissimos or death scenes, and that opera purists should give the new crowd a break in order for opera to co-exist with popcorn. Dress code and food are an issue for many cinemas that exhibit *The Met: Live in HD* program. There are traditional opera goers who know that food and drink, not even champagne are allowed back into the hall at Lincoln Center, and feel it to be sacrilegious to consider it. This is the liminal space that creates a gap between those steeped in the tradition and those new to opera, or those who attend the simulcasts to avoid the old-fashioned rituals of Lincoln Center that may be viewed as too restrictive or out-dated. The Grand has to decide whether the crowd wants to practice the rituals of the movie theater or the opera hall, or both. The Grand finds itself performing the latter. The Grand does sell food and even allows food and drink in the hall during the opera simulcasts. There is not a strict dress code practiced by audience participants, but those that do dress up typically enjoy seeing others dress up. However, there currently is no popcorn sold at the Grand opera simulcasts.

When asked the question of whether audience members should be allowed to purchase and eat popcorn in the hall, Daniel looks down at the question and insists no popcorn for the opera. He does not think the Grand would ever serve it and that is is not a popcorn crowd as nobody would buy it. He adds, "for me it would be the noise. I don't-I don't care if people want to bring whatever they want to eat - I think it's just that crunch, crunch, crunch- two crunches - that's a crunch and that's a crunch (laughter)."

Richard agrees that popcorn does not go with the opera simulcasts. He loves the idea of trying to make the peripheral sites of the simulcasts as a part of the event itself.

For that moment in time he says, “it [the Grand] isn’t a movie house, it’s an opera house and they don’t serve popcorn at the opera house.” As with dress code and the applause, the more the audience does to add to the liveness and the ritual of the event the greater appreciation everybody will have. The sentiment is that if the Met does not do it, then the Grand should not do it. The preference is that the Grand is an opera house for that day, and not a movie house. The Grand is a concert hall at times, but would not transfer the rituals of a rock concert hall to the opera simulcasts. It certainly will not consider practicing the rituals of a boxing venue as it was in the early 1950s in an opera event setting. But if these multiple identities of the Grand are not considered in the practice of opera, then it is unlikely that these groups of audience members will ever consider entering the performance ritual of opera-going at the Grand.

Sheri knows there are a lot of people who do not like popcorn at the opera simulcasts because they do not feel it is appropriate at an opera but she loves the smell. She says, “let the popcorn flow.” She does not eat popcorn for what is added to it, but loves the smell. She concedes,

> But I - ya know - we’re a different age.
>
> It’s a different era,
>
> and to think that the opera from twenty years ago,
>
> ten years ago, even five years ago was going to stay the same
>
> was kind of, uh, naive.
>
> And it’s a different world that we live in,
>
> and it is different people that we are introducing to it

and it's becoming more widely recognized

and to a degree, widely accepted,

and to that we have to do some bending,

and if it's popcorn, OK, why not.

While Richard and Daniel would like to keep popcorn out for the sake of the sanctity of opera as an art form and practice, Sheri is willing to bend to the changing of the times and the acceptance of the blending of opera and cinema, and the performance ritual that audiences partake at these events. Richard Schechner (1988) poses the paradox that people absorb and learn behavior so thoroughly that "the new "performed" behavior knits seamlessly into ongoing "spontaneous" action" (p. 283).

The opera simulcasts have a paradox in that both the cinema and the opera hold personal, historical and social elements of experience that run deep in size, frequency and memory. Popcorn is just one of the many boundaries that are being considered in this liminal area. There are chasms that dissuade patrons from attending the opera simulcasts, but the gratitude expressed by Grand audiences, the pleasure that they receive from their attendance and the communal ritual that bonds them together at the Grand bridge the gap that separates them from the source of the opera in New York.

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

A new person is cleaning the Grand today after the passing of the individual responsible for prepping the theater before shows for the last five years passed away. This winter has taken many folks connected to the theater from our community and their passing is a reminder of the fragility of life, the importance of appreciating those around us and allowing ourselves time to reflect on the human condition. There was a slushy mix of wet snow on the satellite dishes after a winter storm that was more rain than snow on the Coast of Maine the previous night. Still, the satellite signal is strong today. The temperatures are cooler than the first fall day that started the season, but it feels like the start of spring, rather than the middle of winter. Opera-goers from Hancock County are filtering in to the Grand for the opera simulcast of *Ernani*, by Giuseppe Verdi. There is a handful of young children in the house, but the audience is mainly made up of an older generation. The polar groups mingle and are pleased to share their excitement and appreciation for the live simulcasts. Some patrons continue to dress up, while others arrive in sweatshirts emblazoned with their college alma-mater. There is a buzz in the audience over this classic opera, but also over the upcoming live performances by the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Maine this evening, and the announcement of a youth screening of the Met performance of *The Magic Flute* by Amadeus Mozart in April that the Grand is hosting. As the opera starts and the cameras reveal the changing of sets, the Grand Audience is given special access to the Met stage behind the curtain. During the performance, audience members still applaud for the performers in New York (some

patrons are more willing than others) and there is still no popcorn in the hall. Over time, Grand audience members are building relationships with the music as well as the folks around them. There is a fraternity that is being built at the Grand and around the classic art form of opera. These patrons are attempting to connect with other opera lovers as well as bring new opera goers into the fold. This potential media event has become a ritual to them. It is changing the way opera is experienced. "O Time, take wing. It is torment to delay" sings the soprano Angela Meade. This new opera going at the Grand hinges on the elements of time, such as live simultaneity and communal co-presence. But these are not the only reasons the Grand audiences observe these ceremonial occasions on a regular basis and with such passion.

Chapter 2 introduced the history of the opera world and how the success of the Met fit into it. There were comparisons of the Met to the Grand that revealed similar struggles and triumphs, as well as comparable events that resemble each other, only on different scales. What we can learn from this historical context in relation to why people are attending the opera simulcasts at the Grand in Ellsworth, Maine is that patrons are attracted to established institutions that carry a nostalgic and victorious past through quality performances that hold integrity and excellence, despite overwhelming odds against their success. It is the theaters adaptability, even in the latest digital forms, that is inspiring.

This is recognized by critics and national audiences as disclosed in Chapter 3, which looked at the successful elements as well as imperfections of the program through its cinematic and voyeuristic approaches. This chapter brought to light the larger

universal themes that the program brings out for audience members such as cinematic influences, and the beautiful and grotesque revelations within the program. What we can take from that is that how the program is being thought about elsewhere is not necessarily what is being thought about at the Grand in Ellsworth, and that the Grand has a distinctive and idiosyncratic experience of *Live in HD,* that may be similar to other cinemas, but cannot be replicated anywhere but at the Grand. Just as the opera experience cannot be judged as the same experience that is at Lincoln Center, neither can it be judged that the opera experience at Lincoln Center is the same as at the Grand. Even the same replication cast out worldwide will never touch that of the experience at the Grand, due to the geography of where and how that opera is experienced locally. Grand audience members sense this, as they likely have witnessed other *Live in HD* programs elsewhere, but have returned to the Grand for its own qualities, both beautifully flawless and imperfect.

The program was presented in Chapter 4 as a possible media event. The Dayan and Katz study framed media events as televisual programs that pulled massive audiences to simultaneously experience an event, breaking all routines of everyday life. The *Live in HD* program qualifies under such a definition as it does break the routine of Saturday afternoons for audience members on a growing scale. While the numbers internationally are not as great as the Olympics or royal coronations, the opera simulcasts at the Grand are significant as an event that brings audiences together in large numbers. While this is revealing empirically, the particular ways of opera going reveal a phenomenological reasoning for audience attendance at the Grand. We learned that there is a social aspect

that bonds audience members together. There is an identity that is created by audience members that bonds them to each other as well as to the program.

It is this phenomenological consciousness that is evidenced in audience interviews that steered Chapter 5. This chapter exhibited personal responses to the program on a local level. The paper started with the universal and ended with the particular as it had a conversation with audiences on what pleasure is taken from the opera simulcasts, why they feel the program being live matters, why they applaud for an absent performer, why popcorn is not allowed in the hall and what is lost in transmission. Ultimately this chapter is important because it establishes direct discourse on how this traditional practice has become a non-traditional digital ritual.

The chapters are distinctive and individual, but talk to each other in certain ways. The history of opera reveals an established tradition that aids digital practices more than if it were an art form without a tradition behind it. This is also true for building a media event that is already rooted in an established art form. Topics such as sociability, authenticity, identity, and simultaneity are relevant to both the program as a media event as well as a digital ritual. Exploring multiple angles for the same question helps to synthesize a complex approach, similar to a cubist rendering on the topic that is a fragmented package, similar to how the program itself is presented.

Now that I have reviewed what each chapter has contributed to the original research questions, I would like to attempt to stitch themes throughout the paper together. Why people are attending the opera simulcasts from the Met in New York at the Grand in Ellsworth is complicated. Live opera audiences and radio audiences slide naturally into

the simulcast Saturday afternoon ritual, which has been painstakingly and meticulously established over decades by The Met. To Scannell (1996), dailiness is concerned not with what a program is, but how it is; it is not what is said, but how it is said (p. 146-147). Saturday afternoons are meaningful to audience members of the opera. It may not be daily, but rather weekly patterns of habit that concerns the routine carried out. The rhythm of their life revolves around their experience on Saturday afternoons. Through various media experiences on the radio, television and now cinemas, The Met establishes a Saturday afternoon routine that is as much of an audience practice as shaving, breakfast and the morning paper are (p. 149). The *Live in HD* audience dips into that shared way of life, just as their Lincoln Center audience counterparts do. The *Live in HD* program allows aging opera audiences to experience time parallel to those live at Lincoln Center. This worldliness can transform places like the Grand in Ellsworth, Maine that lack musical or social advantages that come with city life (p. 161). Audiences are allowed to pick-up where they left off on their last Saturday opera, to recall the nostalgic experience of previous performances and look forward to the "future-facing present" (p. 159) of performances to come. And for those that have never been to Lincoln Center, they too can experience the eventfulness of being in their own world outside of New York and the great world beyond all at once.

Richard Johnson (2006) states, "no subjective form ever acts on its own" (p. 102). Whether it is literature, music or film, there are coexisting media that are "complex, multiple, overlapping, coexistent, juxtaposed, in a word, 'inter-textual'." Johnson is ultimately pointing to how these products within the *circuit of culture* have a

"context" which determines meaning according to subjective, historical, political or social circumstances, which can change from viewer to viewer, and even within the same viewer over time. The *circuit of culture* presents a way to consider the inter-textual existence of opera as a performance broadcast world wide. It also allows us to think further about how this opera house transmits a public performance full of universal themes to private cinemas like the Grand. The Met and the Grand use each other to continue the cycle of production that use multiple modes of technology to simultaneously share stories of the past today. Johnson points out that we use these cultural forms to escape and that we "tell stories about the past in the form of memory which construct versions of who we presently are" (p. 103). The audience members of the Grand participate in such tellings as they venture into new ways of experiencing opera and return to share their experience with fellow opera-goers.

The opera simulcasts are a performance ritual born from the desire to get closer to the performers, yet the solution comes from a great distance. The opera simulcasts extend both the performer and audience bodies and minds, while limiting the capability of ever touching physically (Shaw, 2008, p. 91). Cyberspace, outer space and now the opera space of the Met are forms of entitlement and colonialism where performances are stored and preserved digital forms of technical mastery (p. 115). The voyage of discovery starts with noble ideals and end with significant effects on lived spaces in the real world (p. 119). What problematizes these stories is that *The Met: Live in HD* program situates bodies and classes in time and space that is neither opera nor cinema,

but at the same time is both opera and cinema. Stories are born out of a marriage that finds opera-going in a liminal state of post-modernism, an in-between state.

The opera and cinema are a joint collection of history and practices, and their union ensures the continued history of both art forms through the presence of past experiences and practices. This is a digital ritual consummated on Saturday afternoons, whether by the radio broadcasts of The Met operas or the cinema matinees at movie houses before the advent of television (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54). The work of reproducing established relations amongst patrons witnessing this marriage constitute an institutional obligation, similar to wedlock. The survival of this marriage between these two art forms is dependent upon the support that comes from those related to the witnessing of their performance (p. 112). Their human labour that supports this blending will turn into cultural capital formed from their ongoing practices, networking and social relationships that support the nuptials between opera and cinema.

Global audiences are the community witnesses that reinforce the marriage of opera in cinema by their attendance at these media events that hold a presence of the grand history of both art forms, which projects a powerful bond for future events. Yet, as Michelle Wilson (2006) asserts in *Technically Together: Rethinking Community within Techno-Society*, community is not a static concept and that ways of being together change, and are experienced and understood differently at different times in complex duplicitous ways (p. 22). The *Live in HD* opera simulcasts from the Met to the Grand have changed the experience and understanding of being together in time, space, knowledge and the body (p. 223). The experience of belonging to an opera community

is different now that it can be compressed technologically and through time, as not previously possible. The technology of the simulcast does not predetermine social direction and forms of opera-going, but the manner in how the technology is used, applied and utilized do have social relationship consequences (p. 225).

As the technology changes, it is certain that the voyage of this marriage is far from over. The question is whether the marriage will be defined as a new way of going to the opera or a new way of going to the movies. Perhaps there will be a "double bind" between the epistemic and aesthetic demands of this practice, and opera-going/cinema-going in the digital age will offer indeterminate poles of practice (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2005, p. 311). After all a performance is not static, neither is the telling of that performance ritual. Langellier and Bell (2010) stress that any "story tries to but must always fail to fix history and performance differences" (p. 122). The audience members at the Grand are the narrators of their own experience and the challenge is similar to what Eric Peterson (2009) calls to attention as the difficulty in accounting for the mobility of embodied subjects that "articulate" or "mash up" the real and the imaginary in the changing terrain of storytelling" (p. 154).

Interview participants from the Grand enjoy the sense of being in on the action and witnessing the variances and nuances of performances. There is a buzz which comes from something that is taking place in real time. It is undeniable that the liveness of the event brings an immediacy to the performance, including a certain danger that something could go wrong at any point, and that for better or worse, there is a collective experience

and a collective witnessing. One patron shares their experience of the Met being simulcast live:

> When the camera pans over the matinee audience at the Met and I see my friends Sara and Ernest sitting in the orchestra, and when I realize that my daughter who lives in Munich, Germany, is also attending an HD simulcast at exactly the same time, it's 7:00 p. m. in her case, I greatly enjoy knowing that we are all enjoying the same performance together-in Maine, in Manhattan, and in Munich.

The audience for *The Met: Live in HD* opera simulcasts at the Grand get pleasure from being in a "front-row" seat enjoying the close-up intimacy of being "in media res," or right in the middle of things. They are drawn in to the facial expressions of singers, as well as the costumes, the actions on stage as it is magnified, unlike the poor view from the Dress or Family Circle at Lincoln Center. There is pleasure in the music, the conductor, orchestra, singers, the story, the stage settings, and the dance. There is also pleasure in viewing on screen images of the Met house. Every gesture and nuance within the frame is seen. However, there can be some displeasure from the fact that an actor must be a good actor and not simply hide behind an exquisite voice alone. If facial expressions are off or inconsistent with the meaning of the script, then it can result in a sour experience of the performance. The intermission interviews and backstage shots allow simulcast viewers to hear the buzz and rustle of the workers and the Met audience in New York. Apparently though, audience members prefer the feel that the simulcasts

are experienced live in real-time (just as the actual opera in New York). It is a community event that is ritually practiced, despite being a reproduction of the original.

Like television media events, the opera simulcasts produce a loyal audience that focus their energy into the ceremonious ritual of opera going, though remotely. The audiences are drawn to the symbolic value of a mass experience through a highly esteemed opera company. The aesthetics of the show reveal a performance and transform it into a spectacle for us to determine the relationship of the opera in New York to its copy in Ellsworth, Maine. The event is festive and it equalizes access to this art form similar to media events, whereas those in actual attendance only experience part of the event from their vantage point. The satellite simulcasts build a frame around a frame that organizes the viewing surrounding the performance, before, during and after the event to create the "other" reality that is possible through technology (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. 108).

While the technology reproduced for audiences bridges the cultural gap for Grand audiences, the biggest factors in bringing audiences to the opera simulcasts is the love for the music, the spectacle that is opera as well as the collective communal experience that audience members share in person. If the Met were closer, Ellsworth audiences would go. If the Met were cheaper, they would go. If they did not have to pay as much for a hotel room in New York or pay as much to travel, they would go. Audiences would much rather go to the live opera at Lincoln Center if these external factors were not a consideration. There is nothing that compares to the experience of live opera with its visceral phenomenology to the performers, musicians, conductor, stage, sets, opera house

and opera goers. However, the simulcasts are cheaper, they are more convenient to opera goers outside of New York. They provide a different cinematic experience that is in your face and pounds in your ears. The simulcasts bring access to culture to a community lacking musical and theatrical diversity. There are no local opera companies in Ellsworth, Maine and even operas that make their way to Maine are a far cry from the quality of the Met. It is the Met brand that brings audiences in. It is the Saturday afternoon ritual that brings audiences back. It is the media event that provides an arena for simultaneity, sociability and engagement with the Grand audience. It is the behind the scenes programming that draws the audiences curiosity to become more intimate with their idols. While there is much lost in transmission, there is also much gained such as democratizing opera and providing cultural capital to patrons at this small art house in Ellsworth, Maine. However, it all comes back to the quality of program elements and the communal experience of that content that ties it all together.

What is assumed is that the Grand was not providing enough local culture or bringing in enough global culture without the opera simulcasts. It is assumed that the opera simulcasts at the Grand provide long-term solutions to dwindling audience numbers at other programs such as films, concerts and plays. With an aging audience at the Met and an aging audience at the Grand, there may not be the need or demand for opera simulcasts in 10 years. This dying art form may find its passing with the passing of this generation. The Grand has shown resiliency before in the face of threats of closing their doors. The Met opera simulcasts came at a time when the Grand needed it.

However, the Grand would do well to actively seek a replacement for the opera simulcasts should the program dwindle from aging audiences.

Future research should be on why certain audience members are not coming to the Grand for the opera simulcasts and what is keeping them away from this program. The Grand must capture the attention of their audience and their imagination for an art house full of history, nostalgia and character. The best thing that the Grand can take from the opera simulcasts is the appreciation for communal audience experiences that follow a traditional ritual of getting together and collectively recognizing quality culture that allows members to escape Downeast, Maine for a moment in time. We find similar results with other Grand programming such as *The Nutcracker* (Ballet)*, Banff Mountain Film Festival, Manhattan SHORTS Film Festival, Greg Brown* (musician) and *Bob Marley* (Maine humorist). Not only do audiences return to these programs for the quality of programming, but also to collectively experience an event with others who return for the same ritualistic-like reasons.

There were limitations to this study such as the small sample size of audience interviews, as well as the very localized and specific experience of this single theater. I also consider this to be a strength. This research does not correlate Grand data with other cinemas that carry the opera simulcasts or attempt to tell their story. This research does not contend to be a textual analysis of the program either. Those topics are ripe for discussion in future studies, as are other topics such as the opera simulcasts comparisons to televised sports, juxtapositions to online gaming simulcasts, the impact of the opera simulcasts on local opera houses and community theater groups, the cultural impact on

theaters in other countries who are closer to the roots of opera, cultural representation in the simulcasts, audience member parasocial interaction with
on-screen personas, and the dangers of art compressed in space and time. These considerations are worthy of their own studies, but did not holistically fit within the purview of attempting to answer the question of why audiences are attending opera simulcasts from the Met at the Grand.

Audiences are conditioned to expect cinematic experiences and are used to building imagined communities and imagined meanings to performers on the screen. Audiences have a pre-established passion for opera before entering the Grand. Many of them have been to the opera in New York, or other opera houses around the globe. They have found themselves in Downeast Maine for professional, philosophical or familial reasons. But not only does the opera as a performance piece bring the audiences back as an meaningful art form, but so does the knowledge of being with others like themselves, who love opera, and love the grandeur and larger than life performances. Opera has been a part of their life before the simulcasts or they have been brought in to opera by a friend, acquaintance or family member. It is not something that someone comes to alone. Opera is a condition of lifestyle and those that surround someone. I am convinced that it is an art form that is either adored or resented, known well or not known well enough at all. Now audiences are energized by the presence of culture in their small city, even if it is not the live and original version of it. They are drawn to the stars of opera and the celebrity being built around them, as well as the emerging artists that find themselves in the limelight. Audiences love the music of the orchestra and the focus on the voice as a

musical instrument that can drive a story. They walk out feeling like they have learned something about themselves and the humanity of the world. They are playing out a memory of when they were children when they either attended the matinee films at the Grand or first heard a soprano on their radio set. And they perform this while in the company of their neighbors in whom they share a communal ritual of digital opera going in the 21st century. Audiences know that they are not attending the actual opera in person, but they feel like they are, and in some ways it is even better than being in the opera house. It is both ritual and natural. It is not a ritual. It is not natural. It is caught in between. It is the liminality of the interstitial moments that draws the audience members in and holds them there like Euridice in the Underworld. The Met and the Grand should never look back, or else they would lose audiences at both houses.

CHAPTER 7:

CODA FOR THE GRAND

The opera simulcasts has brought excitement and energy to the Grand and the community. It has also brought in a steady revenue stream for the theater. But what can the Grand learn from this program and what can this research offer the institution? It is evident there is a desire for quality programming that is embedded in previously established traditions and culture. The quality of the program is important, but the tradition, the ritual and the shared event are equally important. The event that surrounds the opera simulcasts reveals an audience that enjoys commiserating over a common passion. We can also learn that there is a ritual or repetitive structure that audiences enjoy participating in. The audience members become performers in the ritual, and enjoy seeing familiar faces that they can share their experience with. This is relevant in other programming that has successfully returned and over time has become a tradition for the theater and the audience base that supports it. The clout that the Met brings to the program is important, as is the nostalgia that the Grand venue offers, but giving the Grand audience world class programming that becomes a shared traditional practice is even more useful in selecting programming, whether it be *live* or *Live in HD*.

Questions that the Grand will have to ask itself are how is it going to balance simulcasts with local culture and live performances; what are the short and long term implications of the simulcasts; who is not coming to the opera simulcasts, why are they not coming and what can be done to bring them into the fold; and what will the Grand (and the Met) do to address their aging audience demographic for this program? The

Grand will need to recruit younger audiences to the opera, and with that may mean allowing something like popcorn in the hall in order to make way for the ever-changing way of doing opera.

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APPENDIX: Interview Protocol

The interviews used in this study follow the protocol put forth by the University of Maine Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research that involves human subjects. The IRB application for this study was approved on September 29, 2010. The names used in this study are pseudonyms. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and participants could stop their involvement at any time, or choose not to answer specific questions. There were no risks involved in participating in this study or monetary compensation. Participants signed an informed consent form that clearly spelled out the intent of the study and how their interviews would be utilized. In that form, participants were informed that while this study may not have any direct benefit to them, that it aimed to inform the Grand on the *Live in HD* program. Participants were also informed that confidentiality would be kept, and that all data would be secured in the investigators locked office in order to preserve the privacy of participants. Participants were informed that should they have questions about the study they may contact the faculty advisor to this study, Nathan Stormer or the Assistant to the University of Maine's Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, Gayle Jones.

Participants that were used for this study volunteered their time after responding to flyers in the Grand lobby, announcements of the study before opera simulcasts at the Grand, or in email messages sent to Grand members from the Grand. The interview questions were sent to participants prior to collection of data. Of the twelve participants, six either mailed or emailed their responses in, while six chose to relay their experiences face-to-face and agreed to have their interviews audio recorded.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Benjamin Speed resides in Franklin, Maine with his wife Sarina and their son, Noah and daughter, Larkin. Born October 24th, 1979 in Calais, Maine, Benjamin graduated from Woodland High School in Baileyville, Maine in 1998. At Woodland High School he was a member of the National Honor Society. In 2002, Benjamin graduated from the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington with a Bachelors degree in Performing and Media Arts. Benjamin is an award winning producer who has worked on short and long programs for WABI-TV5 (CBS) and Maine Public Broadcasting in Bangor, Maine. He has worked as a Videographer and Editor for News Production, Commercial Production, and Sports Production. Benjamin is the co-owner of Summerfly Productions where he produces videos for corporate, non-profit and private clients. Benjamin demonstrates his passion for the arts through his involvement with The Grand in Ellsworth, Maine where he is the Digital Projectionist for the *The Met: Live in HD* program as well as other live simulcast and video festival events. He also volunteers as an organizer and projectionist for the *Ellsworth Under the Stars Outdoor Movies* project coordinated by Ellsworth Arts. Benjamin continues his love for the moving image as an educator, working full time with high school students at the Hancock County Technical Center in Ellsworth, Maine in Video Production and Screenwriting. He is a member of the Photoshop Users Group, the Maine Film and Video Association, the Ellsworth Young Professionals, and the Maine Arts Commission Media and Performing Arts committee. He is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in Communication from the University of Maine in May, 2012.