

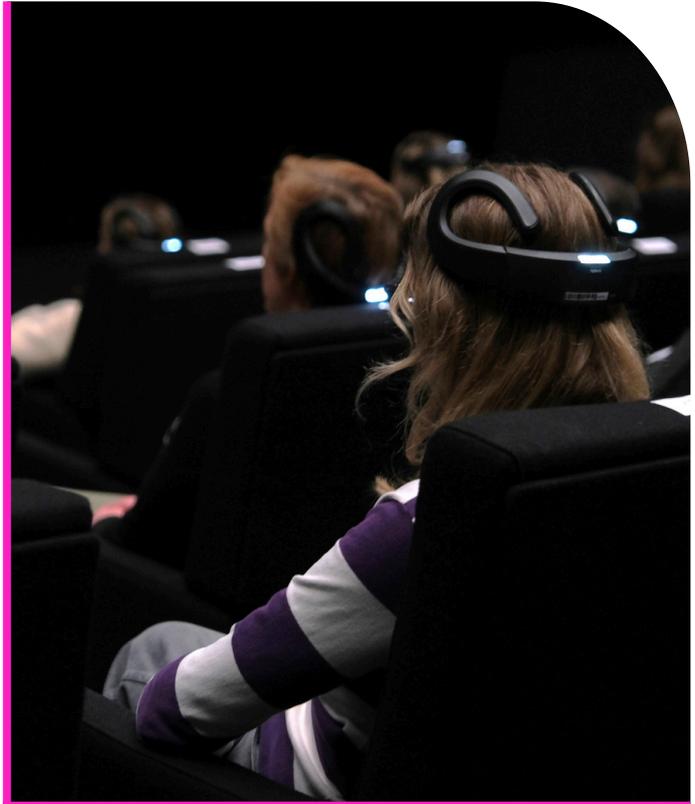


# Audience Insights

## St George's Research Concerts

We live in a world where screen-based media is the way we entertain, educate, and inform ourselves, with the global TV subscription market alone estimated as \$158 billion. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a considerable shift in focus away from in-person entertainment to digital entertainment and the technologies that enable it. Live performance venues that were once cultural hubs are struggling to retain their pre-COVID attendance levels, losing out to newer formats, such as streaming. Many venues responded to declining in-person audience attendance by offering live and as-live streaming of their offerings. Whilst event streaming has shown steady growth, relatively little research has been done into whether it is truly a suitable substitute for the in-person experience. Are audiences missing out by staying at home?

Historically, the practice of audience research in the creative industries has relied on flawed, self-report-based methods, which at their best, provide limited insight, and at their worst, can be unreliable and misleading. This can lead to significant losses when investing in content that audiences do not connect with, or over-investment in new infrastructure for experiences that audiences have a limited appetite for (3D cinema, for example). Rigorous audience research, drawing signal from the noise of the ever-expanding range of audience data, can inform the creative industries; it can de-risk investment in entertainment, making it more likely to engage its target audiences and deliver innovative and captivating experiences for global markets.



MyWorld's Audience Insights research team works with creative organisations to conduct scientific audience research. Their robust approach has many benefits over the methods typically used in the creative industries.

### Reliable methods

In a review of 489 audience research studies, MyWorld's team found that the majority of studies use only self-report methods, such as questionnaires and interviews. While these methods provide useful insights, they rely on subjective reports, which are often biased and difficult to compare between participants. Further, studies have repeatedly shown that human memory is unreliable, and our retrospective opinions are disproportionately biased by the ending of a piece of content. MyWorld's Audience Insights team combine self-report methods with biometric technology to provide accurate, meaningful, moment-by-moment audience measures.

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### Bespoke, real-world studies

It has been widely demonstrated that factors such as viewing environment and the presence of others have a significant impact on audience experience. To obtain accurate results, MyWorld works with industry partners to create research environments that closely match the genuine experience. In MyWorld's Smart Cinema, audiences see media in an industry-standard cinema. Remote sensors combined with wearable devices ensure participants don't feel overly observed and can enjoy the content. The team also takes a smaller-scale version of this set-up to real venues.

### Science-backed research

When researching audiences, companies often face pressure to show success and well-spent funds. This, combined with unreliable research methods, can lead to inaccurate insights and missteps in the creative process. MyWorld's research is underpinned by a robust and repeatable approach, documented, peer-reviewed and published in leading academic journals.

**“You have to be driven by the evidence. If you put too much weight in a borderline finding, you're investing time and effort in something that doesn't really make a difference.”**

Dr Felix Carter,  
Audience Researcher



St George's, a world-class independent music venue at the heart of Bristol, is among those whose business has been affected by the post-COVID decline of in person events. Working with MyWorld's Audience Insights team, St George's set out to measure how audiences respond to live music and investigate if live-streamed concerts are a suitable substitute for the in-person experience.

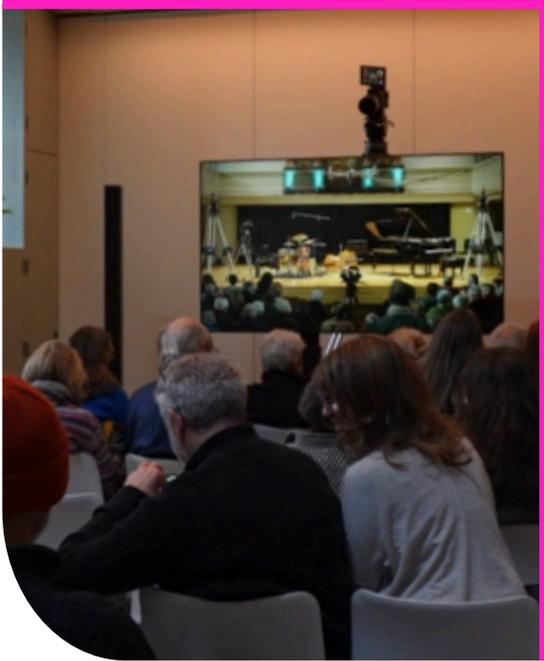
Over two nights, the team conducted two research concerts in St George's hall. Each night attendees were randomly assigned to one of two groups upon arrival to the venue; one group watched in the hall, and the other watched a live stream in a nearby room. The team used portable sensors to measure heart rate synchrony across the two groups, a which has been repeatedly demonstrated in the field of psychology as a reliable marker of immersion in creative content. Alongside audience questionnaires, the heart rate synchrony analysis reliably showed that the in-person experience was more engaging than the live stream.

**“Our main finding suggests it's worth paying to see live music, and now we've got research that really shows it, in a way that no other study has done.”**

Dr Felix Carter, Audience Researcher

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This study is the first of its kind, as no other research has done as tight of a comparison between groups. The strict experimental controls demonstrate that it is more than just the experience of being in a collective, or of being at a venue, that increases audience engagement. The increased engagement was purely due to being in the room with the performers.

**“When someone experiences live music, a lot of things go into it that you don't get live-streamed. You're leaving the house, you might be going for a drink first, this is all part of the experience.”**

**Dr Felix Carter,  
Audience Researcher**

This work shows that there's something irreplaceable about coming together to experience live music, and a vital role for live entertainment venues in our increasingly digital world. The concerts picked up a considerable amount of press, including being featured on [BBC online](#), and the BBC Breakfast Show.

**“We want to use this to amplify locally, regionally, and nationally how important live events and venues like this are to our community and city.”**

**Professor Iain Gilchrist, Research Co-Lead**

These concerts also enabled crucial exploratory data collection. The research team captured a range of additional audience measures, such as thermal imaging and movement, which they will develop as part of their toolkit. Additionally, the concerts were recorded in a range of formats, including 3D video and spatial audio. Using this content, the team will investigate the difference that perceptual quality makes to an audience's experience, and which formats may be the future of live-streamed events.

The St George's research concerts highlight the unique value of live performance, not just as entertainment, but as a shared cultural experience that cannot be replicated digitally. By combining rigorous scientific methods with real-world settings, MyWorld's Audience Insights team is helping the creative industries make evidence-based decisions. This work provides a clear pathway to uncover how creative organisations can intelligently invest in content and technology that truly enhances their audience's experience.