

The positives and negatives of streaming live theatre and opera

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This research was conducted by **Timothy King**

Summary

This paper presents a critique of the role of streaming theatre and opera from stage to screen, using data from a range of surveys, critics' views, reports and case studies. It finds that streaming gives more people a way to experience theatre and opera, although that experience is different to live performance, and does not necessarily diversify audiences.

Streaming provides a significantly different aesthetic experience from a live performance on stage

Sitting in the dark, the use of a musical score and close ups of a particular character enables cinema audiences to become emotionally engaged in a performance. Theatregoers can be rather more detached, choosing for themselves where to look, and engaging in a 'suspension of disbelief'. The cinema experience can lack the type of involvement that could lead to spontaneous applause and the sense of a shared occasion with others in person.

Streaming audiences are similar to live theatre and opera audiences

Those who see performances in the cinema are both socio-demographically and culturally more similar to theatre audiences than to typical cinema audiences. Conceivably, streaming might reduce the size of the market for theatre and opera, as audiences who would have seen the live show simply opt for the

(cheaper) streamed performance instead. However, there is no sign that this has happened in the UK.

Streaming live performances enables more taxpayers to benefit from public funding for theatre and opera

Although data suggests ticket prices affect the decision to attend a streamed (rather than live) performance, price seems to be less important than other factors, such as traveling distance and parking facilities at venues. The author argues that streaming productions that have received public funding is a good way to distribute these to local cinemas, thereby meeting the twin goals of public funding: to support the highest levels of excellence and promote the arts widely throughout the country.

This summary is by **Tanya Graham, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

digital **theatre** **UK** **cinema** **streaming**

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