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Intensity of Classical Musical Participation. Distinction through Attendance of Classical Concerts, Operas and Ballets amongst Opera House Visitors

Abstract: The topic of classical music taste has been widely discussed in the sociology of cultural inequalities. Most analyses have considered the classical genre a single unit and have often focused on the socioeconomic and sociodemographic characteristics of audiences, without seriously addressing motives for attending. In this paper, we present a statistical analysis of data collected by an institution that offers a full program of classical music in Santiago (Chile). Classical concerts, operas and ballets are examined separately. Using linear regression models of intensity of attendance, we explore socioeconomic and sociodemographic variables, along with a diversity of motivations for attendance as explanatory factors. Results demonstrate that classical concerts, operas and ballets are different phenomena. Acknowledging the significant effects of age and sex, motives for attendance are also found to play a prominent role in all the statistical explanations, but they all differ in their impact across the three classical subgenres.

Keywords: homology, classical music, social space, cultural fragmentation, cultural inequalities

Introduction

In studies on social stratification and culture, the genre of classical music has achieved a particular status as representative of high culture. This interpretation originates from the highly influential work of Bourdieu (1979) and reached a peak of popularity in a seemingly endless series of contributions that intimately connect the Bourdieusian model of distinction with a strong association between social position and this traditional musical genre (Peterson & Simkus 1992; Peterson & Kern 1996¹). Besides, analysis have generally taken classical music as a unified or homogeneous practice (Wang 2016), and even when this is not the case, the kind of tastes, practices and knowledge involved have been associated with the dominant, upper or privileged strata of society (Domanski et al. 2020; Ariño & Llopis-Goig 2021).

The models of distinction and the “omnivore” establish classical music among the most socially appreciated of cultural practices. In other words, it is assumed that those who

¹ It is beyond the scope of the present paper to delve into this matter. However, I mention two works by Peterson and colleagues as well-known examples of a line of analysis that has substituted the idea of social distinction for that of the cultural omnivore. Peterson himself does not spend much time analyzing Bourdieu’s work, but his notion of omnivorousness remains the cornerstone of many “anti-Bourdieuian” works to this day. Interestingly, even in this case classical music was considered an essential part of highbrowness.

enjoy and/or attend classical music events have a broad and rich cultural background—they are the quintessential owners of cultural capital. In that sense, appreciation of classical music was seen as a symptom and a sign of profound involvement in culture. The many empirical analyses conducted over the years in myriad national contexts appear to support this idea (Donnat 1994; Bennet et al. 2009; Gayo 2020; Bennett et al. 2021). However, certain key findings have cast doubt on the cultural depth involved in buying expensive tickets (Benzecry 2011), revealing that a considerable proportion of those in managerial and professional roles are very often not engaged with high culture, and establishing that certain operas and the works of some classical composers have become significantly devalued over time. In other words, a proclivity to attend classical music events cannot be taken for granted among those in the upper echelons of society (Gayo 2017), and those who actually participate may not be so knowledgeable and deeply involved as might have been assumed until now.

Saying it differently, while distinction may well be associated with classical music and the upper classes, the way it operates is likely to be highly contingent on the classical subgenre and specific groups that develop embodied practices, tastes and knowledges by which they shape single and communitarian self-identities, not necessarily defined by the social class type of categories. In the long run, it has been argued that institutions are key actors in affecting the contingent relationship between social class and classical music. In that regard, Storey (2003) contends that opera was appropriated by the elite in major US cities like New York, turning what was a popular and widely appreciated genre into a more exclusive form of high culture. Nowadays, even when institutions declare the intention of democratizing subgenres such as opera by, for instance, seizing the opportunities offered by digitalization, they face many obstacles associated with the ingrained exclusiveness of opera culture. This is related not only to creators or institutional policies, but also to audiences' expectations regarding the quality of the performance in a broader sense, including leaflets, photography and videos accessible through very detailed curated institutional webpages (Nyman 2023 and 2024).

It is precisely this matter of social distinction that this article attempts to unravel. Our purpose is twofold. On the one hand, we examine the connection between capital and practice, including, in particular, the divide between cultural and economic capitals, or a specific interpretation of the homology thesis. On the other, we delve as far as possible into forms of internal differentiation that go beyond capital. On this relevant point, we take differentiation between classical audiences outside the limits of economic and cultural accumulations and socio-demographics, giving serious consideration to rationales for taking part.

It is important to acknowledge that data concerning the diversity of classical audiences has already been produced by detailed works on classical music. In a study of opera attendance in East Germany, Rössel (2011) contends that there is a vast diversity of ways of listening. Roose (2008) uses survey data from the Flemish region of Belgium to identify three groups of concertgoers: passers-by, participants, and the inner circle. This order reflects a rising gradient of participation in and knowledge of symphonic and chamber music events. In other research based on a more qualitative approach, authors highlight a marked cleavage within audiences between those who know the classical repertoires well

and were trained on the subject from an early age, and those who have had only limited exposure to classical music and attend concerts more sporadically (Pitts 2005; O'Sullivan 2009; Crawford et al. 2014a and 2014b). Intensity of participation is therefore a relevant issue, and one that features both an “inner circle” (Roose 2008) of “insiders” (Pitts 2005) who form live classical music audiences, and those who, for whatever reason, prefer to listen at home² or by other means. This type of difference is implicit in Storey's (2003) argument that opera has become more popular in recent decades through its accessibility in the form of video recordings, live transmissions and the like, but that the audiences that attend physical opera houses have barely grown. It is the latter audience that we focus on in the present article, that is, those who form the “inner circle.”

An important point to clarify here is the specific content of the matter at hand. Classical music can be considered a musical genre, and this has very generally been the case across sociology. More importantly, however, it is also a cultural field—and a very complex one at that. In light of this, we should mention a number of studies that have looked into this issue in particular. Classical concerts have been the most frequently occurring topic (Kolb 2001a and 2001b; Brown 2004; Dobson 2010; Tong 2016), although more nuanced references are sometimes made to specific types, such as symphonic (O'Sullivan 2009; Crawford et al. 2014a), chamber music (Pitts 2005), or both of them together (Roose 2008). In some rare cases, scholars have focused on operagoers (Storey 2003; Rössel 2011). In other cases, some authors have dealt with classical concerts and opera together, but have done so in such a way as to allow a degree of differentiation in results (Ho et al. 2021). Finally, there is a significant but limited literature in which internal comparison between classical subgenres has been approached in a more systematic or purposive way. It is important paying attention to the fact that it is predominant an interest which combines attention to socioeconomic and sociodemographic factors, at the same time that it is offered an analysis of motivations and barriers to attend. To that regard, the work by Nanos Research (2020) about arts attendance in Canada analyses cultural activities separately across a range that includes classical music, opera and ballet, finding some differences, mainly in the order of the reasons to attend, and above all some commonalities. The most relevant amongst these latter is ‘having grown up participating in it,’ ‘feeling welcome,’ ‘being able to go by themselves,’ ‘feeling like it gives life a deeper meaning,’ and ‘connecting to their community.’ Besides, in a study of the Paris’ *Opéra national*, Roussel (2000) compares opera and ballet audiences. Opera-goers would be more affluent in terms of place of residence, living in central areas of Paris, and older. Looking specifically at opera, those who take part would be very well educated, welcome having information about the show beforehand, and are quite divided in terms of thinking whether or not it is a spectacle for certain social classes. Last, in Slovak Republic, a work on Bratislava shows some differences between opera attendants and ballet-goers (Tajtáková et al. 2005; Tajtáková and Arias 2008). On one side, females are more interested and are

² Listening to classical music at home has not been a prominent subject of analysis, as the focus has been on attendance of live events. This is, to a great extent, because the available research funding has often been linked to the interests of cultural institutions dedicated to classical concerts, or in support of the formulation of an annual calendar of operas. This is not to say that the relevance of listening via recorded formats has gone unnoticed. For example, based on the expansion of electronic media, Dempster (2000) argues that classical music audiences were increasing steadily during the final two decades of the twentieth century.

more inclined to take part in than men in both opera and ballet, particularly the latter. On the other hand, motivations seem to be pretty similar between the genres, as it is the case with the numbers on the evaluation of barriers. A different matter are expectations, which come out as higher for women in terms of: emotional experience, new incentives and inspiration, educational development, and cultural broadening. Some differences are also found based on an analysis of age, but the fact that the survey was conducted to a student population sets strong restrictions in terms of the age differences and therefore it is difficult to assess the reliability of the findings.³

Having all this stream of research in mind, although intensity or frequency of attendance has been addressed in many analyses of classical music practices over the years, the issue has usually been incorporated as a secondary or background variable rather than as a central topic of analysis. This is surprising given that many such studies have been motivated by institutional concern about declining levels of classical concert attendance, particularly since the second half of the twentieth century. This limited attention paid to the inclination to attend classical performances has gone hand in hand with a restricted view of what is to be analyzed. The focus has been primarily on classical music concerts, while opera and ballet have remained secondary issues—if indeed they are dealt with at all—despite the popularity of their composers, choreographers and the works themselves.

In this article, it is offered an extensive analysis of the intensity of attendance of classical music events. We do so by clearly differentiating between opera, ballet and classical concert attendance, which helps to provide a more nuanced understanding of how processes of inequality and social distinction are associated with classical music—an issue that has long been discussed in studies of the sociology of culture. Our findings demonstrate that the three classical subgenres mentioned are significantly different from each other. On the one hand, classical concert attendance increases with age, is more masculine than feminine, correlates positively with visiting other cultural centers, and depends strongly on the reputation of the musical director. Opera attendees are even older than classical concertgoers, focus almost exclusively on operatic events, and are motivated to attend by two main factors: the novelty of the production and the cast of singers. Finally, although women are more inclined to go to the ballet, those who do so are not easily distinguishable according to other sociodemographic or socioeconomic variables. Balletgoers are inspired by a broad range of reasons to attend, including the stage director's reputation, the novelty of the production and the cast of dancers.

Intensity of Involvement in Classical Music

Rather than simply asserting that classical concert attendance frequency has not been analyzed as extensively as it should, I argue that training in classical music has been a prominent concern among studies of the genre. However, approaches adopted in scholarly reflection have been less about the development of a body of systematic analysis on intensity

³ In Sociological literature, we still lack strong theoretical and empirical basis in order to sustain a clear-cut distinction between opera, classical concerts and ballet, or even other alternatives that we can come up with even within those subgenres. It is precisely the main purpose of this article providing evidence to promote a discussion about internal lines of fragmentation between classical subgenres, instead of assuming, as it has been mostly up to now, that they can be simply accepted to be alike and part of the most conspicuous forms of highbrow culture.

of attendance, and have more generally involved mentioning training in passing—above all when asserting the relevance of lengthy training trajectories as a barrier to profound engagement in the classical music world.

An example of ambivalence toward paying a proper attention to proclivity to attend is provided by Roose (2008), who addresses a program of symphonic and chamber music operated by five Flemish institutions. Roose does address the frequency of classical concert attendance, but considers it simply to be a key criterion to make a segmentation of the sample—based on the six months before the survey questionnaire was applied. This means that, on one hand, this criterion is highly relevant to understanding the fragmentation of the classical audience, and, on other hand, the focus is finally on individuals' aesthetic dispositions and motives to attend.

Another means of defending the relevance of attendance frequency is by highlighting the influence of having significant exposure to classical music at an early age (Kolb 2001a; Crawford et al. 2014). In a study of opera house attendance in an East German city, Rössel (2011) contends that those who demonstrate a more analytical approach and greater levels of concentration during classical concerts are the same individuals who are in possession of greater cultural capital or higher levels of education. Although this does not strictly concern frequency of participation, it implies that profound connection with classical music has to do with a lengthy process of training (Crawford et al. 2014b)—from which we can assume that it also involves frequent and recurring exposure to the genre over a long period of time. In a longitudinal analysis of classical music attendance and enjoyment in the USA, Ho et al. (2021) found that a long period of exposure improves the chances of developing a taste for the genre. Furthermore, music lessons received early in life have a positive impact on classical concert and opera attendance. This is consistent with the pattern that sequentially links parents' education, school training and classical music taste and behavior (Crawford et al. 2014b). In a study of children taking piano lessons in the USA, Duke (1997) found that the average starting age is 6.6 years. Recipients were generally students who excelled at school and, in the majority of cases, their parents held professional occupations and had often taken piano lessons themselves, continuing to play the instrument at home. In addition, it has been found that engaging with classical music, opera and ballet is motivated by 'having grown up participating in it' (Nanos Research 2020).

The relevance of the intensity of participation is made clear in the case of non-attenders (Dobson 2010). In a small study of nine individuals who regularly attend arts events but rarely go to classical concerts, Dobson found that these individuals see themselves as lacking the necessary knowledge of the genre and, as a result, feel a degree of unease regarding the manners of audiences at these events, combined with a moral obligation to engage or listen attentively.⁴ The study concludes that this type of listening has much to do with a gradual process of "inclusion," which gives those with very limited exposure to classical music little chance of achieving real involvement in it. As such, we should expect the amount of time spent involved with classical music to be significantly associated with knowledge of musical content and the way in which this is appreciated.

⁴ Other related and relevant barriers would be: lack of knowledge, fear of boredom, formality of the event, and lacking interest by friends and family (Tajtáková et al. 2005; Tajtáková & Arias 2008).

With the above ideas in mind, we build on the relevance of long-term contact with classical music as a means of achieving real engagement with the genre, that is, of becoming someone who attends, listens, and knows about it. We already have significant knowledge of the various groups and their frequencies of attendance. For example, Roose (2008) makes it clear that those more involved—the so-called “inner circle”—have much more listening experience, their evaluations are more emotionally detached, and they are more open to innovation in musical repertoires. Kolb (2001a) identifies four distinct groups of concertgoers: consumers, fans, cultists and enthusiasts. The latter are represented by subscribers to the London Philharmonic Orchestra. These are individuals who start attending earlier than others—from the age of around 17 years. They are usually highly educated and hold professional employment positions. Of particular interest here is that the tastes of subscribers—or enthusiasts—are focused on classical music, which underlines the significant level of involvement in practices linked to achieving experiences that are as complete as possible in terms of their contact with the world of classical music. As such, intensity of contact with the music is not only conducive to achieving strong knowledge of the subject, but is, more than anything else, compulsory to full participation in classical music events.

However, although intensity of involvement has been a matter of interest either directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, this is not to say that statistical explanations of classical music attendance have been either common or a major concern in literature on the sociology of cultural practices and inequalities. Even less attention has been paid to the different subgenres of classical music, such as classical concerts, opera and ballet. In the present paper, we offer an analysis of patterns of participation in these three different traditional expressions, taking into account individuals’ frequencies of attendance, the possible sociodemographic and socioeconomic explanatory variables, and the rationales to take part in. In addition, levels of attendance are crosschecked or statistically correlated in order to establish whether audiences are different, or whether a sort of “general audience” exists, composed of individuals who enjoy classical music, regardless of its subgenres.

Data and Methods

In mid-2012, an opera house in Santiago, Chile, applied an email survey to a list of individuals who had at some point in the past contact with the institution and agreed to be contacted⁵. This email list includes all those who have been purchasing tickets and,

⁵ As a matter of context, the Classical music, ballet and opera offering at the main institutions in Chile follows international trends. Connection to a global circuit is not only about hiring directors and musicians from other countries or being trained abroad, which have been usual practices since the dawn of these disciplines in the country, and above all since the beginning of the twentieth century (Gayo 2020). It also has to do with monitoring the offering of other relevant theaters around the world. Chilean classical music institutions must be considered part of a global cultural phenomenon rather than a peculiar expression of South American culture. Even if we consider introductory programs for children of the type organized by the country’s main opera house, the Teatro Municipal (the Local Theatre), known fondly as “el pequeño municipal” (the little local theatre), the works offered are mainly from the European classical repertoire. Over the years, there has been strong continuity in concerts, operas and ballets, with, for example, classical ballets such as *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake* appearing repeatedly (for further up-to-date information, see <https://municipal.cl/espectaculos/>).

in that procedure, registering their emails in order to receive them and also information on programmes and offers from the same institution. To that extent, similar to what is reported by Roussel (2000) for the *Opéra National* in Paris, our sample does not include a representation of all the possible buyers of tickets, particularly those who got them by directly buying them in the Theatre itself or by other direct means, when this institution occasionally develops campaigns in different places to promote their shows. Having that in mind, a total of 2,412 individuals responded to the questionnaire in full.⁶ 30.1% were subscribers, 24.1% were former subscribers, and 38.3 have never subscribed. Considering all this information and the fact that those on the list were encouraged to participate in the survey by the possibility of getting two tickets of opera and ballet for the season, our sample must be understood as a group of individuals with at least a certain, and most likely a significant one, inclination to take part in the activities of the theatre.

Regarding the questionnaire, the questions covered a range of topics, including their preferred seat in the auditorium for the next season; sensible prices for tickets; reasons for attendance; favorite opera, ballet and classical music composer; how often they have seen a particular type of production (opera, ballet, classical concert), relationship with the theatre (subscriber, non-subscriber, other); time taken traveling; and sources of information. The descriptive statistics can be found in *Annex*, Table A1.

Of particular relevance to our purposes, interviewees were asked separately about the number of times they attended a classical concert, opera and ballet during the years 2010, 2011 and 2012. This means that data was collected concerning participation in specific classical music subgenres and in three different years, as shown in *Table 1*. The lower participation numbers reported in 2012 are due to the fact that the survey was applied in the middle of the year, meaning that responses are based on what respondents had seen up to that point. Otherwise, numbers remain stable over the years and similar in terms of subgenre distribution. Overall, most respondents report low levels of attendance across the board. For example, in 2011, 60.8% of the sample went to the opera between 1 and 3 times, while 66% attended the ballet and 61.9% went to concerts the same number of times. Opera attendance is slightly higher than ballet and concerts one.

Considering that these three years are consecutive, we brought together the data for the whole period, adding up the number of times individuals attended a particular type of performance each year. This procedure generated the dependent for use in the linear regression models presented in the following section. As such, numbers will be higher than for individual years and, to some extent, they will be more realistic, above all taking

⁶ This procedure is similar to the one used by Tong et al. (2016), although the latter achieved only 241 responses. Using a postal survey, Roose (2008) completed 2,465 survey interviews—a similar number to us. However, he contacted a random sample of individuals, while in our study, emails were sent to the complete list of registered individuals. For an East German opera house, Rössell (2011) obtained 1,170 survey responses, conducting interviews during performance intermissions. Our study is distinctive in that we were able to contact all individuals on the opera house's mailing list, meaning that we can claim statistical representation in a broad sense, similar to Roose's study. However, as stated, those not registered are beyond our reach. All the qualitative studies work with much lower numbers and use a diversity of methods of recruiting participants, with little concern given to representativeness, which seems to be merely assumed. In any case, our sample covers very well the public of the opera house, but it is an exploratory sample, in part because it was unknown the socio demographics of the whole e-mailing list, and for that reason general validity of our findings cannot be taken for granted, and much less to a national level, which is not the purpose of this study.

Table 1
Intensity (%) of attendance of opera, ballet and concerts (2010–2012)

Visits	Opera			Ballet			Concerts		
	2010	2011	2012	2010	2011	2012	2010	2011	2012
0	16.4	15.6	16.1	18.5	18.7	20.1	20.3	20.6	22.4
1	27.9	27	38.7	34.3	33.3	48.4	36.6	36.9	47.4
2	18.9	22.1	19	21.6	20.8	16.7	15.9	14.9	12.5
3	12.8	11.7	9	11.4	11.9	8.2	11.4	10.1	5.8
4	7.4	6.1	10.2	5.1	5.9	3.7	5.2	5.6	4.1
5	3.4	3.3	2.7	3.2	2.9	1.3	2.3	2.8	2.8
6	3.4	3.1	0.7	1.9	1.9	0.3	1.6	1.7	1.3
7	7.3	8.4	2.8	3.2	3.7	1	1.2	1.5	0.6
8	0.7	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.1	1.1	1.2	0.5
9	0.4	0.6	0.2	0.3	0.3	0	1.7	1.8	0.7
10	0.3	0.1	0	0	0	0	0.2	0.5	0.1
11	1	1.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.1	2.6	2.4	1.6
Total N	2,412								

NA: no answer given.

into account that in a city such as Santiago, an annual calendar of classical music has significant limitations in terms of the number and variety of events, the small number of institutions able to offer content of this type, funding, and, linked to the latter, opportunities for employment in a reasonably well-paid position as a musician, actor, administrative staff member or any of the other roles involved in the operation of a theatre or opera house. With all these elements in mind, Table 2 offers a summary of attendance frequencies, bringing together the number of times interviewees attended operas, ballets or concerts between 2010 and 2012. This view of the numbers reduces the prominence of low attendance and helps us to understand that demand regulates itself in time spans much longer than the arbitrary 12-month period prior to application of the survey—a period that is so common internationally among surveys on culture. In this table, we observe that individuals are usually repeat attendees of classical events, and that a high proportion (more than 30%) attend frequently (six times or more).

Table 2
Intensity (%) of attendance of opera, ballet and concerts (2010–2012)

N. operas	% opera	N. ballet	% ballet	N. concerts	% concerts
0	11	0	13.6	0	16.5
1/3	19.7	1/3	26.4	1/3	30.2
4/5	21.5	4/5	24.4	4/5	18.6
6/8	20.7	6/7	15.1	6/7	11.3
9/15	16.4	8/10	10.4	8/12	12.8
16/33	10.7	11/33	10.2	13/33	10.7

In order to have reliable linear regression results, robust linear regression models were finally run. The coefficients were compared with OLS linear regression models without

control for outliers, models without outliers and also regression models with dependent variables without zeros or dropping non-attendance. The results controlling the effect of outliers with the robust regression procedure came out as the most stable in terms of results, very similar to the other alternatives which also controlled by the influence of extreme residuals.⁷

Results

The act of unpacking attendance of classical music events into the categories of opera, ballet and concerts allows us to analyze whether attendance is in fact as uniform across the three subgenres as might seem immediately to be the case considering a long stream of research reluctant or unaware enough to be ready to delve into internal differentiations within the “classical” field. Furthermore, we have the opportunity to establish whether there is an association between time and involvement in the classical music scene. From the point of view of the correlations between subgenres, even though statistical relationships are all positive and significant, it is very clear from **Table 3** that attending opera, ballet and concerts are three very different activities. Correlations are much higher within subgenres, that is, between years within the same type of activity. These Pearson’s correlations are always above 0.5, generally above 0.6, and occasionally above 0.8, with a maximum of 1.0 in the case of a perfect match between one year and another. By contrast, if we look at correlations between subgenres, they are all well below 0.3, indicating a much weaker relationship. Regarding this, correlations are stronger between subgenres when attendance is considered for the same year. In other words, “operagoers,” “balletgoers” and “concertgoers” are very frequently different individuals, and those who attend all three types of event are uncommon. This suggests that the world of classical music is complex and highly specialized, or divided by tastes and disciplines that require knowledge of contrasting repertoires, techniques and works. If the three activities generally appeal to different individuals and attract their own particular audiences, separate analysis is required in order to understand whether those who attend have themselves different characteristics. In order to answer this question, we perform a set of (robust) linear regression analyses, presented below. Based on the consistency of attendance of classical subgenres over the years, it was decided to formulate a measure that rolls the three-year period into a single indicator for each activity. The indicators for the three subgenres serve as the dependent variables in the regression models. In other words, the small size of the correlations coefficients between classical subgenres is what prompted us to proceed with three separate analyses, avoiding an approach based on a single indicator of classical music attendance.

In relation to participation over time, there is a patterned dynamic that shows significant stability in attendance, but also some variation. This stability is presented in the previous paragraph, but if we look at change, two ideas emerge. On the one hand, taking the first

⁷ In the literature on classical music, the effects of the dependent variable in the descriptive results, either statistical or ethnographic, have not been well reflected upon yet. In other words, the studies which work on specific institutions, expressions or temporalities of Classical music can be affected by the phenomenon scholars pursue to provide an account for. This is a simple and unavoidable fact, on one side, but something that it is convenient to be well aware of in order to understand the possible limitations of our findings.

year (2010) as a point of reference, attendance seems weakening in the following two years, even though correlations within each subgenre are still very strong. For instance, between 2010 and 2011, going to the opera has a coefficient of correlation of 0.800, while between 2010 and 2012 the figure falls to 0.614. Similar numbers are found for ballet (0.749 versus 0.527) and concerts (0.800 versus 0.644). On the other hand, this very same pattern is found in the relationship between subgenres. Taking 2010 as the year of reference, for any of the activities, the correlation with attending another activity is higher the same year, with the coefficient declining in subsequent years. For instance, going to the opera and ballet in 2010 has a coefficient of 0.169, and opera in 2010 correlates with ballet in 2011 at a coefficient of 0.099 and in 2012 at a coefficient of 0.056. With all these patterns in mind, our conclusion is twofold. First, even though audiences are stable, the individuals who attend—and, therefore, those who do not—are not always the same, with personal involvement fluctuating over time. Second, when individuals present high or low levels of participation in a given activity, they usually exhibit a similar kind of behavior—although at a much lower level—in other domains of classical music. This explains why there is consistency of participation across domains between each of the three years.

Table 3

Pearson's correlations of frequency of attendance by activity and year (2010–2012)

	<i>Opera</i> 2010	<i>Opera</i> 2011	<i>Opera</i> 2012	<i>Ballet</i> 2010	<i>Ballet</i> 2011	<i>Ballet</i> 2012	<i>Concert</i> 2010	<i>Concert</i> 2011
<i>Opera</i> 2011	.800**							
<i>Opera</i> 2012	.614**	.711**						
<i>Ballet</i> 2010	.169**	.119**	.048*					
<i>Ballet</i> 2011	.099**	.160**	.080**	.749**				
<i>Ballet</i> 2012	.056**	.091**	.165**	.527**	.643**			
<i>Concert</i> 2010	.279**	.227**	.169**	.182**	.152**	.124**		
<i>Concert</i> 2011	.203**	.243**	.167**	.131**	.185**	.144**	.800**	
<i>Concert</i> 2012	.174**	.193**	.241**	.127**	.154**	.220**	.644**	.720**

* < 0.05, ** < 0.01.

Given the impossibility of assimilating all the different classical music subgenres under a single or univocal pattern of behavior, as demonstrated in the description of [Table 3](#), above, it becomes necessary to consider that explanations of attendance might be different. In [Table 4](#), we present the results of three linear regression models in which attendance of ballet, opera and concerts are accounted for by treating them separately. It can be said in advance that the differences are notable.

The linear regression models were created based on variables connected with the most common sociological descriptions of explanatory factors within the stream of studies on

culture and stratification. These include occupational class, age and sex (Bourdieu 1979; Bennett et al. 2009). To achieve this, some adaptation was needed due to the limited length of the questionnaire and the scarcity of questions on interviewees' sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics. These covered only their sex, age, place of residence, and occupation.

A significant amount of information on occupation was available, because this had been obtained through an open question. Responses needed to be recoded into occupational groups, until the number of cases was sufficient for us to proceed with statistical analysis with a minimum of confidence. The outcome is the clustering of eleven occupational groups presented in Table 4, managers, physicists/biologists, architects/designers, engineers, medical doctors/ odontologists/nurses, economists/ accountants, lawyers, philologists/ journalists/artists, social scientists, technicians/clerks, and students. We need to consider that the bulk of the opera house's audience would be classified as belonging to the service class according to the EGP social class scheme, as "higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations" according to the British NS-SEC, or as similar positions in any other instrument of socioeconomic classification (Connelly et al. 2016). We therefore adopted a strategy to group similar types of professionals together in order to ensure that a reasonably robust number of cases would be available for each category. As most of our interviewees could be considered service class members, occupational clustering attempts to capture a possible tension between cultural and economic capitals, which has been common currency in Bourdieusian analysis (Bourdieu 1979; Bennett et al. 2009; Rosenlund 2017).

We sought to capture socioeconomic differences by considering interviewees' place of residence. The Chilean capital, Santiago, is a large metropolis characterized by a significant inequality between the various districts and their local governments. Socio-professional and territorial inequalities are of paramount importance here (Link et al. 2015; Gayo & Méndez 2024). We included the territorial dimension in our analysis as another means of controlling for socioeconomic differences. We did so by district, bringing together similar areas, considering the number of cases available in every one of them. This procedure allowed us to keep categories for the wealthiest parts of the city and define much larger zones in areas with less cases and more middle class or even working-class profile, and probably attendees. Together, the districts of Vitacura, Lo Barnechea, Providencia, Las Condes, La Reina and Ñuñoa form the highest-income area of both the capital and the country as a whole.

Sex and age are also included in the models. The idea that sex affects classical music appreciation has been mentioned repeatedly in the literature, with scholars such as van Eijck (2001), Purhonen et al. (2011), Tong et al. (2016), Ariño and Llopis (2021) and Domanski et al. (2020) asserting that women have a stronger preference for classical music than men do. According to these pieces of research, this gendered pattern means that women are more inclined than men to attend classical music events in a considerable range of societies, including Australia, Finland, the Netherlands, Spain and Poland. More closer to our analysis comparing opera and ballet, a study found that women have a higher proclivity to take part in both type of shows (Tajtková et al. 2005; Tajtková and Arias 2008). This is not always the case, however, and Roose (2008) found that men were slightly

overrepresented at classical concerts. Regarding age, it is generally accepted that classical music is overwhelmingly enjoyed by the oldest groups in society. Using survey data for Japan from 1981, Kurabayashi and Ito (1992) contend that the preference for classical music rises with age. Conducting a primarily ethnographic study of a chamber music festival in the UK, Pitts (2005) refers to the aging profile of audiences, despite widespread agreement regarding the need to broaden the age range of those who attend. Similarly, Kolb (2001a) talks about the aging of the subscriber base of philharmonic orchestras in the UK and the USA, asserting that classical music attendance is decreasing due to sociodemographic (increasingly non-white population) and generational (cultural) changes. All in all, a society with growing ethnic minorities and young people inclined toward the consumption of popular music creates a landscape that makes it difficult to maintain interest in classical music and, in particular, levels of attendance of live events. Besides, when comparing the age structure of opera and ballet, Rössel (2000) concludes that those who go to the latter are much younger.

In addition, and approaching the topic in a fairly distinctive way compared to the existing literature, our model considers a number of other variables that have directly to do with behaviors and the rationales of people interested in taking part in cultural activities. On the one hand, we address visits to certain cultural centers that could be compared to opera houses in terms of their offering of content that falls into the category of high culture. One such establishment is the Las Condes Cultural Center, which is located in the heart of a very wealthy area of the city and offers a program that includes theatrical productions and classical concerts. The other is the Fine Arts Museum—a traditional and highly regarded gallery that puts strong emphasis on Chilean visual artists, sculptors and painters. On the other hand, our model delves into the impact of a substantial range of motivations to attend ballets, operas and concerts. These reasons are: 1) popularity of the composer; 2) type of event (classical or contemporary); 3) discounts or promotions; 4) offers available to young people and students; 5) novelty or works which have not been presented in Chile previously; 6) cast (national or international); 7) musical director (degree of recognition); and 8) stage director (national or guest from abroad, degree of recognition). Roose (2008) also considers some of these reasons, but he divides them into two groups: aesthetic dispositions and motives for attendance. Conducting a factor analysis for each of the two groups of variables, he identifies a number of dimensions and attempts to explain them using segmentation based on frequency of attendance as an explanatory variable within a MANOVA test. Although this is a legitimate procedure, Roose's results do not provide information about the specific effect of particular reasons for taking part. For his part, Rössel (2011) is highly detailed in capturing what he terms “components of musical experience,” and he also opts to conduct a factor analysis in order to reduce the complexity of the many items that are assessed. He then puts the six factors or dimensions into a linear regression analysis also as dependent variables. As such, what can be understood as reasons for involvement in classical music listening are positioned as explained Variables.⁸ As stated previously, our models take a very different route, positioning the motivations as

⁸ Although information of this type was not requested in our survey, there are other examples of works that have delved specifically into particular reasons for attendance. One good example is the argument by Dearn and Price (2016) that sense of community is conducive to having a satisfactory concert experience.

variables that are expected to contribute to explaining attendance of classical music events. We find that they do so in a highly effective way in some cases, as shown below. This is directly connected with previous research on the matter (Roussel 2000; Tajtáková et al. 2005; Tajtáková and Arias 2008; Nano Research 2020), but hereafter we focus more on the discounts or prices and, above all, on the features of the classical shows, instead of more general individuals' expectations and motivations, such as relaxation, experiencing life performance or going out with friends, amongst many other.

Bearing all of these factors in mind and looking at the models presented in Table 4, we find an important degree of similarity between classical subgenres. Overall, their percentages of statistical explanation are very similar, ranging from 19.3% (0.193 adjusted R-squared) for ballet to 24.1% for opera, with concerts lying somewhere in the middle at 21.3%. However, when attention is paid to specific variables or categories, differences between models are highly relevant, and this is the main line of argumentation that will be followed hereafter.

To begin with, and despite widespread insistence on the influence of aging on classical music audiences, ballet attendance does not appear to be influenced by this factor, and concert going very slightly. People of different ages attend ballet performances to a very similar degree. Then, moving to variables that capture elements of socioeconomic difference, neither place of residence nor occupation appear to have a major influence on the intensity of attendance by ballet audiences. On the positive side of influence we find almost all of the other variables. First of all, women attend more ballet shows than men, coming out at 0.63 points or number of visits higher. Furthermore, going to other cultural centers with similar programs (e.g., the Las Condes Cultural Center) or experiencing high-culture content (e.g., the Fine Arts Museum) improves an individual's proclivity of going to see ballets, 0.50 and 0.45 respectively. On the negative side, discounts do not make events more attractive to members of the general public (-0.55), though the opposite is true when promotions are made available to young people and students (0.45).

Those who take into account the reputation of stage directors and whether they are from home or abroad are more inclined to attend ballet performances (0.84). This is immediately followed by the novelty of the production, that is, whether it has been presented in Chile previously (0.70). However, the latter must be taken cautiously, as the most preferred, acclaimed and attended ballets almost every year are classical works such as *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*. For individuals to be attracted to the venue, the type of event is also important, that is, whether the show is classical or contemporary (0.98). Other relevant but less significant factors are the cast of musicians or artists, in terms of their national or international renown (0.24); the popularity of the composer, or how well they are known (0.23); and, as already mentioned, any financial incentives or offers that might be effective in attracting young people and students to the event (0.45). These factors together highlight the challenges involved in bringing about the conditions for the current constitution of a ballet audience. There are many reasons for people to attend a ballet, and in the absence of significant effects on the part of age and the socioeconomic differences among audience members, these motives must be evaluated with care in order to ensure that individuals are ultimately inclined to buy a ticket.

Table 4

Robust linear regression of ballet, opera and concert attendance

Variables	Ballet	Opera	Concert
<i>Las Condes Cultural Center</i>	0.50***	0.36+	0.78***
<i>Fine Arts Museum</i>	0.45*	0.25	0.42***
<i>Musical director</i>	0.21	0.02	2.08***
<i>Popularity</i>	0.23*	-0.82***	-0.75***
<i>Event type</i>	0.98***	0.43*	0.42***
<i>Discounts</i>	-0.55***	0.05	-0.43***
<i>Offers (youngsters/students)</i>	0.45**	0.30	0.03
<i>Novelty</i>	0.70***	1.65***	0.16
<i>Cast</i>	0.24*	1.34***	0.13
<i>Stage director</i>	0.84***	0.76*	-0.20
Women	0.63***	-1.12***	-0.87***
63+	-0.15	3.67***	0.59*
53-62	-0.18	0.98**	0.04
43-52	-0.28	0.34	0.14
33-42	0.05	0.05	0.11
Vitacura/Lo Barnechea	-0.32	0.21	-0.61*
Providencia	-0.30	0.39	-0.06
Las Condes	-0.36	0.31	-0.58*
La Reina/Nuñoa	-0.38	-0.21	-0.45+
Southern Santiago	-0.11	-0.58	-0.40
Northern/Western Santiago	-0.52	-0.35	-0.45
Central Santiago	0.002	0.03	-0.40
Outside Santiago	-0.58*	0.01	-0.92**
<i>Managers</i>	-0.03	-0.44	-1.52***
<i>Physicist/Biologist</i>	-0.63	-0.32	-1.02*
<i>Architect/Designer</i>	-0.11	1.00*	-0.27
<i>Engineer</i>	-0.07	-0.21	-0.88**
<i>Doctor/Odont/Nurse</i>	0.37	0.36	-0.42
<i>Economist/Accountant</i>	0.12	-0.14	-1.07***
<i>Lawyer</i>	-0.04	1.67***	-0.36
<i>Philologist/Journ/Artist</i>	0.24	0.92	-0.41
<i>Social scientist</i>	-0.63*	-0.12	-0.20
<i>Technician/clerk</i>	-0.21	-0.21	-1.11***
<i>Student</i>	0.36	0.32	-0.08
Constant	3.51	5.40	6.54
Adj R-squared	0.193	0.241	0.213
N	2,411		

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, +p < 0.10. Baseline categories: 1. Sex: women, 2. Age: 32 years old or less, 3. Local areas: Santiago (city center); 4. Occupation: lecturer/teacher.

The configuration of opera audiences bears some resemblance to that of ballet, but a number of important differences need to be underlined. In terms of occupation, architects, designers (1.00) and, above all, lawyers (1.67) tend to be more inclined to attend the opera than people in other occupations. Place of residence does not have any significant effect. While these two variables have either no or relatively mild effects, age and gender exert

a more notable influence. To a large extent, opera appeals to those in the more advanced stages of adulthood. The frequency with which individuals in the 53–62 age bracket attend increases by almost 1 point (0.98) on the scale compared with those in the earliest age bracket. This, in turn, is less than a third of the effect of the 63+ age bracket, which has the greatest influence of any variable or category in all three models, with an increase of 3.67. In other words, opera is for the mature. In addition, being a woman significantly decreases (–1.12) the number of times that a person goes to the opera, which immediately contradicts any notion of women as the most prominent consumers of classical music and high culture in general.

If we look at other practices, those who visit the Fine Arts Museum are not particularly keen on being part of the opera audiences, although there might be a slight positive effect of attending Las Condes Cultural Center (0.36). This is interesting, as it suggests that operagoers share certain cultural practices that point to specialized behavior focused around opera events—something that seems to happen to a greater degree here than with the other classical subgenres. With regard to motives, we see a considerable reduction in complexity compared to ballet. Novelty of the show is the most important motivation, with opera attendance increasing 1.65 visits when interviewees consider positively to attend the theatre due to a new production is presented. The second most important reason is the cast of musicians or singers (1.34), with emphasis on internationally renowned performers. Then, individuals' evaluation of the stage director (0.76) and the type of event (0.43) have a positive effect, while popularity of the composer shows a relatively negative influence (–0.82 points less of attendance).

Finally, the profile of classical concertgoers is fairly different to those of the other two subgenres. The influence of socioeconomic conditions shows relevant particularities. The socio-professional groups of manager (–1.52), physicist/biologist (–1.02), engineer (–0.88), economist/accountant (–1.07) and technician/clerk (–1.11) declare less frequent attendance. Residential area has some effect, showing a lower level of participation by those who live in Vitacura (–0.61), Las Condes (–0.58) and outside Santiago (–0.92). However, a very different situation is found in regard to sociodemographic variables, with findings more closely resembling the opera genre: women attend classical concerts less frequently than men (–0.87), and older concertgoers participate the most: 0.59 more times when they are aged 63 years or above.

Although there are more similarities between the socio demographics of concertgoers and operagoers than with those who go to the ballet, this pattern disappears in relation to practices of visiting cultural centers. Those who visit cultural centers and museums are very much alike in terms of their inclination to go to ballets and concerts. Regarding classical concerts, those who have been to the Las Condes Cultural Center go more often to concerts (0.78), and for those who have visited the Fine Arts Museum the increase is 0.42. In terms of the motives of concertgoers, in stark contrast to those who go to the ballet and opera, the fundamental reason is the musical or orchestral director, that is, whether or not he or she has an established reputation. This reason increases the frequency of attendance very drastically by 2.08 visits. Another significant motive is the type of event (classical or contemporary) (0.42), with classical being the most in demand. By contrast, the popularity of the composer (–0.75) and the availability of discounts (–0.43) have a negative effect on attendance.

Conclusions

Attendance of classical music events has been a topic of general interest among those scholars who have conducted specific research on this musical genre. However, the types of analysis have been quite diverse, and a clear analytical line has been drawn only around accounting for attendance of classical music concerts. In that vein, there are reflections on the importance of and reasons for a decline in concert-going (Kolb 2001a and 2001b; Peterson 2002). There are even calls from some authors for attention to be paid to recent increases in consumption in the digital era, which they claim compensate for the erosion of concert venue audiences (Dempster 2000). Acknowledging those kind of contributions, I argue that there is a general lack of work to provide quantitative explanations of attendance, which limits our ability to make accounts that connect key variables in the sociology of culture and stratification, within which particular emphasis has been put on forms of cultural and economic capital. Regarding our findings and considering its limitations in terms of representativeness, it is very clear that Chilean classical music live audiences belong mostly to a managerial and professional social class, that is, those who significantly accumulate economic and cultural capital. A sort of cleavage between those two different capitals is more difficult to argue for as a general divide. On this matter, classical concert might be a partial exception as STEM or technical professionals very consistently seem to participate less than all the other socio-professional groups. More than a division between economic and cultural capital, it would suggest one which might confront technical cultures against those more humanistic.

In addition to this, and beginning with Bourdieu's work and interpretations thereof (Bourdieu 1979), portrayals of classical music in its various forms have long been based on a somewhat generalized or univocal notion of the genre. As such, it has been common for classical concerts and opera to be grouped together in analyses (van Eijck 2001; Rössel 2011; Ho et al. 2021). However, when this unit is unpacked, as has been attempted in the present paper, stark internal differences emerge. In other words, although we agree that classical concerts, operas and ballets together constitute an important element of high culture repertoires in contemporary societies, they are three very different types of performances that are consumed and appropriated differently. This issue should be addressed in terms of how particular classical music subgenres operate in relation to degrees or types of social distinction, research agenda which our work attempts to push forward.

Socioeconomic variables, such as place of residence and occupation, generally show no or minor effects across all subgenres, with some exceptions for concert attendance, as already mentioned. However, the story concerning socio-demographics is different. On the one hand, the proclaimed feminization of high culture only appears to occur in the case of ballet, with women making up a greater part of audiences, which cannot be extensive to the opera as other works would suggest (Tajtková et al. 2005; Tajtková and Arias 2008). Opera and concert audiences are more masculine. On the other hand, the oft-claimed aging of classical musical audiences is a phenomenon that appears correct in the world of opera, but to a much lesser extent in that of classical concerts, and indeed seems to be nonexistent in that of ballet, quite consistent with previous research (Roussel 2000).

In *La distinction*, Bourdieu (1979) claimed that works of classical music operate very differently according to structures of lifestyle, capital and social power. Subsequent works have confirmed the connection between positions in the social structure and cultural practices in a diversity of societies, with that musical genre presenting a generally preferential connection with upper-class ways of life (Donnat 1994; Bennett et al. 2009 and 2021, amongst many others). In parallel, important evidence has emerged revealing the diversity of classical music audiences (Roose 2008; Rössel 2011). However, there has been a tendency to overlook the fact that *musica docta* is a complex world that incorporates several quite different expressions and, even more importantly for our argument, that these diverse subgenres of classical concerts, opera and ballet are significantly differentiated by the roles they play in social distinction and the types of individual rationales involved therein.

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Annex

Table A1
Descriptives

	Frequencies	Percentages
Sex		
Men	952	39.5
Women	1210	50.2
Age		
–32	722	29.9
33–42	560	23.2
43–52	393	16.3
53–62	265	11
63+	223	9.2
Occupation		
Managers	166	6.9
Physi/bio scientist	61	2.5
Architect/designer	91	3.8
Engineers	320	13.3
Doctor/Odont/Nurse	199	8.3
Lecturer/teacher	184	7.6
Economist/accountant	180	7.5
Lawyers	140	5.8
Philolo/Journ/Artist	69	2.9
Social scientist	133	5.5
Technicians/clerks	159	6.6
Students	213	8.8
Place of residence		
VitacLoBar	242	10
Providencia	292	12.1
Las Condes	492	20.4
LaReinaNuñoa	286	11.9
Santiago	232	9.6
Santiago's south	165	6.8
Santiago's north/west	116	4.8
Around Santiago's centre	126	5.2
Outside Santiago	184	7.6
Attending Las Condes cultural centre		
No	1665	69
Yes	747	31
Attending Beaux-Arts museum		
No	1466	60.8
Yes	946	39.2
Reasons to attend		
Musical director no	1980	82.1
Musical director yes	432	17.9
Author's popularity no	982	40.7
Author's popularity yes	1430	59.3
Classic or contemporary no	865	35.9
Classic or contemporary yes	1547	64.1
Discounts no	822	34.1
Discounts yes	1590	65.9
Youth/students offer no	1573	65.2
Youth/students offer yes	839	34.8
Novelty no	1798	74.5
Novelty yes	614	25.5
National/international cast no	1310	54.3
National/international cast yes	1102	45.7
Scene director no	2228	92.4
Scene director yes	184	7.6
Total (including don't knows)	2412	

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