

Finding the Results and Reason for Attendance Decline:
A Research Study for Opelika High School Theatre Department

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PRCM 4400

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Research Specifics.....	5
Literature Review.....	6
Media Analysis.....	8
Methodology.....	10
Results.....	11
Recommendations.....	13
Appendices.....	15
Bibliography.....	29

Executive Summary

Opelika High School has a very esteemed theater program, however they suffer in terms of attendance for their shows. Opelika High School Theatre Society (OHSTS) strives to increase their interest in shows and attendance at shows. Currently they perform four shows throughout the year, and each show has six performances. They are present on social media but their outreach is somewhat limited. We have conducted research through an online survey with questions specifically aimed towards discovering what the OHSTS can do to increase awareness, interest, and attendance of shows.

The study conducted asked the public two types of questions: screener questions and questions related to solving the problem. The survey asked questions regarding age range and education level in order to properly analyze the data and publics reached. The survey also asked specific questions to the problem. There were open ended questions such as listing what shows they would be interested in seeing as well as a variety of scale based questions in order to gauge the public's interests. The data was collected with an online survey through Qualtrics. The data was collected during a five-day span, and collected a total of 160 responses. The population was randomly selected as we sent out the survey via social media. The survey was sent out on our individual Facebook pages as well as the OHSTS staff's Facebook pages. Majority of the respondents were in the age category of 45-54 years old at 30 percent, followed by 18-24 years old at 25 percent, etc. One possible area for error was that the majority of respondents were ages 45-54, and we were aiming to target high school age students along with parents and families.

Some major findings from the survey conducted were 65 percent of people preferred social media as their primary source of information. Currently, Opelika High School Theatre Society is only on Facebook and Instagram, and while these are effective social media platforms,

we think they should expand their social media presence by engaging in platforms like Twitter, Snapchat, and using Hootsuite to plan posts. Increasing followers and improving social media presence could increase attendance since the research showed that most people gather their information from social media. Another major finding was the majority of the respondents preferred classic works to modern works. As a result of this finding we recommend to the theater department that they focus on producing more works that would be considered classics, such as *Grease*, *Hairspray* or *Les Miserables*.

Research Specifics

The research conducted was necessary for the Opelika High School Theatre Society because they desire to increase the attendance of their performances. They cast shows with talented students who spend hours outside of their regular studies, and the students' hard work should be rewarded with a large supportive crowd. Small and sparse audiences discourage the students. The theater department has the talent, but in order to increase the audience numbers, some changes must be made. This research was necessary because it has helped us uncover some facts that could help the theater department increase attendance.

The research was conducted at random and through an online survey conducted with Qualtrics. The survey was distributed through social media, specifically Facebook accounts. Since distribution was online, there was no control in who took the survey, meaning the population that was counted in the survey was taken at random. Over the span of five days the results yielded 160 responses.

As stated in the executive summary, two major findings were the public preferred to find out about shows through social media and the public preferred classic works instead of modern works. If the theater department increases their social media presence we believe that they will reach more people in the community who wouldn't normally find out about the performances. Prior to the research being conducted we were aware that the theater department was not having the crowds they aimed for, and they wanted to increase attendance. We also knew they preferred to perform classic works, however, were unsure how the public felt. The survey helped clarify many of the unanswered questions regarding the public's interests and how they receive their news.

Literature Review

Our main source for research was the results we received from our Qualtrics survey. To understand why Opelika High School (OHS) has struggled with attendance at their theater productions, we conducted a survey with a variety of questions including screener, scale, open-ended and demographic. The survey analyzed the audience's demographic, availability, preference regarding the genre and era of the production and their overall past experiences with high school theater productions. According to the survey results, OHS theater program's target audience ranges from ages 45-54 years old with the most availability on the weekends. The majority of the public are more inclined to attend a well-known classical theater production such as *Les Misérables*, *Grease* and *Hairspray*. By receiving the following information about the audience from the Qualtrics survey, we were able to determine ways to increase attendance at OHS theater productions.

Opelika High School Theatre Society's main tactics to promote their productions is through the utilization of the newspaper, email and radio. The week of each production the director of the theater department sends out e-blasts, a clip in the newspaper and an announcement on local radio stations. While this has brought the productions some attendance, it hasn't been the best way to market the productions to the public. Promoting the productions the week of the show doesn't allow the public enough notice to plan on attending. Releasing e-blasts, newspaper clips and radio announcements the week leading up to the production both allow people enough time to plan on attending a show and provides more consistent promotion. We believe these tactics are important to maintain, but we found the most vital form of advertising for the shows is through social media.

Analyzing the Opelika High School Theatre Society's (OHSTS) social media was an important source for conducting research about the program's attendance. After reviewing their Facebook and Instagram, we were able to see how much activity the pages generate and who follows the accounts. We concluded that in order to increase attendance at the school's theater productions they need to better utilize social media to promote each show. Posting on their social media pages months in advance about upcoming productions will increase the page's activity and will lead to more followers on the accounts. Posting weekly on social media also creates online buzz about upcoming shows, which keeps the topic of productions relevant and constantly on people's mind. Creating other accounts on social media, such as Snapchat and Twitter, will further generate the buzz about the productions and broaden the target audience. Overall, improving OHSTS's social media presence will better inform and promote shows to their target audience.

Media Analysis

SWOT Analysis of OHS Theatre Society's Social Media Platforms:

Strengths:

- OHS Theatre Society already has Facebook and Instagram accounts they can utilize to inform their audience about upcoming performances.
- Their main audience consists of high schoolers who are highly interactive with social media platforms.

Weaknesses:

- They lack other social media platforms such as Twitter, Snapchat, etc. that offer a more instant way of reaching their audience.
- They lack consistency, activity and engagement on their social platforms.

Opportunities:

- They have the opportunity to advertise their upcoming performances in advance through social media.
- Through their social media they can create short video clips of scenes from performances for their audience to preview.
- On Snapchat they can create Geotags to engage their student body for the week of the production.

Threats:

- Opelika is located near a college town where football is very popular during the fall season, which can impact the attendance rate of performances.

- Technology allows easier and more accessible forms of entertainment such as video streaming, which can prevent people from actively commuting to a live theater performance.

Methodology

In order to collect data about OHSTS's audience, we conducted an online survey with 14 questions covering demographics, preference of production, availability and overall past experiences with high school theater shows. Screener, open-ended, demographic and scale questions were included in our survey to collect a wide range of data. The survey was posted on Qualtrics, our group's personal Facebook pages and the Facebook pages of the OHSTS staff and faculty. The survey was open to a random audience, and it received feedback from a wide range of demographics. Throughout the five days the survey was open to the public, 160 participants responded. The data concluded OHSTS's target audience ranged from the ages 45-54, with a popular interest in classical theater productions. Also the greatest time of availability is on the weekends, and overall the public had positive past experiences with high school theater productions. At the end of our survey we thanked each participant for his or her time and responses. For more specifics about the method of the survey conducted, please see the appendices.

Results

This survey was intended for the Lee County residents. We used a sampling frame that would allow us to determine the attitudes of people regarding live theater productions put on by high schools. We looked for responses from individuals who have attended a live theater production that would allow us to thoroughly evaluate the feedback for suggestions to increase attendance for Opelika High School (OHS) Theatre productions. We were able to determine which respondents have attended live theater shows before through an assessment of screener questions and open-ended responses. Our main objective was to receive responses from individuals about their opinions and experiences after attending a live theater show. We wanted to find what interests people in attending shows, or what factors discourage people from attending shows. We needed to gain the perspectives from local residents about past productions by the OHS Theatre Department.

We used Qualtrics Survey Software to conduct our survey and data. We had Becky Brown, Public Relations Coordinator of Opelika City School system, and Revel Gholston, Director of the Opelika High School Theatre Department, to send the survey out by Facebook and email. They both have contact lists that were helpful in reaching local residents familiar with the school system. We also distributed our survey on our Facebook accounts to reach an age-specific audience that would help make the survey more successful.

Our survey received a total sample size of 160 respondents. Of these respondents, 86 were 45 years old and older and 66 people were below 45 years old. There were a total of 147 respondents who have attended live theater performances. There were a total of 145 respondents who have attended high school theater performances. Social media was the top response for how people learned about upcoming OHS theater performances (see Appendix B, question 7). For the

next responses we looked at the top results we decided were important for the analysis of the data collected. When we asked, “Would you prefer to see productions of “classic” works instead of more “modern” works,” 60 percent agreed and 9 percent disagreed (see Appendix B, question 11). When asked if they prefer to see a performance during the week, 43 percent agreed (see Appendix B, question 11). When asked if they prefer to see a performance on the weekend, 69 percent agreed (see Appendix B, question 11). The remaining responses were answered, “Neither agree or disagree.” For more results, visuals, graphs and figures, please visit the appendices.

Recommendations

After researching and analyzing the thoughts and opinions of our respondents, we have formed our recommendations that we believe would help to increase attendance to OHS Theatre performances. Our recommendations are based on the responses we received through our survey and the concerns our client has regarding people's interest in live theater productions.

Objective 1: We found that about 65 percent of the respondents answered social media as how they hear about upcoming OHS Theatre performances. Thirty-two percent answered they hear about performances through "other" mediums. Most of the open responses answered were through word of mouth.

Recommendation: Our recommendation regarding social media would be to expand your different platforms. For example, creating an OHS Theatre Society Snapchat account. With Snapchat, the theater students can share behind the scenes pictures and videos for other students to see. One idea would be to create a Geotag filter during the week of the production. In regards to the usage of social media, being more consistent with Facebook and Instagram accounts to keep your audience updated and engaged. We suggest transitioning these accounts to a more professional medium that would help promote the society and advertise performances.

Objective 2: We were able to determine that our respondents preferred to attend a performance on the weekend rather than during the week. We concluded that finding the best time of year along with the best days of the week to schedule the productions would influence attendance to shows.

Recommendation: We recommend cutting down the number of performances during the week to three nights and one matinee to consolidate the number of audience members into less nights. Regarding the best time of year for performances, we suggest offering one production

around the winter holidays and two productions during the spring semester. We believe offering a seasonal production near the holidays would have the best audience turn out especially with out of town visitors during the time of year.

Objective 3: We found that the majority of respondents preferred to see classic works rather than modern works or they didn't have a preference. When we asked them to list shows they would be interested in seeing, the majority of the same responses were popular classic productions such as Disney musicals and Broadway musicals.

Recommendation: We recommend offering a combination of modern and traditional productions throughout the year. We believe more popular classics such as *Grease*, *Mamma Mia*, *Wicked*, etc. would interest people the most. Also, going back to the usage of social media generating polls on Facebook to determine students' show preferences and suggestions would help to increase attendance of students as well.

Appendix A

Survey conducted on Qualtrics for OHS Theater Department:

Hello, we are a group of students with a Public Relations Survey Research class at Auburn University, and we are currently conducting a survey of Lee County residents regarding live theater productions, particularly ones put on by high schools. We like to ask you a few questions regarding live theater productions. This survey should not take longer than 5 minutes. Would you like to continue and take this survey?

Q1 Do you have a child in high school?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q2 If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, is your child involved in any live theater productions at the school?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Answered "no" to the previous question (3)

Q3 Have you ever been to a live theater performance?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q4 Have you ever attended a high school theater show in the past?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q5 If you answered "Yes" to previous question, how long ago was it and did you enjoy the show?

Q6 Please list some plays/musicals you would be interested in seeing in the future.

Q7 How do you hear about the Opelika High School Theater Department performances?

- Social media (1)
- Newspaper (2)
- Other: (3) _____

Q8 Would you like to join an email group to be notified of the performances?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q9 Are you a current East Alabama Arts season ticket holder?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q10 If you were to see a high school theater show, what category would most interest you and why? (i.e. Modern, Classical, Comedy, Drama, Romance)

Q11 For this next set of questions, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with these statements regarding theater shows.

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat disagree (5)	Disagree (6)	Strongly disagree (7)
I enjoy watching performances with singing and dancing. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy performances with a familiar storyline. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I prefer to attend a show during the week. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I prefer to attend a show during the weekend. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I prefer seeing a matinee show. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I prefer seeing traditional shows. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would prefer to see productions of "classic" works (i.e. Guys and Dolls, Singing in the Rain, South	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Pacific, etc.) instead of more “modern” works (i.e. Legally Blonde, High School Musical). (7)							
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Q12 What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received

- No schooling completed (1)
- Nursery school to 8th grade (2)
- Some high school, no diploma (3)
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (i.e. GED) (4)
- Some college credit, no degree (5)
- Trade/technical/vocational training (6)
- Associate degree (7)
- Bachelor's degree (8)
- Master's degree (9)
- Professional degree (10)
- Doctorate degree (11)

Q13 What is your age?

- Under 12 years old (1)
- 12-17 years old (2)
- 18-24 years old (3)
- 25-34 years old (4)
- 35-44 years old (5)
- 45-54 years old (6)
- 55-64 years old (7)
- 65-74 years old (8)
- 75 years or older (9)

Q14 What is your marital status?

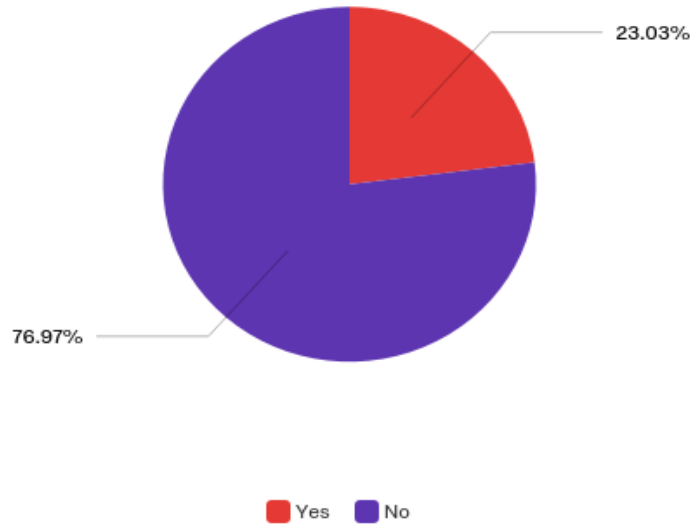
- Single (1)
- Married/domestic partnership (2)
- Widowed (3)
- Divorced (4)
- Separated (5)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your answers are very important to us. We greatly appreciate you sharing your thoughts with us so we can help to increase the attendance of shows for the Opelika High School Theater Department.

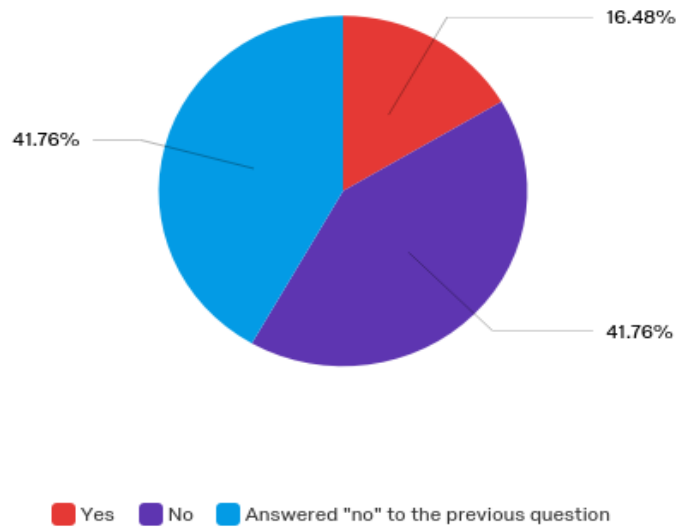
Appendix B

Graphs, charts and figures from survey:

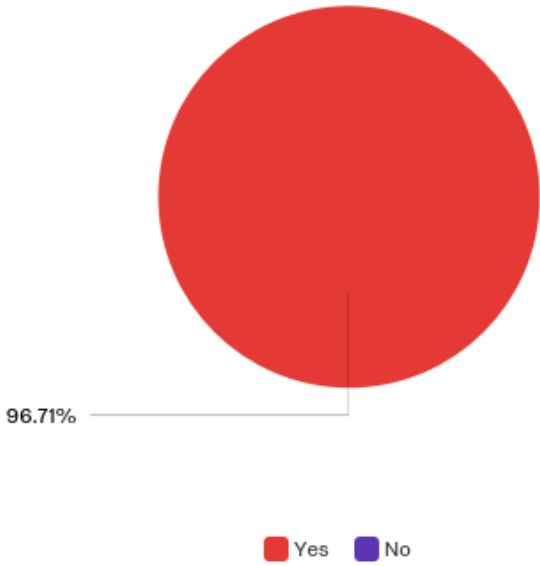
Q1 - Do you have a child in high school?



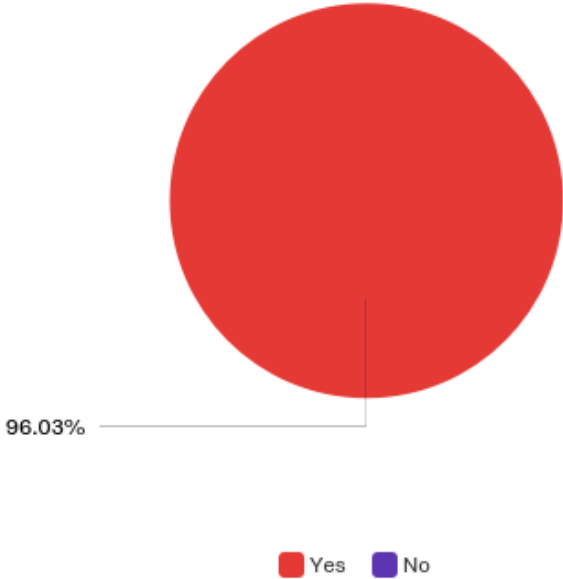
Q2 - If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, is your child involved in any live theater productions at the school?



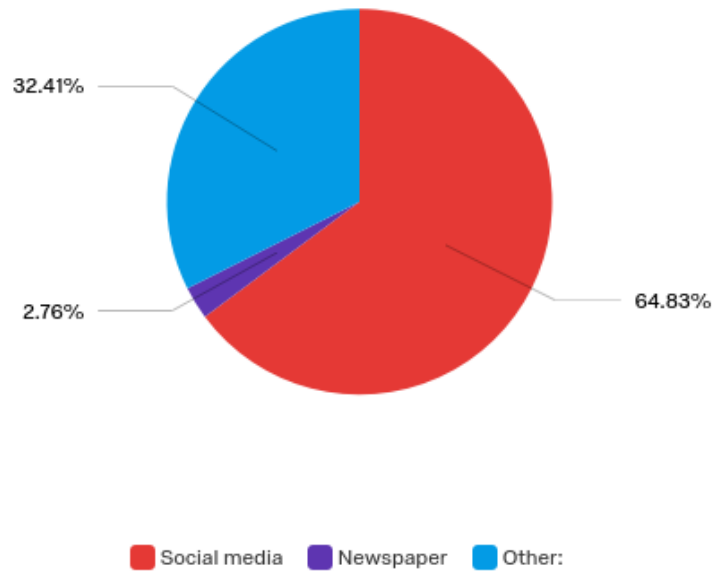
Q3 - Have you ever been to a live theater performance?



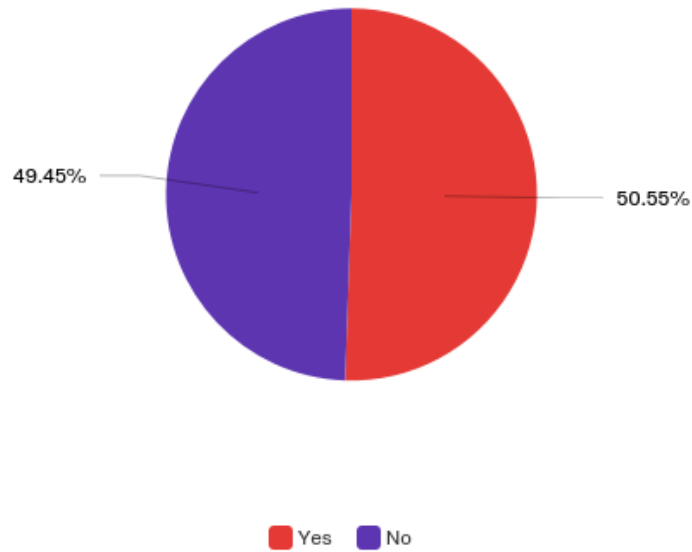
Q4 - Have you ever attended a high school theater show in the past?



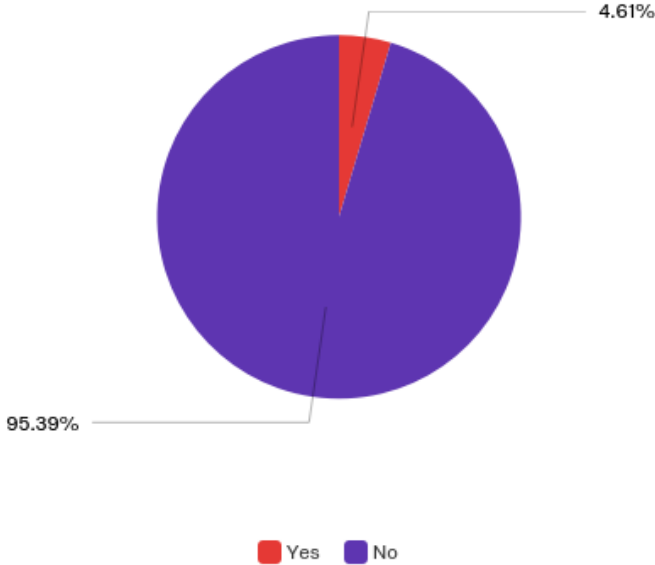
Q7 - How do you hear about the Opelika High School Theater Department performances?



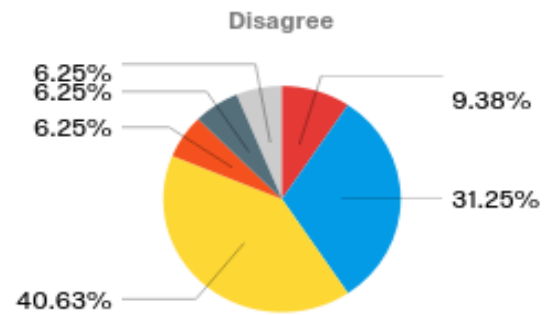
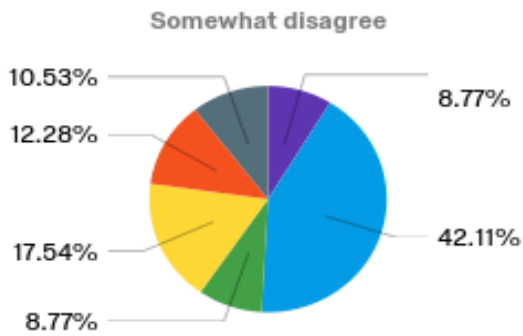
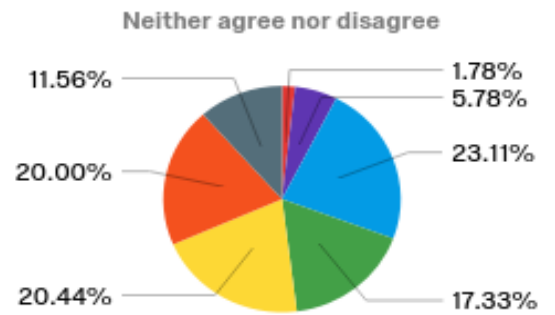
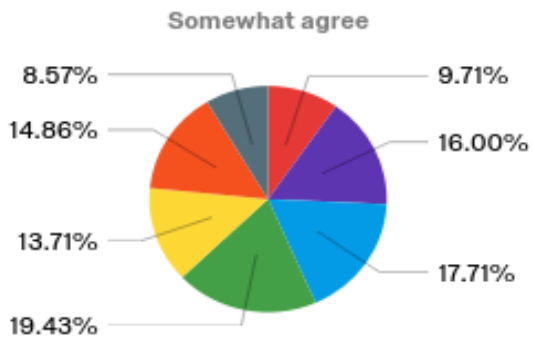
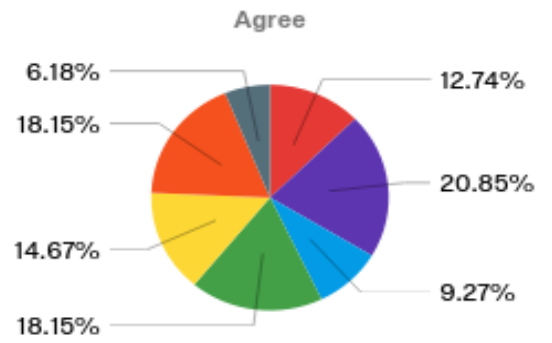
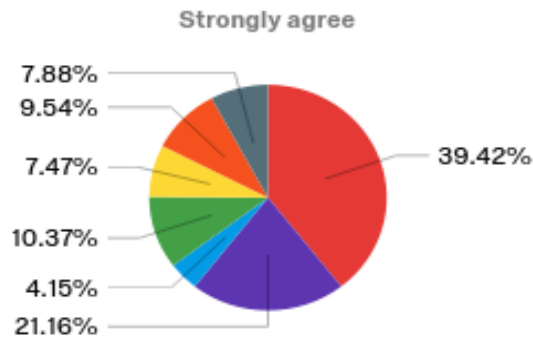
Q8 - Would you like to join an email group to be notified of the performances?



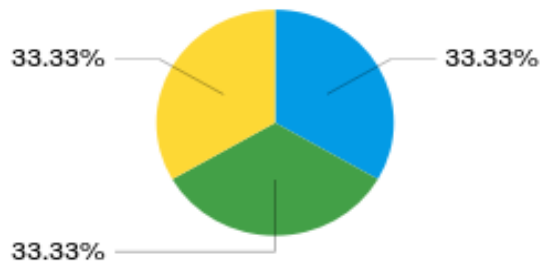
Q9 - Are you a current East Alabama Arts season ticket holder?



Q11 - For this next set of questions, please indicate your level of agreement or

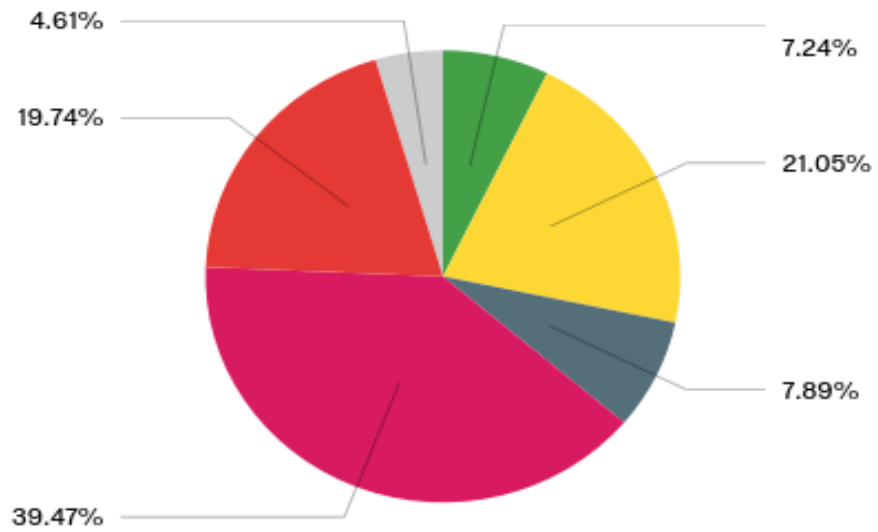


Strongly disagree



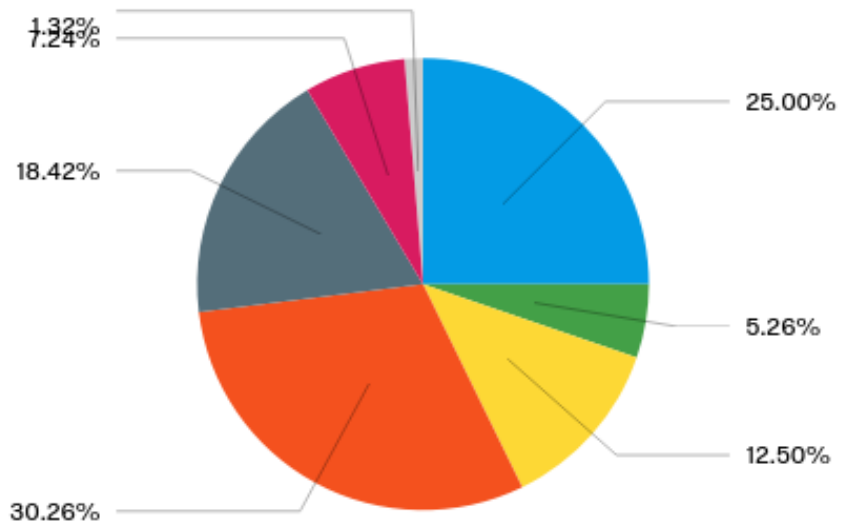
- All Others
- I enjoy watching performances with singing and dancing.
- I enjoy performances with a familiar storyline.
- I prefer to attend a show during the week.
- I prefer to attend a show during the weekend.
- I prefer seeing a matinee show.
- I prefer seeing traditional shows.
- I would prefer to see productions of "classic" works (i.e. Guys and Dolls, Singing in the Rain, South Pacific, etc.) instead of more "modern" works (i.e. Legally Blonde, High School Musical).

Q13 - What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received



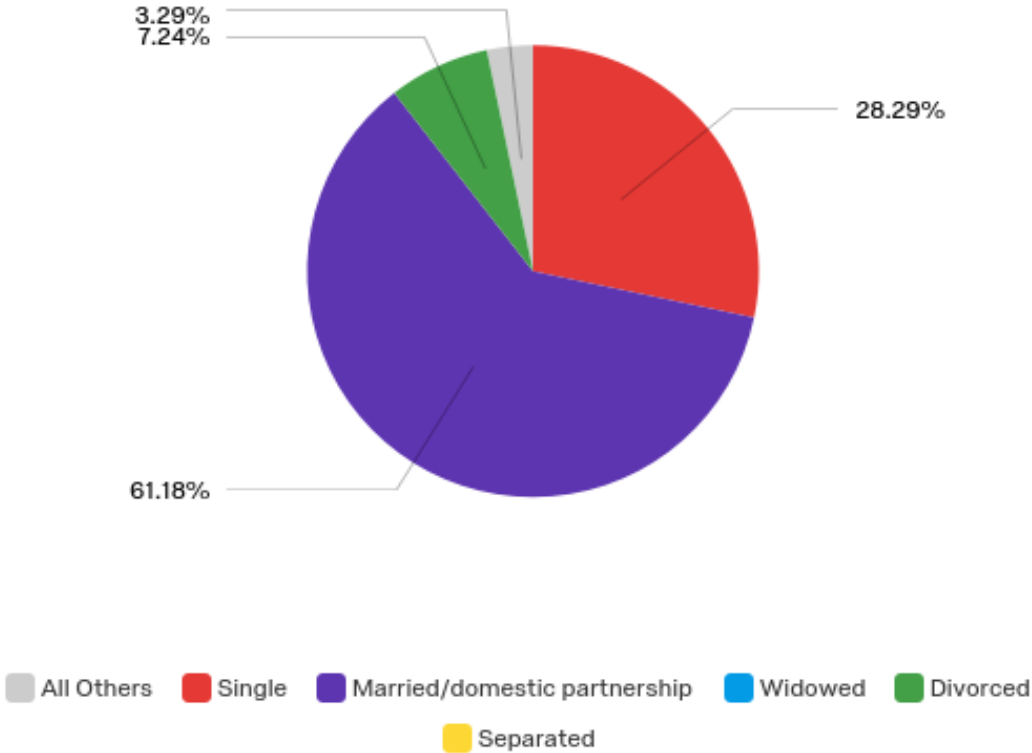
- All Others
 no schooling completed
 Professional degree
 Doctorate degree
- Nursery school to 8th grade
 Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (i.e. GED)
 Some college credit, no degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
 Associate degree
 Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree

Q14 - What is your age?



- All Others
- Under 12 years old
- 12-17 years old
- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65-74 years old
- 75 years or older

Q15 - What is your marital status?



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