

Are Opera and Ballet Elitist?

Ballet and opera have long been seen as the epitome of high culture and art. [Amy Blumsom](#) ponders about how, at the end of the day, they're both forms of art

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"I'd rather shit in my hands than clap."

This was the response when I asked my flat mate if they fancied seeing a ballet. There wasn't a catch- the tickets were free and I happened to have two.

It was surprisingly hard to find someone who wanted to come with me. It was even more disheartening upon arrival to see that the theatre wasn't full.

Last week, the Royal Opera House held a live debate. The big question: "Are opera and ballet elitist?" The panel consisted of Composer Mark-Anthony Turnage, Written on Skin Director Katie Mitchell, The Royal Ballet's Gary Avis, and novelist Dreda Say Mitchell, chaired by Telegraph Arts Editor Sarah Crompton.

They even put together a nice little video montage of average Joe's opinions (containing the usual suspects; a shopkeeper, a kindly looking OAP and a postman). The general consensus: opera and ballet were once elitist but are no longer. It is a little suspicious that a video and debate produced and hosted by the ROH concluded that their own productions are accessible for all. At times it felt more like the video was constructing an argument, rather than exploring different sides of the debate. However, I agree with their conclusion- even if the debate wasn't a reflection of public opinion.

Some tweeters argued that it's the pricing which is elitist. True, the best seats cost a significant amount more than those 'up in the gods': £225 compared with a paltry £4. But this is no different to any other concert or football match. Turnage himself pointed out during the debate that an Emirates ticket is more expensive than opera.

To me, ballet and opera are not themselves elitist, but people continually see them as exclusive. It's a vicious cycle of inverted snobbery. It's this perception of elitism which prevents theatres from being full houses and it will keep happening until it's only the elite left in their seats.

There's a common misconception that ballet is perhaps the snobbiest branch of dance. Some people think it's all about wealthy old people watching impossibly skinny girls in pink tutus and men in tights.

Ah yes, the men in tights with their distracting 'ballet bulge'. I'll admit it can divert the eyes if you're not careful. But once you've gotten over this (hilarious) distraction, you can appreciate the phenomenal combination of strength and artistry that is ballet.

One of the great things about ballet is the variety. You can go and see something fun, light and vibrant such as Matthew Bourne's *Nutcracker*! If you're hankering for something much darker, try Arthur Pita's *Metamorphosis*, based on Kafka's novel. Choreographers like Bourne and Pita have proven that ballet can be exciting, contemporary, and even at times controversial.

Yes, ballet and opera have long been seen as the epitome of high culture and art. But at the end of the day, they're both forms of art. Art is meant to be enjoyed. It certainly isn't meant to be intimidating, or reserved for the elite, or seen as a punishment on par with defecating in your own hands.



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