CHAPTER ONE
THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Due to the particular research field of this dissertation and its focus on Site-specific Theatre, it is recommended that one familiarise themselves with the terminology used throughout this book. The familiarisation of the terms will be for the greater benefit of the understanding of all the chapters. Please refer to the glossary for the project-specific definition of certain terms which explain the author's understanding of the terms. The glossary can be found on page xxii A breakdown of the book structure is also explained on page xxiii to ensure that an overall consideration of the book structure and progression is understood.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to establish an understanding of the chosen research topic of this dissertation. In order to understand the development of theatre from Conventional Theatre to the Site-specific Theatre, as well as its limitations and benefits, it is first important to explore and illustrate the history of theatre. The focus of the research is on site-specific theatre, and the multiple forms of theatre which have contributed to the development of this form. These forms and progressions will be addressed through a historical study of theatre and how it has changed and been moulded by society's needs over time.

1.2 OVERVIEW OF THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The theoretical focus of this chapter is the development of theatre and the way in which it forms a vital role in society. In order to understand what Site-specific Theatre is, a historical overview of theatre, performance forms, genres and periodical developments need to be considered.

In producing an in-depth knowledge of theatre, it is important to explore not only the traditional Western Theatre, which South Africans are most frequently exposed to, but also the culturally-different theatres seen throughout generations. To ensure a non-biased approach, a comparative exploration of the cultural diversities within Western, Asian and African Theatre will be studied

The study of cultural theatre has many avenues and is incredibly diverse as a field of research. However, to create a comparison of the cultural diversity, only a select number of the cultures from Western, Asian and African Theatre will be identified for further exploration. The Western Theatre development will focus predominately on Roman and Greek Theatre. Chinese and Japanese Theatre will be the concentration in the Asian Theatre study, and African theatre will be studied by analysing the traditional song and dance of indigenous South African cultures. These cultural diversities are further discussed in

chapters 1.2.2, 1.2.3 and 1.2.4 respectively.

As the development of these culturally diverse theatres forms is not the main focus of this dissertation, a brief overview is given, supported by graphic collages which give an impression of the differences and variations found in each culture.

1.2.1 THEATRE ORIGINS

The Western Theatre originated as a means of appreciative performance, which took the form of group dance and singing. According to Gascoigne (2001), the followers of Dionysus (the god of wine and fertility) were the first society to develop this movement for performances that were used to tell stories of Greek Mythology.

In the 6th century BC Thespis, (a Dionysus priest), was the first to introduce dialogue into the performances. This dialogue took place between Thespis and the chorus, making him one of the first known people to take on the role as an actor. The theatrical contest became frequent at the Dionysus annual festival, with each performance taking place over a full day. The audience was seated on the hillside watching over the circular main stage, behind which stood temporary timber structures used as scenery. In 484 BC, the dramatist Aeschylus added a second actor to his play, thereby increasing the potential for drama. Shortly after this in 468 BC, Sophocles gained victory for adding a third actor into his play. The plots became more

complex, and the personal character interactions aided in the development of the drama (Gascoigne, 2001).

In 360 BC, the first stone auditorium was built to replace the hillside seating. The tiered seating was placed around a semi-circle stage with the occasional aisle - a seating structure still seen today in theatres around the world. This structure is shown in the timeline on the following page, Figure 1.1. In Roman Theatre, entertainment takes the form of plays, gladiator contests and circuses. However, during the collapse of the Roman Empire in the middle ages, theatre did not play a part in general society but is re-introduced in the late 10th century when Christian churches began performing Easter dramas (Gascoigne, 2001).

The following timeline, Figure 1.1 on page 004 - 005, is a graphic representation of the development of theatre architecture from 435BC to the 21st century. A focus has been placed on the structural development of the theatre and the evolution over a few centuries.
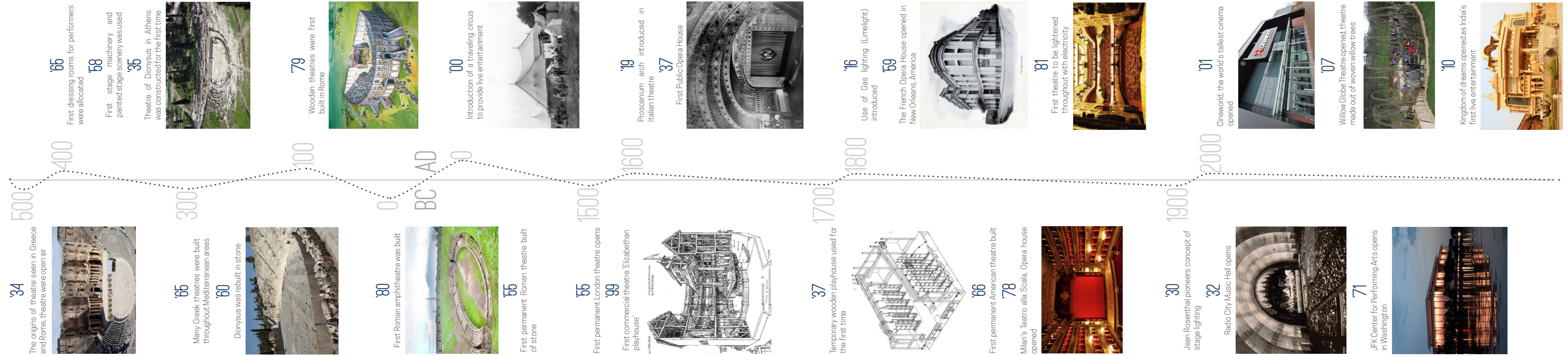
ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN THEATRE

'65 — First dressing rooms for performers were allocated

'58 — First stage machinery and painted stage scenery was used

'35 — Theatre of Dionysus in Athens was constructed for the first time

'79 — Wooden theatres were first built in Rome

'00 — Introduction of a traveling circus to provide live entertainment

'19 — Proscenium arch introduced in Italian theatre

'37 — First Public Opera House

'16 — Use of Gas lighting (Limelight) introduced

'59 — The French Opera House opened in New Orleans, America

'81 — First theatre to be lightened throughout with electricity

'01 — Cineworld, the world's tallest cinema opened

'07 — Willow Globe Theatre opened, theatre made out of woven willow trees

'10 — Kingdom of dreams opened as India's first live entertainment

'34 — The origins of theatre seen in Greece and Rome, theatre were open air

'65 — Many Greek theatres were built throughout Mediterranean areas

'60 — Dionysus was rebuilt in stone

'80 — First Roman amphitheatre was built

'55 — First permanent Roman theatre built of stone

'55 — First permanent London theatre opens

'99 — First commercial theatre 'Elizabethan playhouse'

'37 — Temporary wooden playhouse used for the first time

'66 — First permanent American theatre built

'78 — Milan's Teatro alla Scala, Opera house opened

'30 — Jean Rosenthal pioneers concept of stage lighting

'32 — Radio City Music Hall opens

'71 — JFK Center for Performing Arts opens in Washington

Timeline markers: 500 400 300 100 0 BC AD 0 1500 1600 1700 1800 1900 2000

Figure 1.1 Architectural development of the Western theatre

Figure 1.2 A collage of Western Theatre

1.2.2 WESTERN THEATRE

Originating as a means of appreciative performance, the Western Theatre model is now viewed as a form of entertainment. The Western performing arts include drama, dance, singing and acting, as depicted in the collage, Figure 1.2. Thematic focus is typically on life and the common situations of everyday people. Costumes, staging and set design form an important part of the production.

Precision, accuracy and elegance are used to describe ballet, a form of Western Theatre focused on dance. Dance plays a vital role in supporting the characters and themes of performance. Humour and comical content provide entertainment, and a steady shift in the innovation of the western theatre keeps the audience interested and the theatre itself alive.

1.2.3 ASIAN THEATRE

Asian theatre uses a variety of visual methods to convey different themes, characters and moods. "What is known, is that theatrical arts in Asian and Pacific-island cultures are ancient, highly developed, rich almost beyond imagination in their diversity, and very much alive for large segments of the population." (Brandon 1993:1)

The Asian Theatre has culturally rich and elaborate costume design, with highly intricate and delicate details. Figure 1.3 shows the use of masks, puppets, dolls and shadows, which allow the actors to portray multiple characters simply and efficiently. Puppets are a symbol of the non-human concepts such as animals, demons or gods, giving the audience a clear yet sophisticated understanding of the performance themes. These culturally-rich elements set Asian Theatre apart from Western Theatre, and give innovative inspiration to new developments and entertainment considerations.

Figure 1.3 A collage of Asian Theatre

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Figure 1.4 A collage of traditional African theatre

1.2.4   SOUTH AFRICAN INDIGENOUS THEATRE

Ancient African Theatre was developed as a means to worship gods, and was also used for storytelling. Told through energetic dance, song and chanting, the traditional African performances and stories are emotive and expressive. Dancing and singing are the primary forms of communication. The main character chants or calls out to those standing by, inviting them to participate in the cultural experience. Positive energy and participation are characteristics found in members of the tribe or community.

The collage in Figure 1.4 shows traditional African clothing, representing the warrior. Colourful beading and face-paint communicates the layered meaning of each performer. Stories depicting struggles and mighty occasions are celebrated through passionate dance. Loud voices fill the environment, encouraging all to take part and join the celebrations.

1.2.5   CONSIDERATIONS FROM THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The diversity of Western, Asian and South African Indigenous Theatre creates multiple possibilities to incorporate innovative methods of visual communication into a production at Fort Daspoortrand. Inspired by the rawness of the African traditional song and dance, and the creative use of puppetry and shadows from Asian Theatre, as well as the accuracy and dramatic stance of Western Theatre, the production at the fort could combine various arts to create an engaging audience experience.

Inspiration is taken from Asian Theatre, where elaborate costumes add to the themes of the story. These details help create the characters personality. The costume design for this project places a focus on using design as part of the scenery and telling more of a story through dress. A deeper exploration of the thematic links and moods is another consideration taken from Asian Theatre, as well as the use of shadows and puppets as characters in the production. In this performance, light has been utilised to create an illusion of a chorus without the use of multiple actors during certain scenes.

The emphasis on storytelling is taken from indigenous South African Theatre, where a powerful voice is used to narrate the performance, bringing together site and performer in a celebration of the story. Drama and set design is a permanent feature in Western Theatre. This project aims to bring these two concepts together to expose the beauty of the site, culture and performance in one celebratory event.

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

DEVELOPMENT OF STAGES

☐·············Stage and actors area   ☐·············Audience area
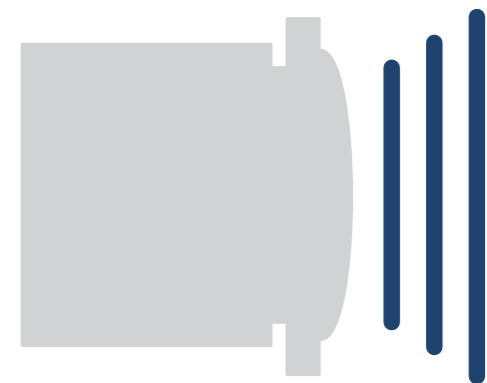
PROSCENIUM STAGE

Figure 1.5 Proscenium stage plan and section

THRUST STAGE

Figure 1.6 Thrust theatre plan and section

1.3   THEATRE STAGE CONFIGURATIONS

There are varying types of theatre stages which have developed over the years. The following diagrams, Figure 1.5 to Figure 1.11, depict the stage structure as well as the audience-stage separation. There are six main stage configurations: Proscenium Stage, Thrust Theatre, End Stage, Arena Theatre, Profile Theatre, and Sports Arena. The stage is illustrated in grey and the audience seating in blue - a section is supplied in order to better illustrate the levels between the public (seating) and actors (stage).

The Proscenium Stage, Figure 1.5, was designed with the "primary feature of a 'picture frame' placed around the front of the playing area of an end-stage" (Alderson, 2002). The audience is seated in front of the stage, and the actors are placed behind the 'frame' threshold.

Contrarily in the Thrust Theatre, Figure 1.6, the audience surrounds the stage on three sides, with the fourth side acting as the backdrop to the performance. "In a typical modern arrangement: the stage is often a square or rectangular playing area, usually raised or, surrounded by raked seating" (Alderson, 2002).

Following a similar layout to the Proscenium Stage, the End-Stage, seen in Figure 1.7, places the audience at the front of the raised stage. However, unlike the Proscenium Stage, a part of the performance takes place on the 'audience side' of the stage 'frame' threshold. "Like a thrust stage, scenery serves primarily as background, rather than surrounding the acting space" (Alderson, 2002).

Figure 1.8 illustrates the Arena Theatre as a "central stage surrounded by audience on all sides. The stage area is often raised to improve sightlines" (Alderson, 2002).

END STAGE

Figure 1.7 End-stage plan and section

ARENA THEATRE

Figure 1.8 Arena theatre plan and section

PROFILE THEATRE

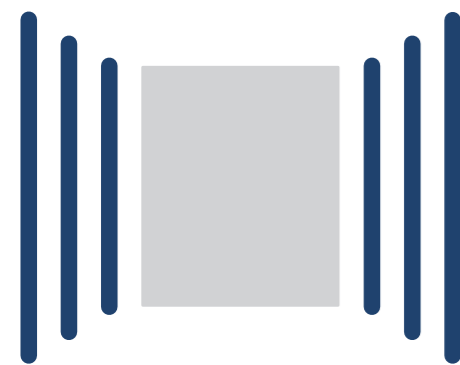**Figure 1.9** Profile theatre plan and section

SPORTS ARENA

Figure 1.10 Sports arena plan and section

In the Profile theatre, "the audience is often placed on risers to either side of the playing space, with little or no audience on either end of the stage, actors are staged in profile to the audience" (Alderson, 2002). The audience-stage separation is represented in the graphics. Figure 1.9.

The final formal stage configuration is the Sports Arena seen in Figure 1.10. It is recognised by "form as it (sic.) resembles a very large arena stage" (Alderson, 2002). However, the stage is typically rectangular.

With the stage configurations changing to facilitate different forms of audience-actor relationships, audience participation in the theatre began to improve. The stage manipulations broke away from the idea of a framed performance, introducing a scenario where the actors are surrounded by the audience, marking a step towards integrating the audience into the performance. The stages mentioned above, although progressive for audience participation, still contained a fourth wall - or physical boundary - between audience seating and the stage.

The final stage variation and that which is more closely aligned with the site-specific performance is the Black Box, seen in Figure 1.11. The black box opens multiple opportunities for the actors to engage in the audience space. No area of the stage is designated to a specific character type – audience or actor. This encourages creativity in the performance and facilitates audience-actor interactions. The black box is best suited to Improvisational, Participatory, Site-specific and Immersive Theatre.

BLACK BOX

Figure 1.11 Black box theatre plan and section

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

1.4   FORMS OF THEATRE

As mentioned in 1.2.1, different forms of theatre evolved from the conventional theatre model. The conventional theatre is defined as a physical space where the audience is seated on stepped levels, looking towards the performance which takes place on a Proscenium-arch-style stage. The 'fourth wall' between the audience and actors is prominent in this form. No verbal or physical interactions between audience and actor occur throughout the performance. Figure 1.12 depicts a conventional theatre seating layout - stepped seating and a Proscenium-arch-style stage.

With Experimental Theatre originating in 1925, playwrights such as Alfred Jarry and Bertolt Brecht began to experiment with a theatre movement which explored innovative works and new thematic concepts. Brecht (1961) stated that "in reviewing the experiments…we discovered that they quite remarkably enlarged the possibilities of expression in the theatre." Their works were known for pushing the boundaries of the techniques and performance in stage productions, the unique use of language and the body were used to create a more relatable performance for the audience. "In a world, as fast-moving and dynamic as ours the enticements entertainment are quick to wear out. We must always be prepared to meet the desire for progressive public stupefaction with new effects" (Brecht, 1961). This marked the beginning of the traditional theatre rejection, catering to the entertainment of the audience and using the theatre to make social commentary. Figure 1.13 shows an example of experimental theatre in Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty.

After the invention of Experimental theatre came Improvisational Theatre. In 1956 Keith Johnstone was commissioned to write a play which would act as the foundation of Improvisational theatre. "The improvisational techniques and exercises evolved there to foster spontaneity, and narrative skills were developed further in the actor studios, they demonstrated to schools and colleges and ultimately in the founding of a company of performers, called The Theatre Machine" (Yorkshire Post review cited in Johnstone 1979:1). This play exposes that the actors, for the first time, had the freedom to improvise dialogue and develop the storyline of the production. The scripts were not dictated and certain, it was merely a suggestion of what the performance outcome should be. Figure 1.14, illustrates an example of the Improvisational Theatre with an image from the Theatre Language Studio, Frankfurt.

In addition to the growth of the theatre movements, there was still the opportunity to remove the fourth wall - the verbal and physical boundary between audience and actor. Up until 1985, the audience had remained silent. However, Participatory Theatre challenged this idea, with actors who would call to the audience and in response, the audience would call back. '66 Minutes in Damascus' is an example of Participatory Theatre, as shown in Figure 1.15. "Participatory Theatre is an approach in which the actors interact with the public, based on a real problem. Throughout the participatory event, the public participates to adapt, change or correct a situation, an attitude or behaviour that is developed during the show" (Participatory Theatre… 2017). Performances began to take place amongst the audience, breaking down the typical physical boundaries of the audience-stage realm.

Site-specific Theatre originated in the 1980's as a form of theatre that gave the audience a new and exciting perspective on entertainment. Originally, the performers partook in street art and entertainment, but soon this excitement and spontaneity spread to the theatre house. Site-specific theatre, which is the focus of this project, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.2. It is characterised by a performance which uses the properties, qualities, and meanings found at or on a given site, be it a landscape, a city, a building or a room. An example of Site-specific Theatre is SZPERA 42, seen in Figure 1.16.

In the year 2000, a company named Punchdrunk developed a theatre movement known as Immersive Theatre, opening with 'Sleep No More', seen in Figure 1.17. "Immersive Theatre is all about creating participative theatre experiences where audience members give up their 'observer' status to become co-actors and co-creators of the narrative and the storytelling process. Our audience members are action wise performers who direct the story by taking decisions, choosing from endless options and negotiating the process" (Immersive Theatre, 2016). Immersive theatre removes the physical and verbal boundaries, making it similar to that of Participatory Theatre. However, it also contributes to the form of Improvisational Theatre, whereby the actors adapt to the interaction of the audience in order to create a new storyline or outcome.

PRE 1925
Conventional Theatre

Figure 1.12 Conventional theatre seating layout

1925
Experimental Theatre

Figure 1.13 Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty

1950
Improvisational Theatre

Figure 1.14 Theatre Language Studio, Frankfurt
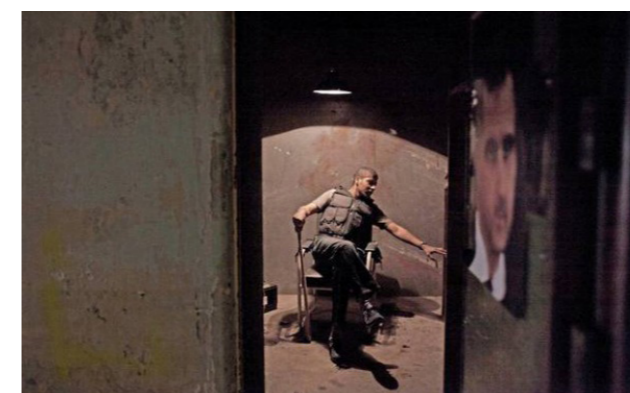
1970
Participatory Theatre

Figure 1.15 66 Minutes in Damascus, participatory theatre

1980
Site-specific Theatre

Figure 1.16 SZPERA 42 site-specific theatre

2000
Immersive Theatre

Figure 1.17 Sleep No More immersive theatre

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

1.5   ORIGINS OF OPERA

Opera is an age-old art form in which singers and musicians create a dramatic display and performance. Opera is considered an elitist entertainment source as it is typically expensive and difficult to understand, due to its complex thematic content and language barrier (often performed in Italian, German, French and other languages). Opera content varies according to the culture in which it takes place, taking on a serious form (Opera Seria) or a comical form (Opera Buffa) (Emmerson, 2012). An example of each of these forms can be found in Donizetti's Maria Stuarda (Opera Seria) Figure 1.18 and Donizetti's Don Pasqual (Opera Buffa) Figure 1.19.

The diagrammatic timeline, Figure 1.20, on the following page gives an overview of the history of Opera and how it has developed over time within each culture.

GENRES OF OPERA

Seria (Serious)

Tragedy
Mythology
Main characters: Castrati's

Buffa (Comic)

Lighter topics
Main characters: Tenor and Basses

Figure 1.18 Donizetti's Maria Stuarda

Figure 1.19 Donizetti's Don Pasqual

1600

Started in Italy, as a revival of ancient tragedy

1607   The first opera La Favola d'Orfeo (Monteverdi) Venice was at the centre of opera
1637   First commercial opera house was opened

1700

1700   Naples, Vienna, Paris and London were major operatic centres
1779   Chorus and ensembles were introduced by Christoph Willibald Gluck

1800

Nationalism created a variation in operatic styles, mixture of Seria and Buffa, became more contemporary dealing with recent history. Started to include symphonic music.

1848   Wagner revolutionised opera into "musical drama", orchestras became a part of the performance and leitmotif (musical phrasing) was widely used.

Italian Opera

The voice remained prominent and Buffa (comic) opera and theme were mostly used.

Verdi was the last great Italian composer of 19th Century, he was known for his combination of 'show' and 'emotions'.

Russian Opera

Opera was inspired by history and national literature.

French Opera

'Grand Opera' with scenic effects, action and ballet was common and 'Opera Comique' included spoken dialogue.

1900

Similar developments to that of the 19th Century

Many operas were composed by Puccini including:
1900   Tosca
1904   Madam Butterfly
1926   Turandot

2000

Larger variety of opera performances appeared, evolution in the form of opera performance

Great pieces were reinterpreted as well as staging, setting, and design innovation.

Figure 1.20 Timeline of the history of opera

1.5.1 THE DECLINE OF OPERA

There is no doubt about the decline of opera attendance in recent years. The consensus of the public is that ticket expense, and a cultural divide are some of the main reasons for this decline. However, interest in Opera seems to on the increase as more and more people are enjoying an Opera performance, especially if it has more to offer than just a typical experience. "It is past time we put to rest the notion that opera is somehow an elitist indulgence only enjoyed by few" (Emmerson, 2012).

An 18% drop in audience attendance has been noted by New York's "Metropolitan Opera, which had a 97% attendance rate in 1959 and currently (2014) it has a 79% attendance rate."

There is a motion to reimagine the opera and breathe a new, 21st-century life back into it. "Opera can transport the listener to faraway lands and encompass all the senses. Knowing the power of opera, it makes perfect sense to embrace the idea of 'immersive' production that brings the audience into the action" (How Opera Can Get.... 2017).

As further explored in Chapter 2: Research and Proposal, the reimagined Magic Flute opera proposed in this project will act as a catalyst both for the re-introduction of Opera, as well as an Introduction of Fort Daspoortrand into the eye of the public. This new life aims to be achieved through a three-dimensional
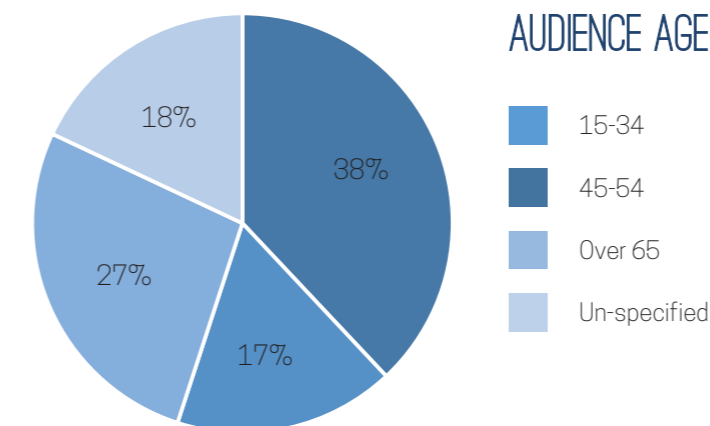
spatial translation of the Magic Flute opera into an experiential production for the audience members. The spatial experience aims to minimise the language barrier by making the opera – which is traditionally in Italian or German –accessible to all. Both site and opera have an opportunity to create a unique audience experience and give opera the energetic support that it deserves. Opera offers a cultural and educational experience, which is rich with diversity and imagination. This concept will aid to increase the attendance rates of Opera.
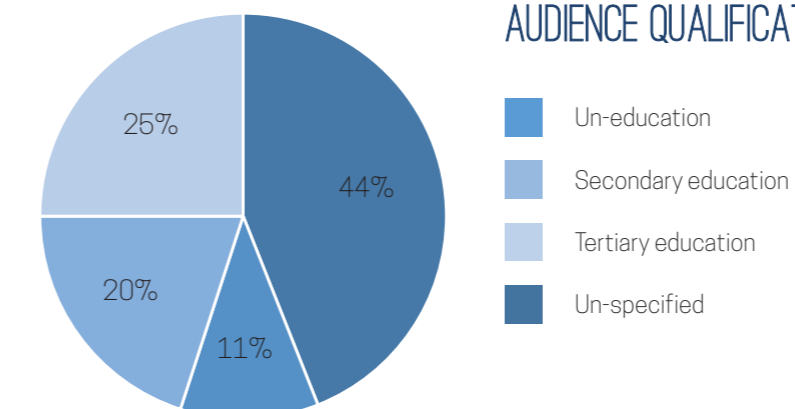
1.5.2 OPERA ATTENDANCE STATISTICS

According to the New Zealand Framework for Cultural Statistics, the following information, (Figure 1.21), was provided as an overview of opera and its audience members in 2013. Although the statistics are not South African, they are still useful as they give a general understanding of the regular user group of opera. It was concluded that the audience age range is 45-54 at 38%, with the lower attendance from the age group of 15-34 at only 17%.

The question that must be asked is: Why does the older generation attend opera more than the youth and how can this be changed? When looking at the qualification held by the audience who attend the opera, it is noted that 45% of the audience jointly possess a secondary or tertiary qualification. This creates a challenge to make the opera more accessible to those who are not fully educated. These statistics also show that the opera is attended by 31% of people who are part of the higher income bracket, and again the challenge is to make it more accessible to all income brackets.

AUDIENCE AGE GROUPS

- 15-34
- 45-54
- Over 65
- Un-specified

AUDIENCE QUALIFICATIONS

- Un-education
- Secondary education
- Tertiary education
- Un-specified

AUDIENCE ANNUAL INCOME

- Under N$15000
- N$15000 – N$29999
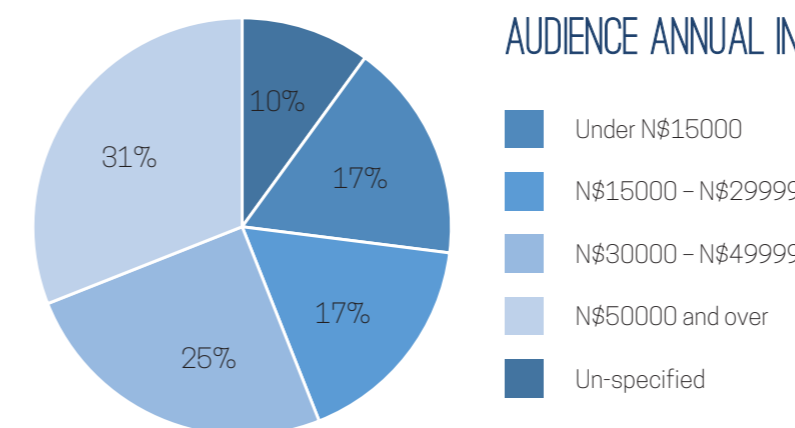- N$30000 – N$49999
- N$50000 and over
- Un-specified

Figure 1.21 New Zealand statistics of opera attendance

1.6 CONCLUSION

The Opera has been identified as an important cultural experience which is in need of preservation. Opera offers a unique experience to its audience members, by telling a story through the use of music, set design and song. To ensure that this cultural entity has a prolonged life, various changes need to take place. The proposed project aims to encourage the youth to experience opera by creating a unique spatial experience. By removing the audience from the conventional theatre realm and placing them into a Site-specific Theatre location, the performance becomes more exciting and encourages participation. Through the spatial experience, and conveyance of the themes of the Magic Flute through site and set design, the opera will be more accessible to those who are not highly qualified and who may struggle with the language barrier. The use of a three-dimensional experience allows people of all ages and levels of education to understand the opera performance.

Ensuring that the opera is more accessible to audience members of all income brackets. The remote location of the site and the unique experience of the performance could cause this to be an expensive project. However, the use of recyclable and reusable materials, as well as utilising existing equipment from a conventional theatre – such as lighting, projectors and sound equipment – will help to lower the cost of production and thereby keep the ticket price affordable for the majority.