

Understanding the audience at a jazz and blues festival

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This research was conducted by **Karen Burland** at the **University of Leeds** and **Stephanie E. Pitts** at the **University of Sheffield, UK**

Summary

This study set out to examine audience participation and engagement in a well-established jazz and blues festival held annually in Edinburgh. The festival audience had high expectations of performers and festival organisers. Whilst festival-goers had strong ideas about the styles of jazz that interested them, they were also open to new kinds of performance. The researchers emphasise the appeal of live performance for audience members. In particular, the improvisatory nature of jazz seemed to play an important role in persuading people to go to the trouble of attending a concert rather than listening to a record at home.

Jazz festival audiences seek immersive and appropriate venues

701 attendees of the 2007 festival returned a survey left at venues, and the researchers subsequently carried out further interviews with 36 of those who had responded. Listening to the music in the intimacy of a suitable venue was seen as an immersive and 'inclusive' experience. The study also stresses the importance of Edinburgh as a desirable destination with a range of different venues and a reputation as a festival city.

Sustaining an audience: the importance of high-quality programming

Whilst the sociable aspect of the festival was highly appreciated, festival goers' primary interest was in the quality of performance and their proximity to world-

class musicians. The research emphasises how high-quality programming is more effective than 'even the most persuasive marketing literature' in retaining audiences. It stresses that casual attendees who have a powerful encounter with the music often return to the festival year after year. As well as high-quality programming, arts organisations should make identifying and retaining first-time attendees a priority. Whilst this research draws encouraging conclusions about audience participation at a jazz and blues festival, more investigation is needed into jazz audience participation in club settings.

This summary is by **Richard Mason, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

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