BEYOND "GREENING": A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR OPERA TOURING

WILD ARTS: THEATRE GREEN BOOK CASE STUDY, SUMMER OPERA TOURS 2025–2026



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WILD ARTS



Ellie Neate as Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* (Photo by Dominic Lynch)

1. Introducing Wild Arts

Exceptional Performances · Extraordinary Places · Accessible to All

Founded in 2022, Wild Arts is a UK touring arts charity dedicated to bringing extraordinary, high-quality performances, everywhere; and to making music direct, immediate, and accessible to all. Performances take place anywhere from established theatres and concert halls, to gardens, churches, barns, and historic houses, with musical quality and honest, impactful storytelling at their heart. Though also producing a chamber music series and touring our own orchestral ensemble, the central pillar of Wild Arts's annual programme is a summer opera tour, now reaching more than 13,000 audience members every year.

Environmental responsibility is built into the company's artistic and operational model. Instead of adapting a conventional large-scale production for touring, Wild Arts begins with a simpler question: what does this music – this *story* – actually need? Reduced set and props, reused, hired, or second-hand costumes, and flexible staging enable performances to travel anywhere.

Our work is guided by four charitable objectives:

1. Making exceptional music accessible to all.
2. Sharing the benefits of engagement in the creative arts through delivering musical education and widening participation.
3. Creating sustainable professional pathways into the creative arts.
4. Developing and demonstrating environmentally responsible models for arts performance.

Wild Arts has grown rapidly since its establishment, demonstrating the viability of its environmentally responsible touring model at increasing scale. Alongside four- and five-star reviews from *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, and *Opera Now* (among others), annual

audiences have grown from 2,100 across 26 performances and two summer productions in 2022 to more than 16,000 across 69 performances in 2026, with productions running year-round.

This artistic success has been matched by financial growth: annual income rose from £103,810 in the financial year ending January 2022 to £830,880 in January 2026, with £1.1 million projected for January 2027.

Wild Arts is demonstrating that sustainable production can underpin a substantial, critically acclaimed national programme.

2. *Rusalka* and the race to "greening"

The performing arts are increasingly conscious of their environmental responsibilities. Opera has always responded to current issues, and productions are increasingly exploring environmental themes – from Opera North's *Masque of Might*, to Barry Kosky's ongoing staging of *The Ring Cycle* at Covent Garden.

When the Royal Ballet and Opera (RBO) brought directors Ann Yee and Natalie Abrahami on board to create a new version of Dvořák's *Rusalka* in 2023, it became central to the RBO's new sustainability drive – supported by their September 2021 pledge to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2035[1] and their non-extension of their sponsor partnership with BP. The creative team removed a proposed 3,200-litre polypropylene water pool and gas-powered fire effect, redesigned scenic elements, and incorporated extensive reused fabrics, stock staging, and costume materials – showing incredible ingenuity to reduce impact while retaining the spectacle that defines the RBO's productions.[2]

The creative team described the process as "greening" – taking an ambitious concept and adjusting it for delivery within more sustainable parameters. But the Theatre Green Book case study documented the team's difficulty in seeking to alter their established production model.[3] Substantial new materials were still required, with choices constrained by time, budget, and a need to deliver the grand designs proposed.

These difficulties highlight the importance of the question at the core of Wild Arts's model: beyond making conventional productions greener, can companies conceive performances that avoid requiring those resources in the first place? What are the bare minimum materials required to bring exceptional music and an impactful story to an audience?

[1] https://www.rbo.org.uk/about/our-commitments
[2] "Royal Opera House and *Rusalka*: Case Study 2023", https://theatregreenbook.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/ROH-Rusalka-Case-Study-2023-Lessons-Learned.pdf
[3] Ibid.

3. A stripped-back approach: what do we *need*?

Wild Arts uses reduced sets to direct attention to performers, music, character, and to free the audience's imagination. The principle: that a simple object or piece of costume can establish a dramatic world without a need to physically construct it; and that such reductions do not limit a production or diminish the audience's engagement, but instead, when used well, can enhance it.

The performing company is also reduced – with a cast of 8-12 voices, and a 10-person orchestra at the majority of venues – and productions travel using efficient transport. In 2026, 65% of artist and company travel was by train and lower-carbon transport; set and props travel in a single electric car or small van.

Operationally, the charity has no permanent theatre or central office, although rehearsal spaces, homeworking, storage, and host venues all still have an environmental impact.

Audience travel represents more than 75% of production emissions. The fact that so many of our opera audience are first-time attendees of the art form (26.8% of our *An Evening of Opera* audience in 2026) or have not attended a similar event in a decade (26.2%) demonstrates that these are mostly not attendees who would otherwise be travelling long distances to reach more established venues.[4] However, focussing on a high number of intimate (100-300-seater) venues ensures we reach as local an audience as possible, with 65% of our summer tour attendees in 2026 travelling less than half an hour to reach our performances, and 11% of audience members for *An Evening of Opera* reaching the venues on foot.[5]

Wild Arts's approach does not eliminate the environmental impact of performance, nor does it make touring intrinsically sustainable. Instead, it seeks to reduce the resources required for each production, extend the useful life of materials, and make efficient use of transport and infrastructure. Crucially, environmental responsibility is considered alongside artistic ambition and practical requirements from the outset, with an awareness of environmental impact maintained throughout the development and delivery of each production. The aim is not to eliminate every environmental cost, but to balance these considerations with Wild Arts's fundamental mission to bring exceptional music to audiences across the UK.

The following case studies examine three fully-staged productions from Wild Arts' 2025 and 2026 summer tours, and two semi-staged touring productions, each presenting different challenges, solutions, and learnings for sustainable production.

Eugene Onegin (Case Study 1) and *The Elixir of Love* (Case Study 2) present full productions chosen and developed for their sustainable production potential; *The Marriage of Figaro* (Case Study 3) applies the learnings from these productions to a more complex and materially demanding production context; and *An Evening of Opera* and *Messiah* (Case Study 4) offer hyper-lightweight touring alternatives to these fully staged productions.

[4] Post-show survey data 2026 (420 respondents). Respondents were asked about their own attendance, as well as the make-up of their group.
[5] Ibid.



Rozanna Madylus (left) and Laura Mekhail (right) in *Eugene Onegin* (Photos by Allan Titmuss)



Eugene Onegin (Photos by Allan Titmuss)

4. Case Study 1: *Eugene Onegin* (2025)

Director: Dominic Dromgoole | Designer: Tatiana Dolmatovskaya

Concept

The choice of *Eugene Onegin* for Wild Arts's 2025 headline production was driven by the resonance between the charity's artistic and operational model and Tchaikovsky's own conceptualisation of his "lyric scenes". In an 1877 letter to cellist and composer Karl Albrecht, Tchaikovsky wrote:

> *This is what I need for Onegin: 1. singers of good quality – they must have been drilled well and should be reliable; and must also be able to act simply but well; 2. the staging doesn't have to be lavish, but it must be strictly in keeping with the period; 3. the choruses should not be like a herd of sheep, as is the case on the stage of the Imperial theatres – rather, they must be people who really are participating in the plot of the opera.*

Former Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe, Dominic Dromgoole, was hired as director. Across his time at the Globe, and subsequently exemplified in his tour of *Hamlet* to every country in the world, Dominic had created worlds from almost nothing. His productions embody the Elizabethan adage that "two planks and a passion" were all that was needed to make theatre happen. Writing of his Hamlet world tour in a later book, he described the production as: "Sixteen human souls, armed with hope, technique, and strong shoes, their set packed into their luggage."[6]

The production needed to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate performance spaces ranging from intimate 5x5-metre stages to the considerably larger stage at Opera Holland Park, while retaining its dramatic coherence and visual identity.

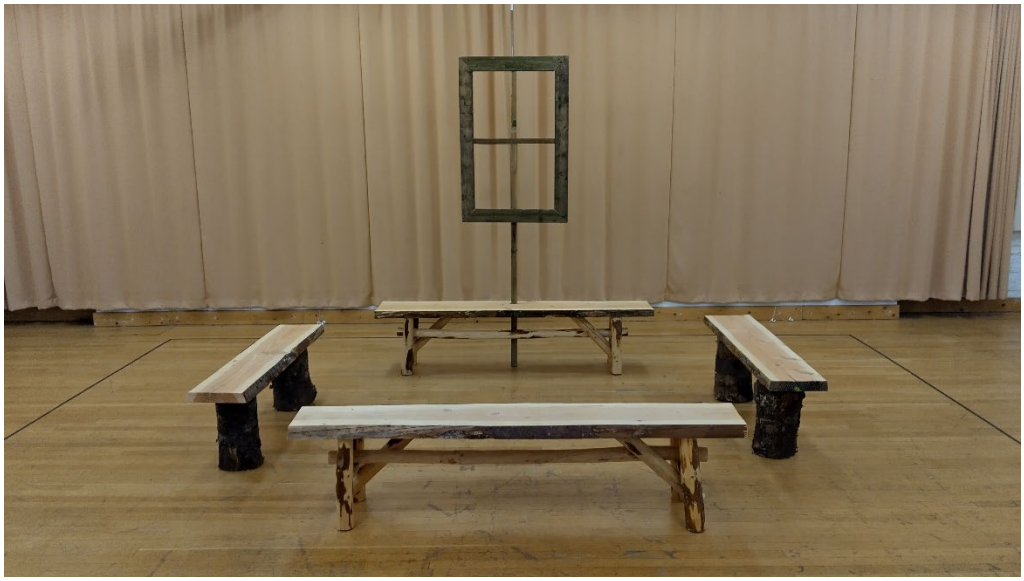
Dominic worked with designer Tatiana Dolmatovskaya – *Lohengrin* (Opéra national de Paris), *Le nozze di Figaro* (Komische Oper Berlin/Edinburgh International Festival), *Parsifal* (Vienna State Opera), *The Nose* (Bavarian State Opera) – and choreographer Siân Williams – Kate Bush's *Before the Dawn* (Apollo Hammersmith), *Wolf Hall* (BBC2), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (RSC), *The Tempest* (Shakespeare's Globe).

Together, the creative team developed a production in which a small number of carefully chosen scenic elements could suggest multiple locations, with the performers, movement, and music providing the detail and emotional depth.

Set and Props

The set was conceived as four rustic benches, to be moved around the stage to represent the different interior and exterior spaces. These benches were created from found forest tree trunks, with cross-planks provided by Woodpoint, a sustainable forestry company with whom

[6] Dominic Dromgoole, *Hamlet: Globe to Globe* (Canongate, 2017).



The bench and window set in rehearsals for *Eugene Onegin*

we partnered for the production. Founded by Oliver Barnsley, Woodpoint are based just one hour out of London (where production rehearsals took place), and revitalise young, overgrown British woodland by hand-felling small-diameter trees, maximising light and air circulation, and supporting plant and insect diversity.

The benches were complemented by a selection of second-hand objects: a recycled wooden window-frame, four straw baskets, some bedsheets, an apple crate, and a selection of period accessories.

Two props were purchased new: the pistols used in Onegin and Lensky's duel. Modern replicas were selected on grounds of cost, practicality, and safety. Given the duel's pivotal role in the narrative – culminating the first half of the opera and setting in motion the events of the second – a convincing visual and auditory firing effect was considered essential to the staging. Single-use plastic spark/smoke capsules were used to create this effect, with one capsule used per performance and three during rehearsals. Although representing a small proportion of the production's overall material use, these constituted a source of single-use waste that was considered necessary to achieve the desired dramatic effect.

Where venues had period features, these were actively highlighted and incorporated into the production – for example the great hall spaces of Forde Abbey in Dorset, Elveden Hall in Suffolk, or Charterhouse in London – with each venue creating a unique feel and design context for the performance.

Costume

Period costumes were predominantly sourced from existing second-hand stock, with more ornate, period-specific elements acquired from flea markets and antiques stores. This approach allowed the production to retain a strong period aesthetic without commissioning an entirely new wardrobe. Overall, 89% of costume materials by weight were sourced through reuse, with 100% retained by Wild Arts for future use.

As Wild Arts's first period production, some base layers – including socks, T-shirts, shirts, and underskirts – were purchased new to allow for easier washing and maintenance. These were subsequently incorporated into the Wild Arts costume store, with the majority being reused for the 2026 summer production of *The Marriage of Figaro* (Case Study 3).

Travel and Freight

The tour was scheduled to minimise travel between venues wherever possible. However, the need to accommodate performers' rest days, alongside the availability of individual venues, resulted in a number of isolated performances and return journeys.

Approximately 17,975 miles were travelled by artists and the creative team across the rehearsal period and tour. This included 7,700 miles by car, of which 2,125 were travelled by passengers sharing vehicles. The remaining 10,275 miles were travelled by train, representing 57% of total travel. This was the lowest proportion of rail travel among Wild Arts's recent productions, largely because the secondary summer production, *The Elixir of Love* (see below), visited the majority of more distant venues, which typically account for a greater proportion of rail journeys.

The production's minimal physical footprint allowed the entire set and props to be transported in one car, with costumes carried in a second vehicle. Together, these vehicles travelled approximately 1,800 miles over the rehearsal period and tour.

Theatre Green Book Assessment

The sustainable, but newly-sourced bench tops and the newly-sourced pistols reduced reused/recycled source materials to just 75% of the total weight of set and props. Advanced Standard was nonetheless achieved for this production.

	Source *% recycled or made from recycled materials*	**Destination** *% recycled or used as recycled materials*
Set and Props	75%	100%
Costumes	89%	100%
Total	**82%**	**100%**

	Estimated Production Emissions (kg CO_2e)
New materials	279
Material transport	604
Touring	3,117
Total	**4,001 kg CO_2e**

Total Audience	2,538
kg CO_2e per Audience Member	1.58
Total Performances	11
Kg CO_2e per Performance	363.73



Alex Jones as Dr Dulcamara with ensemble in *The Elixir of Love* (Photo by Becca Hunt)

5. Case Study 2: *The Elixir of Love* (Revival: 2025)

Director: Guido Martin-Brandis | Designer: Sophie Lincoln

Concept

Wild Arts's 2025 revival of Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* offered an opportunity to explore a different aspect of sustainable production: the environmental benefits of extending the life of an existing staging.

First produced in 2023, *The Elixir of Love* was initially chosen for its narrative simplicity and intimate scale – just one principal location and five substantial named roles, combined here with the chorus to create an eight-person cast – as well as its light-hearted summer atmosphere. Originally set on a rural farm in the summer heat, the Wild Arts production relocated the action to a 1950s seaside resort. This setting made effective use of the natural surroundings of Wild Arts's outdoor summer venues, allowing the landscape and summer weather to contribute to the world of the production without the need for elaborate scenery.

As Wild Arts's second production, and its first to incorporate substantial period elements, *The Elixir of Love* required a creative team capable of achieving a distinctive and joyful visual identity with modest resources. Director Guido Martin-Brandis was chosen for his work with The Opera Company, including *Rameau's Roots* and *The Theatre of the Salon*, alongside productions for the Grimeborn Festival and his work directing opera scenes at Guildhall School of Music and Drama. His work demonstrated an ability to create engaging performances with limited theatrical means, drawing out the individual strengths of performers. Designer Sophie Lincoln, meanwhile, had been creating ambitious designs from second-hand and thrifted items and sharing them on social media – crucially combining economy of means with a sense of fun.

For the 2025 revival, the smaller cast and orchestra – with an accordion adding depth to the reduced instrumental ensemble – enabled performances in Wild Arts's more intimate venues,

while the production's playful comedy provided a welcome contrast to the emotional drama of *Eugene Onegin*.

Rather than commissioning a new design, Wild Arts retained and reused the existing production's costumes, furniture, and props, adapting these where necessary for the returning cast and the demands of the tour. This allowed the initial investment in the production to be spread across multiple seasons, reducing the need for new materials while preserving the artistic identity of the original staging.

Set and Props

The set was conceived around two deckchairs and a folding table from which Dulcamara could sell his quack medicines, complemented by a blue cloth to evoke the summer sky in indoor venues. Other elements included two period suitcases, an advertising sandwich board, artificial flowers, and an assortment of Elixir bottles, ranging from relabelled 12ml miniatures to 75cl bottles and 150cl magnums.

All set and props elements had been retained from the original production for the 2025 revival, with the expectation that 100% of materials would be reused from stock.

During the second performance, however, the folding table broke on stage, requiring a replacement to be sourced within 24 hours for the next show. With no time to source a suitable second-hand alternative, a new table was purchased, while the broken table could not be recycled. Given the minimal quantity of materials involved in the production, this single replacement accounted for 12% of the total weight of set and props materials used in the revival. Other than the broken table, all set and props were retained for reuse following the production.

Costume

The revival made extensive use of costumes retained from the original 2023 production, with just five new costume items required: a pantsuit for the lead performer and four bathing suits for the chorus. The replacement pantsuit was necessary to accommodate differences in sizing between the original and revival casts, while the bathing suits had been damaged during storage. This experience highlighted the importance of appropriate storage conditions in preserving costumes for future reuse, prompting Wild Arts to hire a professional storage unit for subsequent productions.

Travel and Freight

The Elixir of Love toured alongside *Eugene Onegin*, with the two productions sharing elements of the summer touring infrastructure. As with *Eugene Onegin*, the tour was scheduled to minimise travel between venues wherever possible, with some shared venues eliminating the need for

additional company travel. However, the smaller company size meant that *The Elixir of Love* could tour to more distant venues, resulting in greater overall travel mileage.

Approximately 24,950 miles were travelled by artists and the creative team across the rehearsal period and tour. This included 9,800 miles by car, of which 2,000 were travelled by passengers sharing vehicles. The remaining 15,150 miles were travelled by train, representing 61% of total travel.

As with *Eugene Onegin*, the production's minimal physical footprint allowed the entire set and props to be transported in one car, with costumes carried in a second vehicle. Together, these vehicles travelled approximately 3,300 miles over the rehearsal period and tour.

Theatre Green Book Assessment

Though figures were impacted by the breaking and replacement of Dulcamara's table, Advanced Standard was achieved for this production.

	Source *% recycled or made from recycled materials*	**Destination** *% recycled or used as recycled materials*
Set and Props	88%	88%
Costumes	86%	100%
Total	**86%**	**95%**

	Estimated Production Emissions (kg CO_2e)
New materials	178
Material transport	1,108
Touring	3,981
Total	**5,267 kg CO_2e**

Total Audience	2,827
kg CO_2e per Audience Member	1.86
Total Performances	13
Kg CO_2e per Performance	405.15

6. Case Study 3: *The Marriage of Figaro* (2026)

Director: Danielle de Niese | Designer: Laura J Stanfield

Concept

Unlike *Eugene Onegin*, for which Tchaikovsky had explicitly advocated a modest approach to staging, or *The Elixir of Love*, with its relatively intimate setting and straightforward narrative, Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* presented a different challenge. A complex ensemble comedy, it is traditionally associated with elaborate domestic interiors, multiple rooms, grand eighteenth-century costumes (in contrast to the more modest late nineteenth-century dress of *Eugene Onegin*), and intricate relationships between characters.

Where the 2025 productions had relied on set elements primarily to evoke a world, in *Figaro* the physical environment is integral to the farce, with characters constantly hiding, entering and exiting rooms, and moving between different spaces. In a conventional production, however, these physical elements and the elaborate mechanics of the plot can sometimes dominate, obscuring the characters and their wider emotional narrative. For Wild Arts, the heart of the opera lay in creating fully realised, believable characters whose relationships could carry the audience through the comedy towards the greater emotional depth of the final acts.

Following the success of the previous productions, *Figaro* therefore offered an opportunity to test whether Wild Arts' character- and story-driven, environmentally sustainable approach could be applied consistently across a wider range of works.

This approach informed the appointment of acclaimed soprano Danielle de Niese as director for the production. Having performed the role of Susanna throughout her career, including in her debut (aged 19) at the Metropolitan Opera, de Niese brought an understanding of the work from the perspective of a performer who had truly inhabited the characters. Her approach placed particular emphasis on the humanity of Mozart's characters and the delicate balance between comedy and emotional truth.

Designer Laura Jane Stanfield, meanwhile, brought experience of creating distinctive theatrical worlds across a range of operatic settings, from smaller-scale productions with Vache Baroque and West Green House Opera to work with English Touring Opera and Opera Holland Park. Her experience of period opera on a smaller scale made her well suited to the challenge of establishing *Figaro*'s eighteenth-century world while accommodating the practical demands of a flexible, environmentally sustainable touring production.

Set and Props

To support the mechanics of the plot and capture the chaos of *La Folle Journée*, as well as the bustle of the Almaviva household, the creative team felt that more scenic materials were required than in previous productions.

Several props were reused from earlier productions, including baskets, fans, and sheets from *Eugene Onegin*, while stored costumes and props were used to fill boxes in the opening scenes.



Olivia Ray as Marcellina in *The Marriage of Figaro* (Photo by Lucy J Toms)

Two sheets of FSC-certified wood were purchased and used to construct six small wooden panels, which could represent doors, walls, hedges, and other scenic elements. Different designs were painted on each side, allowing the setting to change simply by rotating a panel, and different configurations were rehearsed, enabling the production to use anywhere from two to all six panels, depending on the size of the performance space.

Alongside these panels, four 40x40 cm boxes were constructed from recycled wood, serving both as storage for essential props and as barriers around the stage. Four antique chairs were sourced from an antiques market and reinforced to withstand the demands of the staging, including performers sitting and standing on them, and throwing them across the stage.

A single clean white sheet served variously as a pillow, a bed sheet, a hiding place, and a tablecloth. For the latter, the four wooden boxes provided the structure beneath, allowing the entire table to disappear when the boxes were pulled apart in one dramatic movement.

One particular design challenge arose in the opening of Act III. Danielle had chosen to reimagine the moment as an afternoon tea, with the makeshift table at the centre of the action. At an outburst of anger, the sheet would be pulled away and the table would vanish. During pre-production, the team initially planned to construct a tea set from layers of cardboard covered with paper. In practice, however, it proved difficult to achieve the intricate period detailing required using this material. Suitable wooden alternatives were similarly difficult to source, while a conventional ceramic tea set would have been vulnerable to breakage at every performance.

The decision was therefore made to commission a new tea set, 3D-printed in a Baroque-inspired design using polyhydroxyalkanoates (PHA), a family of biodegradable polymers produced through the microbial fermentation of sugars and oils. The resulting pieces provided the necessary period appearance while being sufficiently robust for repeated performances.

Towards the end of the tour, the main teapot developed a crack, which required repair using conventional superglue.

All set elements and props have been retained for future use, with the wooden boxes and panels designed to be repainted and adapted for subsequent productions.

Costume

While the simpler costume requirements of *The Elixir of Love* and *Eugene Onegin* had allowed Wild Arts to source costumes for its permanent stock, the greater demands of *The Marriage of Figaro*, particularly its elaborate eighteenth-century dress, made this approach financially impractical. The decision was therefore taken to hire the majority of the costumes, with minor alterations and additions to create a cohesive visual design.

Of the 108 costume elements, 57 were hired, 17 were taken from Wild Arts' existing stock (primarily from *Eugene Onegin*), and six were purchased second-hand. Through Danielle de Niese and connections established through the UK Opera Association, Wild Arts was also gifted 17 items from Glyndebourne's costume store, including period-specific panniers and breeches, alongside several dresses, coats, and frock coats.

The remaining 11 items were thigh-high socks and tights, purchased new for reasons of durability and washability, and retained as part of Wild Arts' permanent stock.

Overall, 95% of costume materials by weight were sourced through reuse, with 100% either returned for further use or retained by Wild Arts.

Travel and Freight

The tour was scheduled to minimise travel between venues wherever possible. However, as with *Eugene Onegin* and *The Elixir of Love*, the need to accommodate performers' rest days, alongside the availability of individual venues, resulted in a number of isolated performances and return journeys.

Following lessons learned from the 2025 productions, particular attention was given to ensuring that performance finish times allowed performers to catch the last trains home. This was not always possible at more remote venues, but where appropriate, the Wild Arts team booked rail travel centrally and in advance.

The 2026 production also marked a substantial increase in Wild Arts' overall touring mileage, reflecting the charity's growing capacity to reach more distant venues and the larger touring company. Each performance involved nine singers, 10–11 orchestral musicians, and five members of the backstage and production team.

Approximately 106,599 passenger miles were travelled by artists and the creative team across the rehearsal period and tour. Of these, 69,132 miles were travelled by train, representing 65% of the total. The remaining 37,467 miles were travelled by car, including 7,875 passenger miles undertaken through car-sharing.

While previous productions had restricted set and props to the boot of a small car, the increased scenic requirements of *The Marriage of Figaro*, alongside the need to transport a keyboard and amplifier for recitative accompaniment, made this impractical. The decision was therefore taken to hire a small electric van for the tour. Costumes continued to be transported in the Wardrobe Manager's car.

The electric van travelled approximately 5,000 miles, while the car travelled a further 4,500 miles, giving a total freight mileage of approximately 9,500 miles.

The electric van proved a hugely valuable addition to the tour. Operationally, it facilitated a simpler, faster get-out at the end of each performance, while improvements in electric vehicle range in recent years meant that charging was straightforward throughout the tour. In most cases, a single charge at home was sufficient for a full return journey, while longer trips requiring charging stops provided a welcome opportunity for a break from driving. Wild Arts intends to continue this hiring arrangement for its 2027 season.

Theatre Green Book Assessment

Despite the greater scenic and costume requirements of *The Marriage of Figaro*, the production achieved Theatre Green Book Advanced Standard, with 89% of materials sourced through reuse or recycling and all materials retained or returned for future use. The production demonstrated that Wild Arts' sustainable touring model could accommodate a more complex and visually ambitious work, although the larger company, greater touring distances, and increased freight requirements also contributed to substantially higher overall emissions.

	Source *% recycled or made from recycled materials*	**Destination** *% recycled or used as recycled materials*
Set and Props	77%	100%
Costumes	95%	100%
Total	**89%**	**100%**

	Estimated Production Emissions (kg CO_2e)
New materials	156
Material transport	2,214
Touring	16,978
Total	**19,348 kg CO_2e**

Total Audience	9,371
kg CO_2e per Audience Member	2.06
Total Performances	26
Kg CO_2e per Performance	744.15



Natasha Page and Felix Kemp in *An Evening of Opera* (Photo by Pedge Photography)

7. Case Study 4: *An Evening of Opera* and *Messiah* (2025-26)

Directors: James Hurley & Guido Martin-Brandis | Tom Morris

An Evening of Opera

An Evening of Opera is a 90-minute opera gala that uses operatic excerpts to tell a complete story. Performed by four singers and a string quintet (often engaging directly with the singers), in 2025 the narrative retold *The Marriage of Figaro* (dir: James Hurley); in 2026 *Cinderella* (dir: Guido Martin-Brandis).

Conceived without scenery or theatrical costume, the entire theatrical prop inventory of the 2025 show was a bottle of wine, four glasses, and a maid's apron; while the 2026 show was created with a mirror, a broom with detachable handle, a flower, and a pair of sunglasses. Both shows also used one chair, borrowed from each venue. All props are taken from Wild Arts's store, or borrowed from performers and venues, with the staging and some lines of dialogue designed to adjust to each unique venue.

Able to perform in much smaller spaces, and to perform outdoors with greater ease (not requiring cover for the full chamber orchestra or for costumes), these tours travel alongside the main summer productions, with performers already having travelled to the local area. With lighter vocal requirements, performers are able to sing multiple "Opera Evenings" in a row, maximising touring efficiency. Travel, however, is almost entirely by car, due to the hyper-local village-based nature of the tour.

In 2025, approximately 13,233 car passenger miles were travelled by artists and team across the rehearsal period and tour, including 8,822 miles undertaken through car sharing.

In 2026, the tour travelled with 1-2 additional team members to improve the artist and audience experience. Approximately 18,546 car passenger miles were travelled by artists and team across the rehearsal period and tour, including 16,860 miles undertaken through car sharing.

Messiah

Wild Arts's version of *Messiah* dramatises Handel's oratorio of Christ's life. Touring each year around Christmas, the work is performed by eight singers (performing from memory), and twelve period instrument players.

Though with higher artist travel demands than *An Evening of Opera*, the tour similarly designs out the need for materials – with the prop inventory being a found wooden box, three abstract models of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, and a cross. The models and cross were gifted by the workshop of the University for the Creative Arts for the first tour in 2023, and have since been used across four tours, with further tours confirmed to 2028 and expected to continue to 2030.

Performances take place in theatres, cathedrals, and barns – with heated spaces required due to the time of year (for audience members and period instruments alike).

As the Messiah tour primarily travels to urban centres, or within easy access of trains, the majority of travel (67%) is by train – with cars required for those with larger instruments, or by production team required to travel before the first or after the last scheduled trains.

In 2025, approximately 15,888 passenger miles were travelled by artists and team across the tour, with 10,592 miles travelled by train, and the remaining 5,296 by car.

In 2026, approximately 22,752 passenger miles will be travelled by artists and team across the tour, with 15,168 miles travelled by train, and the remaining 7,584 by car. (Report written just prior to the start of the tour, November 2026.)

Summary

For both of these productions, the venue becomes an intrinsic part of the experience – choosing beautiful or atmospheric spaces within which to create the story – as do the instrumental players – very much incorporated within the movement and action. For *An Evening of Opera* the experience is enhanced by picnics and a traditional "Summer Opera" atmosphere, and for *Messiah* by a Christmas atmosphere – coming into a warm, beautifully-lit space on a cold, dark winter night; often with mince pies and mulled wine available.

No separate set, prop, or costume assessments were undertaken for these productions. Neither requires purpose-built scenery or theatrical costumes, while the few props used are drawn entirely from existing stock or borrowed from venues, resulting in no added production emissions. Freight was similarly excluded, as props travel with company members rather than requiring dedicated transport. This does not imply that the productions have no environmental impact, but that their principal impacts lie in artist and audience travel, and the operation of the venues in which they perform.

An Evening of Opera 2025

	Estimated Production Emissions (kg CO_2e)
Touring	4,444
Total	**4,444 kg CO_2e**

Total Audience	3,258
kg CO_2e per Audience Member	1.36
Total Performances	21
Kg CO_2e per Performance	211.62

An Evening of Opera 2026

	Estimated Production Emissions (kg CO_2e)
Touring	6,228
Total	**6,228 kg CO_2e**

Total Audience	3,328
kg CO_2e per Audience Member	1.87
Total Performances	26
Kg CO_2e per Performance	239.54

Messiah 2025

	Estimated Production Emissions (kg CO_2e)
Touring	2,536
Total	**2,536 kg CO_2e**

Total Audience	1,707
kg CO_2e per Audience Member	1.49
Total Performances	5
Kg CO_2e per Performance	507.20

Messiah 2026

	Estimated Production Emissions (kg CO_2e)
Touring	3,631 *(Projected / Provisional)*
Total	**3,631 kg CO_2e**

Total Audience	2,200 *(Projected / Provisional)*
kg CO_2e per Audience Member	1.65
Total Performances	7
Kg CO_2e per Performance	518.72



Lucy Hall in *Messiah* at Smith Square Hall (Photo by Steve Gregson)



Natasha Page and Timothy Nelson in *Messiah* at Chichester Cathedral (Photos by Lucy J Toms)



Will McGahon, Christine Anderson, and Stacey Watton in *An Evening of Opera* (Photo by Pedge Photography)

8. Beyond the Theatre Green Book: audience travel and other impact factors

For Wild Arts' 2026 season, and the Summer Opera Tour in particular, efforts were made to strengthen our environmental and audience data collection. This included adopting a more developed customer relationship management (CRM) and ticketing system, Ticketsolve, introducing detailed post-show surveys for performances where Wild Arts managed the box office, and gathering additional audience data from partner venues. Further information had been expected from The Audience Agency, although this was disrupted by the organisation entering voluntary liquidation in September 2026.

All calculations are based on the UK Government's 2026 greenhouse gas conversion factors, published by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ).

I. Audience travel

Arts Council England and Julie's Bicycle's *Culture, Climate and Environmental Responsibility 2024–25* report found that audience travel accounted for approximately 39% of the combined reported carbon footprint of National Portfolio Organisations when included in the calculations. Across 255 reporting organisations, audience travel generated an estimated 75,430 tonnes of CO_2e, highlighting the importance of understanding how audiences reach cultural events. Julie's Bicycle have also suggested that this continues to be the most underestimated impact factor, even when data is collected.

The impact is all the more distinct within Wild Arts's model. Wild Arts' central aim to make performance accessible to new audiences means we often go to places that other organisations do not. This includes more deprived communities and those further from

traditional centres, and many of our venues have less well-established public transport links, or none at all. We do not intend to compromise on our objectives, so instead we seek to minimise or mitigate private car use wherever possible.

Wild Arts' local touring model aims to bring performances as close to a community as possible. In 2026, approximately 65% of Wild Arts' audience travelled less than 30 minutes to a performance. At the more intimate, locally focused *An Evening of Opera* performances, 77% of audiences travelled less than 30 minutes, with a one-way journey distance of 10-20 miles, and 11% arriving on foot (based on 287 survey responses).

These figures suggest some success in minimising journey emissions. However, the estimated environmental impact is nevertheless considerable. For the 2026 Summer Opera Tour, audience travel generated an estimated 79,224 kg CO_2e, more than three times the 25,576 kg CO_2e attributed to production materials, material transport, and company touring. Audience travel therefore accounted for more than 75% of the combined estimated emissions across these categories.[7]

	Estimated Production Emissions (kg CO_2e)	**Estimated Audience Travel Emissions (kg CO_2e)**
***The Marriage of Figaro* (2026)**	19,348	58,997
***An Evening of Opera* (2026)**	6,228	20,228
Total (Summer 2026)	**25,576**	**79,224**

It would be misleading to assume that people attending Wild Arts locally would otherwise have travelled to a more distant performance space. For many – particularly the 35% of attendees either attending an opera for the first time or bringing someone new to opera – the alternative is simply not attending opera or classical music performance at all. The charity is creating new local cultural participation rather than displacing longer journeys.

Public transport options have been explored, however this is unfeasible given the emphasis on reaching areas others cannot. The venues are often only reachable by car, particularly from an audience scattered around the local community. As Wild Arts's own reputation grows this issue is only anticipated to increase.

Wild Arts will continue to measure and minimise the impact of these journeys where possible; and to embed their performances as locally within a community as possible. Future audience research will seek to establish a more detailed picture of transport modes, including electric, petrol, and diesel vehicles; a more widespread assessment of car size and occupancy; and further data from urban venues. These improvements should enable Wild Arts to estimate audience travel emissions more accurately and identify opportunities for further reductions.

[7] Figures were calculated two ways: 1. by taking the average group size and journey distance reported in surveys and multiplying by the total attendees for the tour; 2. by measuring the "as-the-crow-flies" geographical distance from 4,201 attendee postcodes to their performance venues, and multiplying the distance by a factor of 1.3 to allow for road distances. The latter measure produced a substantially higher result, which has been used. It is notable that Wild Arts only possesses survey or postcode data for venues where it directly manages the performance box office – usually small, rural, first-time venues.

II. Company Accommodation

Though less substantial than audience mileage, and minimised by Wild Arts's smaller touring forces, accommodation represents another environmental consideration for a touring production where performances regularly take place beyond easy travelling distance of performers' homes.

During the 2026 Summer Opera Tour, 438 bed-nights were provided for performers and production staff. Of these, 379 (87%) were generously provided by volunteer hosts, with just 59 (13%) requiring paid accommodation. This arrangement provides significant financial and logistical support to the tour, while also making more sustainable use of existing household infrastructure. While DESNZ conversion factors report a commercial room as generating 10.4 kg CO_2e per room-night, for volunteer accommodation, this can be reduced to 5.5 kg CO_2e per bed-night.[8]

The resulting estimated accommodation footprint was 2,698 kg CO_2e across the Summer Opera Tour.

	***The Marriage of Figaro* (2026)**	***An Evening of Opera* (2026)**	**Total (Summer 2026)**
Paid bed-nights	45	14	59
Volunteer bed-nights	249	130	379
Total bed-nights	**294**	**144**	**438**
Paid accommodation emissions (kg CO_2e)	468.00	145.60	613.60
Volunteer accommodation emissions (kg CO_2e)	1,369.50	715.00	2,084.50
Total emissions (kg CO_2e)	**1,837.5**	**860.6**	**2,698.1**

These figures are necessarily approximate, particularly for volunteer accommodation, where household heating arrangements, seasonality, and individual behaviour will affect actual emissions. Nevertheless, the assessment provides a useful starting point for understanding the extended environmental impact.

[8] To calculate volunteer accommodation impact, individual DESNZ conversion factors were used to estimate additional emissions generated by hosting a guest in an existing household. This was judged at 1.5 kg CO_2e for hot water and showering, 2 kg CO_2e for additional bedroom heating, and 2 kg CO_2e for laundry. While many of these aspects may have been equivalently saved by the performer being away from home, the majority of performers live in family contexts where heating or hot water is unlikely to be substantially reduced in their absence.

III. Venue emissions

Wild Arts' touring model makes use of a wide variety of performance spaces, from conventional theatres, to churches, historic houses, gardens, and outdoor venues. Rather than operating a permanent theatre, the charity brings its productions to spaces already embedded in their local communities, adapting the staging and technical requirements to suit each location.

The diversity of these venues presents both opportunities and challenges for environmental reporting. Outdoor performances may require little or no auditorium heating, ventilation, or air conditioning, while some can take advantage of natural light and existing architectural features. Conventional theatres, by contrast, generally operate more substantial lighting, ventilation, and front-of-house systems, although these may benefit from modern energy-efficient technology.

An initial classification of the 2026 Summer Opera Tour demonstrates the variety of spaces used:

Venue Type	**Performances of *The Marriage of Figaro* (2026)**	**Performances of *An Evening of Opera* (2026)**	**Total performances (Summer 2026)**
Conventional theatres and concert halls	6	0	6
Outdoor and open-air theatres	4	1	5
Gardens, Estates, and historic houses	12	21	33
Churches and smaller indoor spaces	4	4	8
Total performances	**26**	**26**	**52**

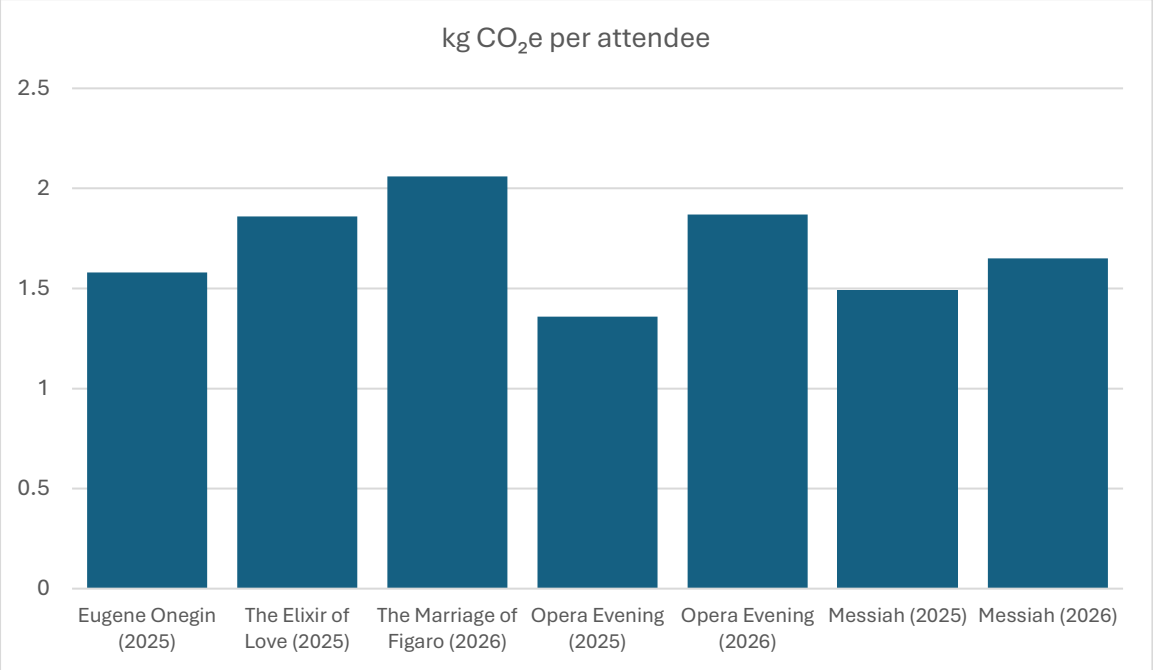
Though only touring to theatres with firm environmental policies, Wild Arts does not operate its host venues and generally has limited access to information about their energy consumption. Furthermore, the energy required for an individual performance may differ considerably from the venue's overall operational footprint, particularly where buildings and facilities are already in use, and given the substantially reduced requirements of Wild Arts's touring shows.

Venue emissions are identified as an area requiring further research and data collection in 2027 and beyond.

9. Environmental performance: comparative data analysis, 2025–2026

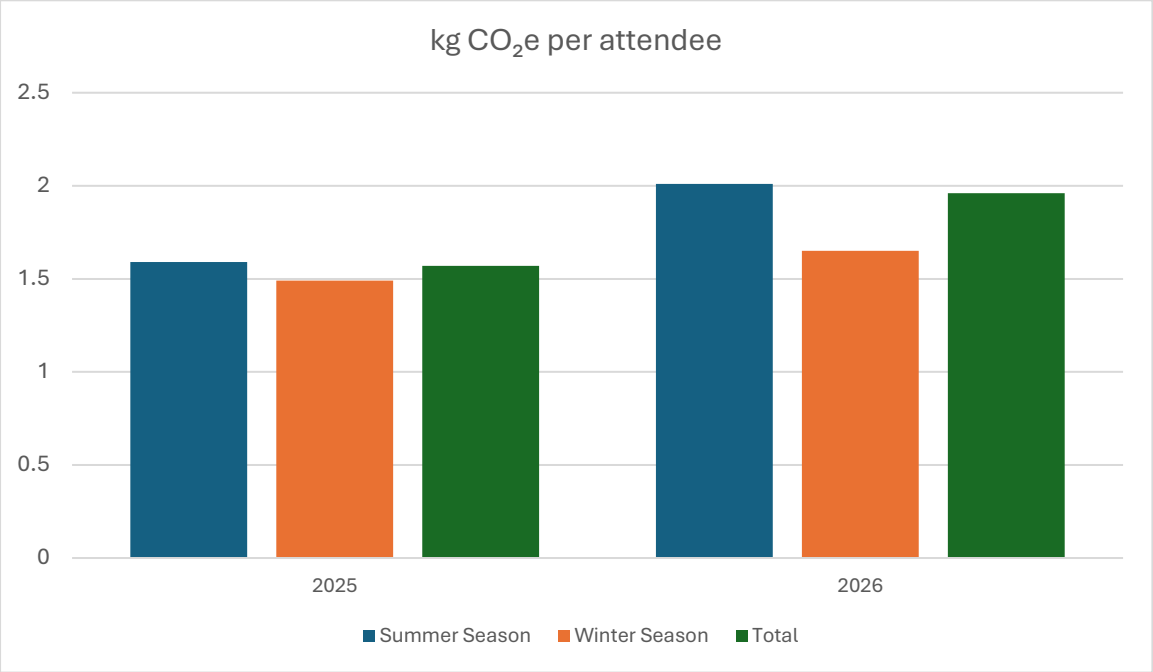
Theatre Green Book production and touring emissions per audience member

Production	Performances	Audience	kg CO_2e	kg CO_2e per attendee
Eugene Onegin (2025)	11	2,538	4,001	1.58
The Elixir of Love (2025)	13	2,827	5,267	1.86
The Marriage of Figaro (2026)	26	9,371	19,348	2.06
Opera Evening (2025)	21	3,258	4,444	1.36
Opera Evening (2026)	26	3,328	6,228	1.87
Messiah (2025)	5	1,707	2,536	1.49
Messiah (2026)	7	2,200	3,631	1.65



Theatre Green Book season and annual production emissions per audience member (Summer and Winter Tours)

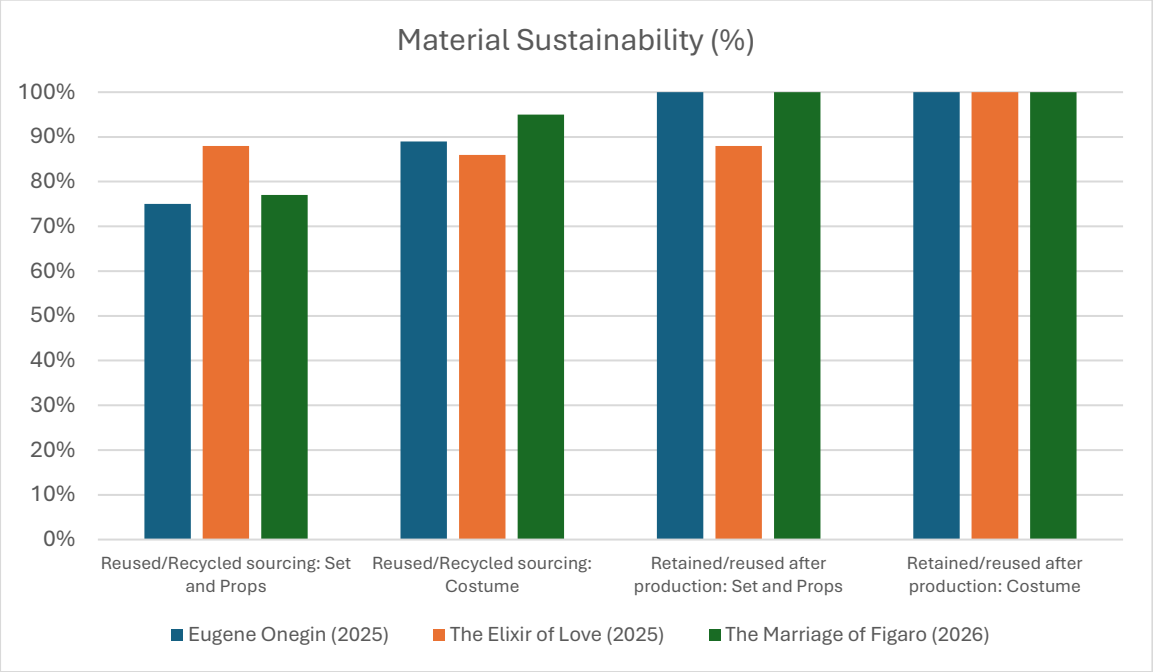
Season	Performances	Audience	kg CO_2e	kg CO_2e per attendee
Summer 2025	45	8,623	13,712	1.59
Summer 2026	52	12,699	25,576	2.01
Winter 2025	5	1,707	2,536	1.49
Winter 2026	7	2,200	3,631	1.65
Total 2025	50	10,330	16,248	1.57
Total 2026	59	14,899	29,207	1.96



Wild Arts is a Registered Charity, Charity No. 1158366

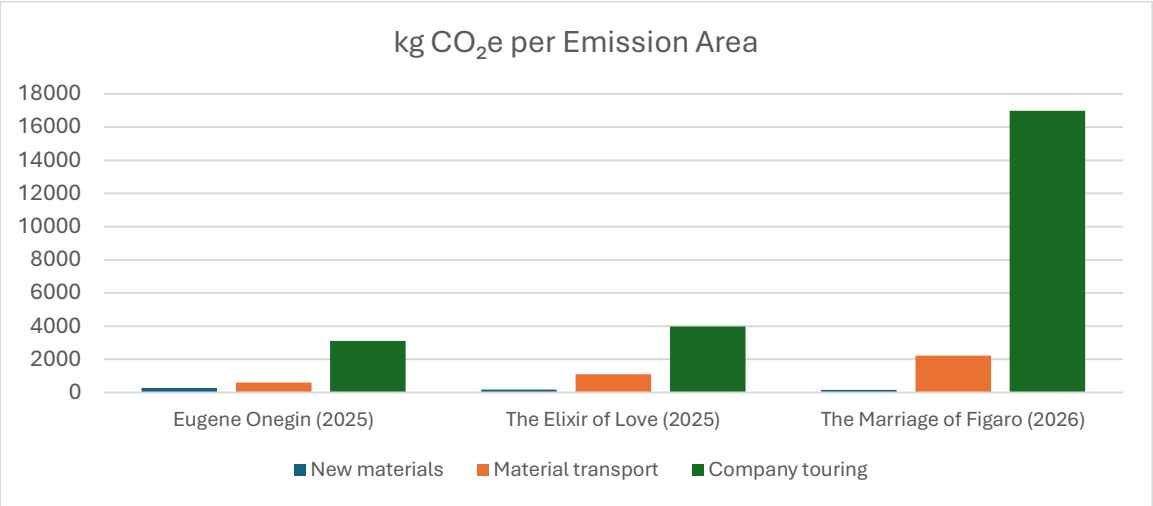
Material sustainability comparison

Production	Reused/Recycled sourcing	Retained/reused after production	TGB Standard
Eugene Onegin (2025)			
Set and Props	75%	100%	Advanced
Costume	89%	100%	Advanced
Total	82%	100%	Advanced
The Elixir of Love (2025)			
Set and Props	88%	88%	Advanced
Costume	86%	100%	Advanced
Total	86%	95%	Advanced
The Marriage of Figaro (2026)			
Set and Props	77%	100%	Advanced
Costume	95%	100%	Advanced
Total	89%	100%	Advanced



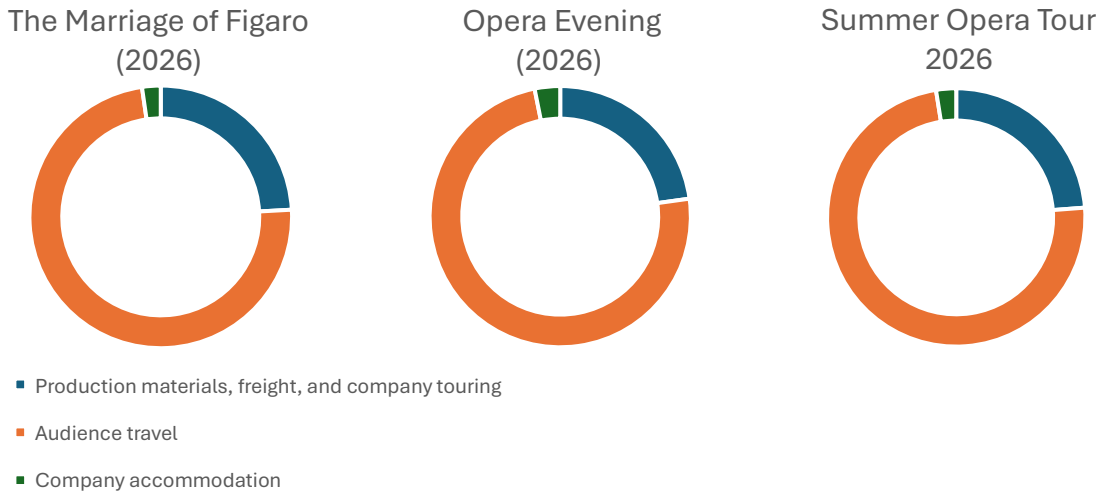
Theatre Green Book breakdown of environmental emissions

Source	Eugene Onegin (2025)	The Elixir of Love (2025)	The Marriage of Figaro (2026)
New materials	279	178	156
Material transport	604	1,108	2,214
Company touring	3,117	3,981	16,978
Total kg CO_2e	**4,001**	**5,267**	**19,348**



Other measures: Summer Opera Tour 2026

	The Marriage of Figaro (2026)	Opera Evening (2026)	Summer Opera Tour 2026
Production materials, freight, and company touring	19,348	6,228	25,576
Audience travel	58,997	20,228	79,224
Company accommodation	1,838	861	2,698
Combined assessed emissions	**66,155**	**16,209**	**82,363**



10. Artistic excellence without compromise

Arts Council England and Julie's Bicycle's *Culture, Climate and Environmental Responsibility 2024–25* report highlighted a particular concern as being repeatedly flagged by participant organisations: that fewer materials or less technical infrastructure might mean diminished artistic quality; that audiences and critics *require* grand spectacle, particularly for opera.

Wild Arts's experience suggests that a restrained physical design can not only avoid being negatively received, but can become a key strength of a production – focusing attention on musical interpretation, characterisation, and the relationship between performers and audiences.

Critical responses to Wild Arts' productions provide considerable evidence of this approach's artistic success. The 2026 production of *The Marriage of Figaro* received four-star reviews from *The Guardian*, *The Times*, and *The Stage*, alongside five-star reviews from *The Telegraph*, *MusicOMH*, *The Reviews Hub*, and several other publications. *The Telegraph* wrote: "This is an absolute model of how to do small-scale classic opera with a contemporary edge. I feel sure Mozart would have cheered"; *The Times* that:

> *There's almost no scenery… yet this show feels emotionally and dramatically fuller than many productions set in sumptuously furnished sets. The reason is evident. An excellent cast who portray their characters with raw emotions and total credibility.*

The Elixir of Love and *Eugene Onegin* received similar praise, with *Eugene Onegin*'s four-star review in *The Times* titled "No frills Tchaikovsky goes straight to the heart":

> *This Onegin succeeds because it is direct, simple, heartfelt. All harder goals to achieve than they sound.*

This acclaim was matched by audience members, with the 2026 Summer Tour receiving an average 9.7/10 audience rating, and 83.5 Net Promoter Score.[9]

The consistency of acclaim across Wild Arts' programme in 2025 and 2026 proves that artistic excellence and environmental sustainability can come hand in hand.

By treating material limitations as creative parameters rather than compromises to be concealed, Wild Arts has developed a distinctive artistic language in which sustainability, accessibility, and musical and dramatic ambition can reinforce one another.

[9] Post-show survey data (420 respondents).

11. Core principles, learnings, and improvements

Core principles

1. **Designing out materials from the outset.** Productions should be conceived with minimal physical requirements, rather than adapting elaborate designs retrospectively, reducing environmental impact while encouraging artistic creativity.
2. **Prioritising versatility and longevity.** Scenic elements should serve multiple dramatic purposes and be designed for adaptation and reuse across future productions. Appropriate storage and maintenance are essential to extending their useful life.
3. **Integrating sustainability into touring logistics.** Geographical scheduling, rail travel, car-sharing, and efficient freight arrangements should be considered from the earliest planning stages, reducing emissions while delivering operational benefits.
4. **Recognising the importance of scale.** Achieving Theatre Green Book Advanced Standard does not necessarily mean lower overall emissions. Larger companies, longer tours, and greater audience numbers can increase absolute emissions even where materials are sustainably sourced.
5. **Embedding environmental responsibility throughout the creative process.** Sustainability should inform artistic, production, and operational decisions from the beginning, rather than being assessed retrospectively.

Learnings and Improvement Priorities

1. **Improve audience travel data.** Gather more detailed information on transport modes, vehicle types, occupancy, and longer-distance journeys to improve the accuracy of emissions estimates.
2. **Develop venue emissions reporting.** Work with venue partners to collect information on energy consumption, technical infrastructure, and the additional environmental impact of individual performances.
3. **Further reduce touring emissions.** Continue improving geographical scheduling, rail accessibility, car-sharing, and the use of electric vehicles. Wild Arts will review its artist travel payment policy in 2027 to further encourage car-shares and train travel, and will continue to adjust start and finish times to allow train travel where possible.
4. **Further extend material lifecycles.** Prioritise the reuse, adaptation, maintenance, and appropriate storage of sets, props, and costumes, with future use considered from the earliest design stages.
5. **Monitor environmental performance as the organisation grows.** Compare total emissions, emissions per performance, and emissions per audience member annually, distinguishing improvements in efficiency from changes in absolute environmental impact. Artistic and organisational growth will continue to be considered hand in hand with environmental impact.