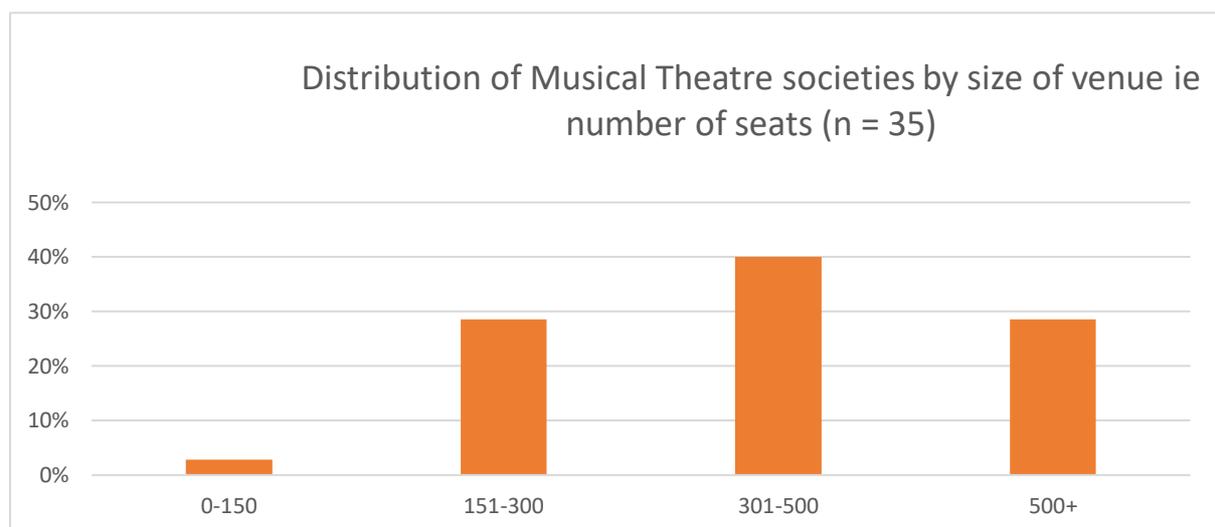


Results of Membership and Audition Survey

Many thanks to the 51 respondents to the Survey Monkey survey I linked to the NODA Bubble Banter FB site. I was genuinely surprised at the rapid response and the extent of some of the free text comments. You are all very generous. Apologies to the respondents from societies who do not exclusively do musicals. Since my own society is a musical theatre group which brings with it unique musical challenges, such as a chorus, live orchestra and a vastly different cost structure to drama groups I have focussed on the results from the 35 musical societies.

Range of Venue Size

Only one of the 35 respondents perform in a venue with less than 150 seats. At the other end of the scale there were two respondents that perform in 1100 and 800 seat theatres. There may be more than that but 500+ was my largest size option and there were 10 of those. The most common venue size was 301-500 seats.



Membership Fees

The range here was £0 (presumably the income is per production only) to £100 annual subscription. I don't know if any of this is gift aided but my own society claims at least £750 pa in Gift Aid since we make a clear distinction between production fees and membership fees. The latter should not be spent on professional tuition (ie professional directors and MD fees); this is what the Production fee should cover.

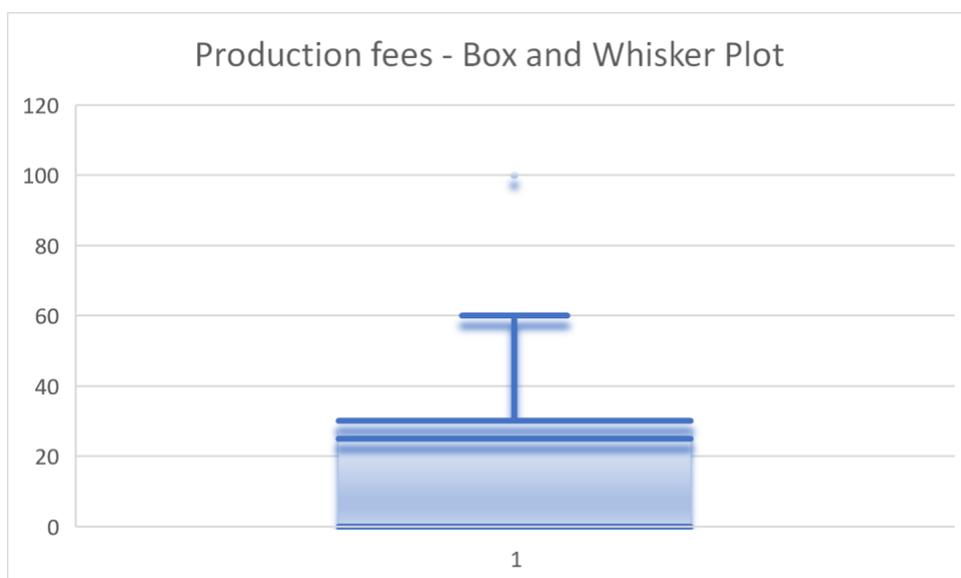
The box and whisker plot below shows the minimum (£0), maximum (£100), the median (£40) and the different quartiles. 25% of all respondent societies pay between £0-30 pa, 25% between £30-40, 25% between £40-60 and the rest between £60-100. The £100 society requires no additional production fee.

My own society performs in a 270 seater public hall and charges £60 annual membership with £40 fee per production. We have no additional membership fee for under 21s who are already part of our youth group but they do pay £20 production fee. We also have reduced subs for seniors and those in full time education. We also have a discreet bursary option for those facing financial difficulties.



Production fees

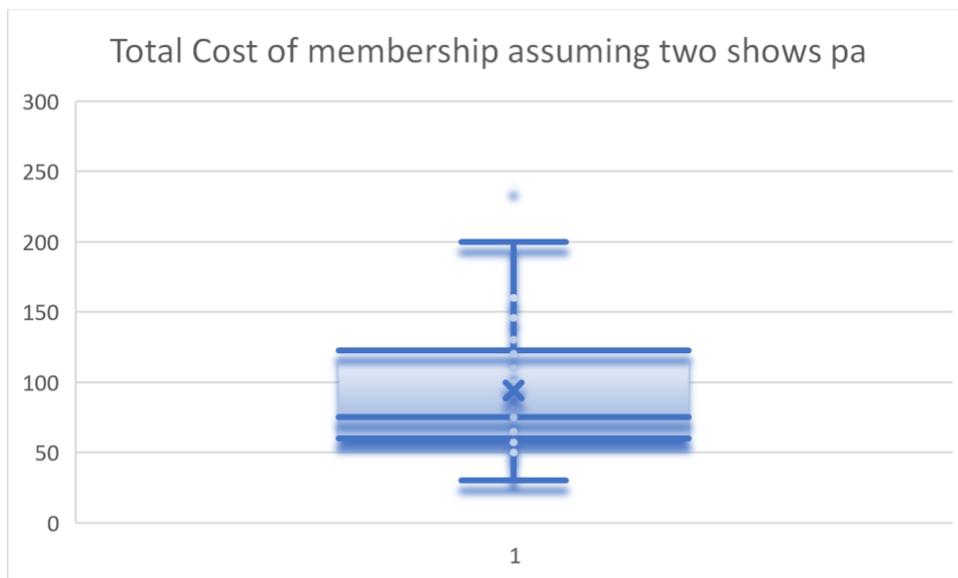
The choice of how a society gets income from its members has, I suppose, evolved over the years for everyone. For 11 correspondents there is no production fee at their society. However, the median is £25 and 75% of all respondents pay £30 or less. 25% pay between £30 and £60 with one outlier at £100. The £100 society has a production fee of £40.



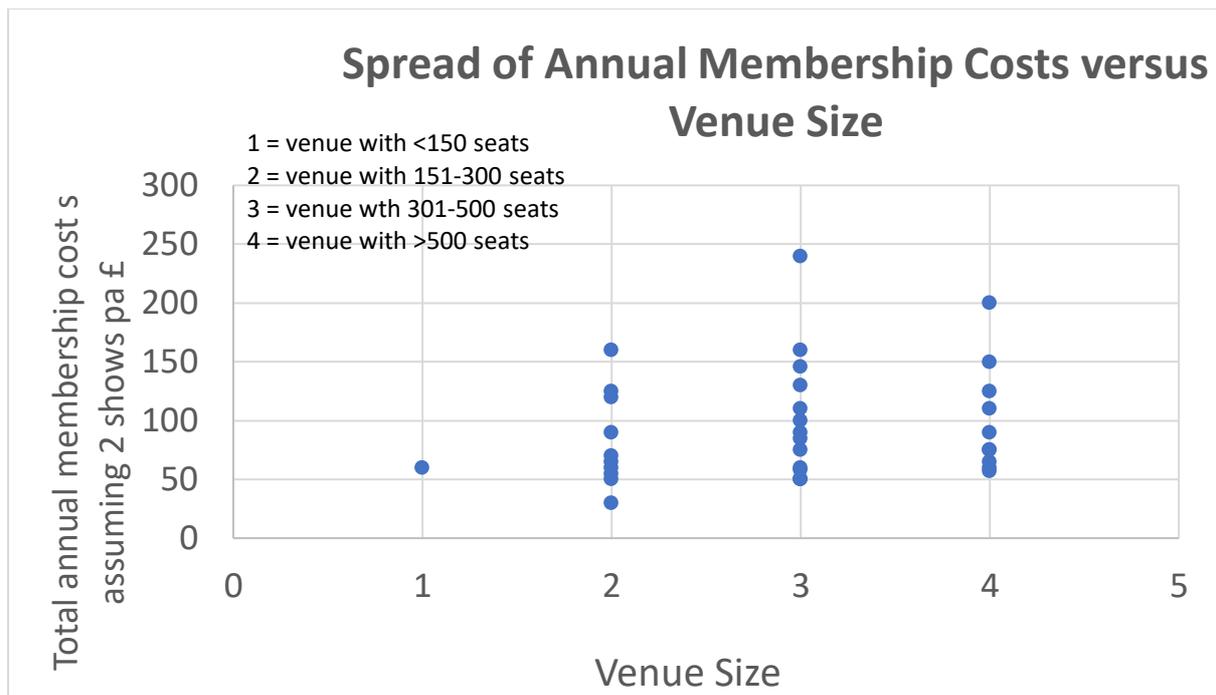
The data above begs the question as to what is the total financial commitment for a member who sticks with the society all year.

Annual cost of membership and two shows each year

Assuming two shows each year the box and whisker plot shows the range from just £30 to £200 (£240 assumed to be an outlier) with 50% of societies taking £60-120 from members, made up of membership and two lots of production fees. My own society takes £140 from each member doing two shows a year.



Given the large range of membership and production fees between societies the question arises why does it vary so much. Further investigation is needed to understand if fees vary by geography or according to some index of local economic activity. There is no correlation between size of venue and total fees per annum per member. If any of these societies are struggling financially they could explore raising subs and/.or production fees over time. In my own society it is always contentious and we haven't changed the fee structure for some years but I am reminded that £160 is just one cup of Starbuck/Costa coffee per week.

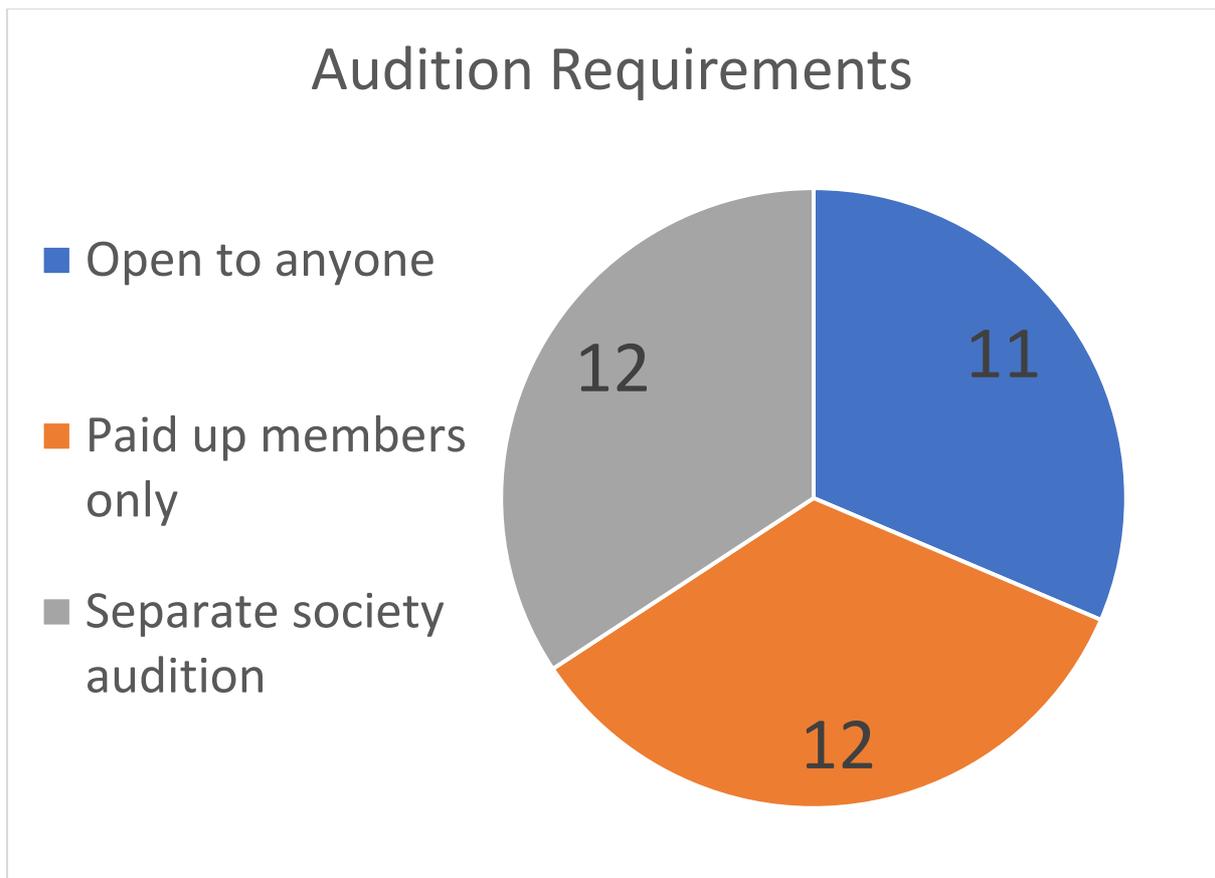


Audition Process

Interpreting qualitative results is difficult and open to all sorts of bias on the part of the analyst. Wherever possible I have stuck with the answers as given but point out where inconsistencies between different answers may exist.

Open auditions or not? 11 out of 35 have genuinely open auditions where anyone can come along irrespective of whether they are a current member. These societies also say that new people have equal rights to audition for chorus and lead roles, just as existing members do. However, 24 societies insist on auditionees becoming members first. In half of these cases a potential member has to audition for the society before being approved as a member. The other half just insists on membership fees being paid before the audition. In summary societies split roughly three ways – open auditions, pay up and audition, audition separately to join the society before auditioning for the show.

One society did say that once accepted into the society, no further show audition is required for the ensemble. Leads and dancers would have to audition. There is no explanation about how to deal with a surplus of ensemble. One respondent said that his/her society once took all-comers without auditioning and had complaints that there were too many people on stage and that the quality had suffered. They have abandoned that approach since.



Balancing Best Possible Cast with Membership Satisfaction

This is a tricky one to interpret. 24 of 35 respondents say their societies audition for the best possible cast whether the auditionees are members or not. However, some do acknowledge the disappointments and perceptions of unfairness that this audition process can entail. Others have stated : “you can’t please everyone, don’t try”; |”there will always be people who struggle to accept they were not the best on the day”. 11 societies say they always favour members, all other things being equal but no-one has said they will not allow new members to audition for lead roles, as long as they have paid their fees. One respondent says that their members understand the need for new blood.

The summary of the free text on this seems to be that societies either have an all-comers audition process (with or without fees paid before hand) or at least try to manage the flow of new comers through a society audition, separate from the show audition. Of course, the latter can be very political and I did not ask if the audition panel for society admission is totally independent and has transparent entry criteria or whether there may be hidden rules applying. More research needs to be done here.

Maintaining membership satisfaction was not a question to which there were effusive responses that I could analyse. However, maintaining a good social calendar, inclusiveness, demonstrating a fair and transparent audition process were all comments made. One

society said that helping back-stage or front of house, when not performing, was part of the constitutional requirement to which all members signed up. Alternatively there were a few responses suggesting that getting members to do anything other than perform was extremely difficult. My own society is somewhere in between but our particular concern is that our backstage crew is a few years beyond normal retirement age and needs/wants to handover to a younger crew.

Membership Types

Most societies have different types of membership, including concessions, non-acting, acting, family memberships and life memberships. What did stand out were a few comments that technical/backstage crew didn't have to be members. This resonates with me and my society. Because we have so little choice we don't insist on membership, even at the lowest level, for tech crew and they seem to be somewhat separate as a group. My society tried a takeaway Chinese meal for all cast and crew in the theatre on Friday after the show. We had never done that before but it was very popular and people have suggested it become a regular thing. It was one of very few opportunities for cast and crew to mix off-stage.