



# An Evaluation of QSO's Healthy Ageing Concert Series:

Exploring Outcomes Related to  
Happiness, Health, and Hope

Report for 2024-2025 Season

Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and Emma Heard



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### **Suggested citation**

Bartleet, B. L. & Heard, E. (2025). *An Evaluation of QSO's Heathy Ageing Concert Series (2024-2025): Exploring Outcomes Related to Happiness, Health, and Hope*. [Commissioned by the Queensland Symphony Orchestra]. Creative Arts Research Institute, Griffith University.

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Professor Brydie-Leigh Bartleet (Project Leader): Conceptual work and research design, leadership of focus groups, critical review of analysis, co-authoring of report, and project management.

Dr Emma Heard (Research Fellow): Conceptual work and research design, assistance with data generation, leadership of data analysis, and co-authoring of report.

Design: Hannah Ison at Liveworm Studio, Queensland College of Art and Design, Griffith University.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to acknowledge Dr Caroline Robertson for her literature review of the key concepts of health, happiness and hope, which has informed this report. We would like to thank Tanya Jones, Dr Elizabeth Meyers and Dr Mat Klotz for their assistance with conducting audience vox pops. We would also like to thank the Queensland Symphony Orchestra for commissioning this report, and acknowledge the vital input and assistance from the QSO's Development team in all aspects of this research. Finally, we would like to thank all the audience members who generously gave their time to talk to us.

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# Executive summary

This report presents findings from an evaluation of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra's (QSO) **Healthy Ageing Concert Series** across two performances (**19 July 2024** and **25 September 2025**), examining audience-reported outcomes aligned with QSO's pillars of **happiness, health, and hope**.

Across the first program year, **226 audience members** attended the two concerts (98 in 2024; 128 in 2025). In total, **104 participants** contributed insights to this evaluation: **29** survey responses, **59** vox-pop interviews, and **16** focus-group participants.

## Key findings (Happiness, Health, Hope)

**Survey results** indicated consistently positive perceived impacts:

- **Happiness:** 100% of survey respondents reported the concert made them feel more happy.
- **Mental health & wellbeing:** 100% agreed the concert improved mental health and wellbeing.
- **Physical health & wellbeing:** 79% agreed the concert improved physical health and wellbeing.
- **Emotional health & wellbeing:** 96% agreed the concert improved emotional health and wellbeing.
- **Cultural and spiritual wellbeing:** 82% agreed it improved cultural wellbeing and 82% spiritual wellbeing.
- **Hope:** 89% reported feeling more hopeful after the concert.

**Qualitative insights** help explain *how* these outcomes were experienced:

- **Happiness** was commonly described as *joy, relaxation, wellbeing, inner calm, and contentment*, with participants emphasising joy, being "in the moment" (especially for carers), and appreciation of the repertoire and musicianship.
- **Health** was understood broadly (beyond absence of illness), including *mind, body and spirit*, and was linked to positive memories, relaxation/calm, and social connection with family, friends, and others attending.
- **Hope** was associated with feeling uplifted, the meaning of a rarely accessed cultural experience, and reconnecting with creativity and long-held passions—supporting more positive expectations about the future.

## Commendations and recommendations

Participants strongly endorsed the program model and offered clear guidance for strengthening delivery:

- Continue in the QSO Studio (valued as special, accessible, and convenient).
- Keep it intimate (close proximity to instruments and musicians enhanced impact).
- Maintain the timing and length (morning time/format supported accessibility and enjoyment).
- Add light-touch participation/education (more information about instruments, pieces for listening afterwards, and orchestra setup; interest in active music-making).
- Support social connection (opportunities to connect before/after, including refreshments).
- Evaluate immediately after, ideally onsite, as recall was harder at longer intervals.

Overall, findings suggest QSO's Healthy Ageing Concert Series meaningfully supports older audience members' happiness, multidimensional wellbeing, and hope, while also generating actionable insights to refine program design and evaluation practice.

# Background

This report provides a summary of the findings from an evaluation of Queensland Symphony Orchestra's (QSO) Healthy Ageing concerts held on 19 July 2024 and 25 September 2025. The evaluation has been framed around QSO's Healthy Ageing pillars of happiness, health, and hope, and considers how concert goers understand and experience shifts in these areas as a result of attending the performances.

This project builds on the literature review commissioned by QSO that demonstrated positive health and wellbeing outcomes of music participation (Walton & Bartleet, 2021). Further, there is growing evidence to suggest that music can support healthy ageing in particular, with music programs in clinical settings demonstrating positive outcomes across psychological well-being, cognitive functioning, physiological responses, quality of life, and overall well-being for older people (Brancatisano & Thompson, 2019; Castillejos & Godoy-Izquierdo, 2021; Ma & Ma, 2023; Murtin & Zanobetti, 2024).

Music participation including learning new music technologies, as well as listening, may also support wellbeing in older age (Creech, 2019; Viola et al., 2023). Furthermore, there is emerging evidence to suggest that engaging in musical leisure activities can support psychological wellbeing in ageing and in neurological rehabilitation (Särkämö, 2017).

Qualitative research shows that music is a meaningful aspect of many older people's lives and can support physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual health and well-being (Hays & Minichiello, 2005; O'Reilly et al., 2023). Notably, there is limited evidence exploring specifically orchestral musical performances and health among older people.

QSO's Happiness, Health and Hope pillars align with the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of health – "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organization, 1946, p. np).

Happiness is essential to health and has been found to be not only a consequence of ill-health but a contributing causal factor (Steptoe, 2019). International research demonstrates that happiness in older adults is important for mental health (Sun, 2023).

Health is a broad term and, as demonstrated by the WHO definition, is related to physical, mental, emotion and social aspects of a person's wellbeing (World Health Organization, 1946). Older people in Australia experience a range of health and wellbeing concerns related to physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects of their lives (AIHW, 2024) and international literature highlights how social and community connection are important for supporting health in older adults (Bar-Tur, 2021).

Hope is about positive expectations for the future and an important part of mental health and wellbeing (Laranjeira & Querido, 2022). For older adults, hope can support positive mental health particularly for those experiencing social isolation or a lack of belonging (McLaren et al., 2024).

This report draws on participants' experiences and perceptions to explore how QSO's healthy ageing program might support happiness, health and hope for older adults who attend.

Outcomes contribute to an important gap in literature about the role that orchestral music can play in building health and wellbeing among older adults. Both the approach we have taken to this evaluation and the reported findings could help orchestral music institutions understand and capture the impact of their community programs, and support building this important evidence base further.



# About the team

This research has been conducted by Professor Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and Dr Emma Heard from the Creative Arts Research Institute at Griffith University. Both researchers bring expertise in music, social impact, health promotion, and program evaluation. The team have also been supported by Research Assistants Dr Caroline Robertson for the report's literature review, and Tanya Jones, Dr Elizabeth Meyers and Dr Mat Klotz for the evaluation's audience research. An informal Advisory Group has also provided feedback and input at key points in the research.



Figure 1: Research team and audience members at Blue Care Focus Group (2024)

# Methods

A mixed methods approach to data generation included the following three methods:

- Vox-pop style interviews with participants immediately after the performance.
- Surveys sent to participants after the performance (completed immediately after – two weeks post).
- A focus group with participants two weeks after the show (2024) and immediately after the show at QSO (2025).

The questions used in these methods sought to first understand audience members' perceptions of the three key pillars of happiness, health and hope, and how their experiences with the Healthy Ageing Concerts affected these in any way. Due to the small scope of this evaluation, and the practicalities of working with this demographic, the data generation methods were succinct and closely tied to the concert experience. The data was analyzed by the research team according to key themes relating to the three pillars using NVivo. This research received ethical clearance from Griffith University (GU Ref No: 2024/501).

# Participants

A total of 226 audience members attended the two Healthy Ageing Concerts in the first year of this program (98 in 2024 and 128 in September 2025).

In total of 104 participants contributed towards this study across the two concerts in the 2024-2025 Healthy Ageing season. This includes:

- 29 survey responses (17 in 2024 and 12 in 2025);
- 59 vox-pop participants (33 in 2024 and 26 in 2025); and
- 16 focus group participants (9 in 2024 and 7 in 2025).

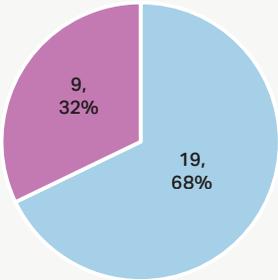


Figure 2: Research team and audience members at QSO Focus Group (2025)

# Findings

## Survey responses

### Did your sense of happiness change during the QSO concert?

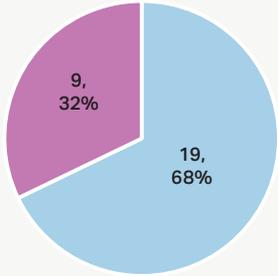


- The concert made me feel a lot more happy
- The concert made me feel more happy

Using a 5-point scale, participants were asked if attending the QSO concert affected their sense of happiness (A lot – not at all).

- **100% of survey participants reported that the concert made them feel more happy.**

### The QSO concert improved my mental health and wellbeing

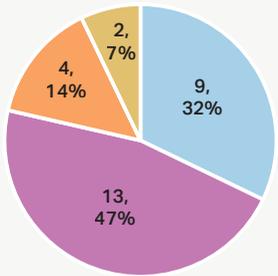


- Strongly agree
- Agree

Using a 5 point scale, participants were asked if they felt that attending the QSO concert improved their mental health and wellbeing (Strongly agree – Strongly disagree).

- **100% of survey participants reported that the concert improved their mental health and wellbeing.**

### The QSO concert improved my physical health and wellbeing

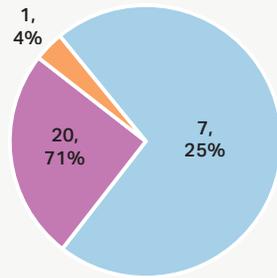


- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree

Using a 5 point scale, participants were asked if they felt that attending the QSO concert improved their physical health and wellbeing (Strongly agree – Strongly disagree).

- **79% of survey participants reported that the concert improved their physical health and wellbeing.**

### This concert improved my emotional health and wellbeing

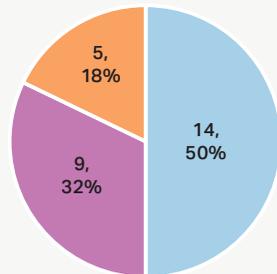


■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Unsure

Using a 5 point scale, participants were asked if they felt that attending the QSO concert improved their emotional health and wellbeing (Strongly agree – Strongly disagree).

- **96% of survey participants reported that the concert improved their emotional health and wellbeing.**

### This concert improved my cultural health and wellbeing

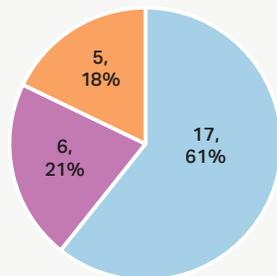


■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Unsure

Using a 5 point scale, participants were asked if they felt that attending the QSO concert improved their cultural health and wellbeing (Strongly agree – Strongly disagree).

- **82% of survey participants reported that the concert improved their cultural health and wellbeing.**

### This concert improved my spiritual health and wellbeing

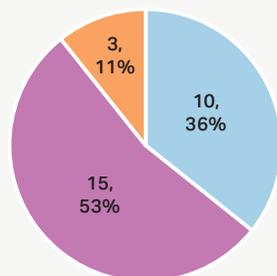


■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Unsure

Using a 5 point scale, participants were asked if they felt that attending the QSO concert improved their spiritual health and wellbeing (Strongly agree – Strongly disagree).

- **82% of survey participants reported that the concert improved their spiritual health and wellbeing.**

### Did this QSO concert affect your sense of hopefulness about future?



■ The concert made me feel a lot more hopeful  
 ■ The concert made me feel more hopeful  
 ■ The concert did not affect my sense of hopefulness

Using a 5-point scale, participants were asked if attending the QSO concert affected their sense of hopefulness (A lot – not at all).

- **89% of survey participants reported that the concert made them feel more hopeful.**

Participants were asked to describe their experience of the QSO Healthy Aging Concert in one word.



Word	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
enjoyable	6	9.09%	enjoyable
happiness	6	9.09%	happiness, happy
uplifting	5	7.58%	uplifted, uplifting
relaxed	4	6.06%	relaxed, relaxing
good	3	4.55%	good
joyful	3	4.55%	joy, joyful
wonderful	3	4.55%	wonderful
alive	2	3.03%	alive
fantastic	2	3.03%	fantastic
fulfilling	2	3.03%	fulfilling
love	2	3.03%	love, lovely
magical	2	3.03%	magical
warm	2	3.03%	warm, warming
acceleration	1	1.52%	acceleration
beautiful	1	1.52%	beautiful
brilliant	1	1.52%	brilliant
calm	1	1.52%	calm
cheerful	1	1.52%	cheerful
clarity	1	1.52%	clarity

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
delighted	1	1.52%	delighted
elated	1	1.52%	elated
excellent	1	1.52%	excellent
exhilarating	1	1.52%	exhilarating
floating	1	1.52%	floating
fun	1	1.52%	fun
goosebumps	1	1.52%	goosebumps
great	1	1.52%	great
interesting	1	1.52%	interesting
invigorating	1	1.52%	invigorating
okay	1	1.52%	okay
peaceful	1	1.52%	peaceful
pleasant	1	1.52%	pleasant
pleasure	1	1.52%	pleasure
positive	1	1.52%	positive
skills	1	1.52%	skills
special	1	1.52%	special
unforgettable	1	1.52%	unforgettable

# Qualitative insights related to happiness, health and hope

## Happiness

Participants described happiness as experiencing "joy", "relaxation" and "wellbeing". They used words representing presence of mind such as "peacefulness", "inner calm" and "contentment". When asked what happiness meant to them, other participants described things they enjoyed such as "love, flowers, music". For participants, the QSO concert supported their sense of happiness through joy, being in the moment and appreciation of the music.

Experiencing joy was an important part of how participants described the concert as supporting their sense of happiness. For carers, being able to accept the music as a way to relax was significant.

*It was happy and worthwhile. Sometimes you feel pretty down don't you? So, it was good (2024 audience response)*

*Doing something different, where I am the recipient, the receiver. (2025 audience response)*

Many participants highlighted how the music encouraged them to be present in the moment, which was particularly important for the happiness of carers and people experiencing mental and physical health concerns.

*You've got a few hours in your life where you're in something else but the horrors of dementia, or the horrors of other things (2024 audience response).*

Finally, almost all of the participants described appreciating the repertoire and musical skill of a full orchestra and how this brought them a sense of happiness in the moment.

*I think the repertoire was wonderful. And it was joyous. And it really, really connected people into a number of different genres of orchestral music (2024 audience response).*

*It was a beautiful finish, and there was so many different sections that were marvelous. I just enjoyed the whole lot. Oh, wonderful, yeah. (2025 audience response).*

These findings suggest the concert supported happiness for participants aligned with how they understand the concept.

Some participants described how they saw concepts of health and happiness as intertwined and discussed how the concert supported their sense of both happiness and health together.

*Health and happiness go hand in hand. Happiness relieves some health issues. Having happiness in your life is a distraction from health issues. (2025 audience survey response)*

## Health

Participants' understanding of health appeared to align with the WHO definition. When asked what 'health' meant to them, participants described physical and mental wellbeing, including "not just the absence of illness" and "sound mind, body and spirit". Similar to descriptions of happiness, participants described health in terms of "calmness" and "feeling nourished". For some being with others was important for health. The QSO concert experience contributed to participants' perceptions of their health through positive memories, moments to relax and opportunities to connect.

When asked how the QSO concert supported their health or not, participants described how the concert brought back positive memories and helped them relax. Some described how the concert supported social connection with close friends and family, and was also an opportunity for meeting new people.

For participants, the QSO concerts' effect on memory was a key part of how the experience was important for their health. For many, the concert brought back positive memories.

*Yeah. In terms of orchestral music. So I was an old trumpeter, so I remember back in the day and then school bands. It was nice (2024 audience response).*

*I was able to see how it transcends these songs to the very place. Instantly knew the sounds, knew the music, knew the piece. (2025 audience response).*

A moment to relax and feel calm was significant for many participants, including carers and those experiencing stress.

*Calming and relaxing effect of the music (2024 audience response).*

*I've always loved music. I've loved music. And I had a very bad night, and I was [coming here], and I said, 'I've just got to go'. And I feel much better now. (2025 audience response).*

For others, their sense of health was supported through the opportunities the concert created for being with others, loved ones and meeting new people.

*So for me it's just always nice to spend time with mum (2024 audience response).*

*Sharing an experience with others who appreciate and value the same things, in a comfortable and beautiful setting (2024 audience response).*

*The music. Interaction with others and certainly sharing the experience with my husband. (2025 audience response).*

Participants understood health as more than a lack of illness and for them, the concert appeared to support health in this broad sense, as an opportunity to strengthen mental and social wellbeing.

## Hope

For participants, hope was a diverse and complex concept, with descriptions including words such as “assured”, “enlightened”, “endurance” and “fulfillment”. Overall, responses pointed to an understanding of hope as about a positive expectation for the future. For participants, the concert was uplifting, a new or rare experience and a way to reconnect with their creative passion – all playing a role in supporting positive expectations for the future.

The lifting of spirits was a common sentiment from audience members across the concerts. This was connected to feeling more positive about the day and the future after the experience.

*I felt my spirits lift (2024 audience response).*

*Uplifting. I'm very positive about everything. Lovely atmosphere, just very positive. I did say uplifted in there. (2025 audience response).*

For many participants, their life stages and situations meant that attending music and cultural events had come rare. The QSO concert made this accessible and this was meaningful in the context of participants lives.

*So things like this matter a lot because it, you know, when you go home, you think, it's nice to have been out something out, you've done something that you know (2024 audience response).*

*The fact that I'm here. It's a rare experience for me (2024 audience response).*

Participants described how the QSO concert was an opportunity to reconnect with their creativity and engage with a passion which was often unexpressed in their current lives.

*Well it's something we haven't done for a long time. We used to go to the concerts quite regularly, yes, so we don't anymore. And so it was good to come along and hear and see the orchestra people play as well (2024 audience response).*

*It's always nice to for our seniors, especially, to come to things like this. Because, you know, I used to go to concerts when I was young, and I acted in most of them, but now it's someone else's turn to entertain me. (2025 audience response).*

Hope appeared to be an important aspect of the QSO experience for many participants. Comments related to the 'lifting of spirits' aligned with participants' understanding of hope. Discussions about the opportunity do to something rare or new and to reconnect with and express creativity may also point to key aspects of hope supported through the concerts. For one participant, the concerts represented something even bigger, a strengthening of positive expectations for a well and just society.

*Music has an extraordinary power to invoke joy, hopefulness and to stimulate. To invite members of the older population to experience QSO up-close made me hopeful that there can be more kindness and generosity in the world. (2025 audience response).*



# Summary of findings

Overall, the evaluation indicates that the Healthy Ageing Concert Series is delivering strong, consistent perceived benefits across QSO's three pillars, with survey data showing universal gains in happiness and mental wellbeing (both 100%), substantial gains in emotional wellbeing (96%), and broad perceived benefits in physical (79%), cultural (82%), spiritual (82%) wellbeing, alongside increased hopefulness (89%).

Qualitative findings add detail about how these shifts occur: audiences described happiness as joy, relaxation, inner calm, and contentment, often linked to being "in the moment" and appreciating the repertoire and musicianship. Health was understood holistically (mind–body–spirit) and was supported through positive memories, stress relief/relaxation, and strengthened social connection with loved ones and other attendees—reinforcing that participants experienced the concerts as a form of multi-dimensional wellbeing support, not simply entertainment. Hope, meanwhile, was commonly tied to uplifted spirits, the significance of a rare or newly accessible cultural experience, and reconnecting with creative identity and long-held passions, in some cases extending to wider optimism about kindness and social generosity. Taken together, the findings suggest the program is not only achieving its intended outcomes for older audiences, but also contributing to an emerging evidence base about the role of orchestral performance (and accessible, intimate program design) in supporting healthy ageing.

## Commendations & recommendations

- Continue to run at QSO studio: The venue felt special and participants felt it enhanced their experience. Participants noted the accessibility and convenience of the venue, including being close to public transport.
- Keep it intimate: Participants appreciated the opportunity to be close to the instruments and to engage with the musicians.
- Stick with timing: Participants noted the length of the concerts as well as the morning time was appropriate and made attending easy and enjoyable.
- Consider ways to incorporate participation and education where possible: A number of participants noted they would have liked some information about the instruments, the pieces being played, and the orchestra set up. The focus group highlighted how many people were (or would like to be actively) engaged in playing music together.
- Consider ways to support social connection: Participants indicated that social connection was an important part of their experience and having opportunities to connect with others before and after the performance including over refreshments was valued.
- Conduct evaluations immediately after and potentially in the same place: Participants found it difficult to recall their experiences during focus group held 6 weeks post.

# Appendix 1. Post survey questionnaire

1. In just a few words, what did you enjoy most about your experience at [insert name] *(open text box response)*
2. Happiness is about sensations of joy, peace and wellbeing. Did your sense of happiness change during this [insert name]?  
*Please select one option below.*
  - The concert made me feel a lot more happy
  - The concert made me feel more happy
  - The concert did not affect my happiness
  - The concert made me feel less happy
  - The concert made me feel a lot less happy
3. What was it about this experience that affected your happiness (e.g. the music, being with others, going to a new place, having a shared experience)? *(open text box response)*
4. Health is not just about not being sick or in pain. Health relates to physical, mental, social, spiritual and cultural well-being. Do you think [insert name] improved your health and wellbeing? *Please circle whether you agree or disagree with these statements.*
  - a. This concert improved my mental health and wellbeing  
Strongly Agree   Agree   Unsure   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
  - b. This concert improved my physical health and wellbeing  
Strongly Agree   Agree   Unsure   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
  - c. This concert improved my emotional health and wellbeing  
Strongly Agree   Agree   Unsure   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
  - d. This concert improved my cultural health and wellbeing  
Strongly Agree   Agree   Unsure   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
  - e. This concert improved my spiritual health and wellbeing  
Strongly Agree   Agree   Unsure   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
5. What was it about this experience that affected your health and wellbeing (e.g. calming nature of the music, opportunity to get out of the house and be physical, socially connecting with others, an opportunity to connect or reconnect to part of your culture)? *(open text box response)*
6. Hope is about a positive future outlook. Do you feel a stronger sense of hope after [insert program] Did [insert name] affect your sense of hopefulness about your future? *Please select one option below.*
  - The concert made me feel a lot more hopeful
  - The concert made me feel more hopeful
  - The concert did not affect my sense of hopefulness
  - The concert made me feel less hopeful
  - The concert made me feel a lot less hopeful
7. What was it about this experience that affected your sense of hopefulness (e.g. having a joyful musical experience leading to a sense of optimism, feeling a moment of satisfaction in life, feeling more positive about friendships and/or potential for new social connections in the future)? *(open text box response)*
8. Please provide one suggestion for how your access to the performing arts/live music could be improved, or provide any other comments about your concert experience. *(open text box response)*

## Appendix 2. Post vox-pop questions

1. What was the most enjoyable thing about this concert for you?
2. Do you think this experience was good for you? Why?
3. What's ONE word that best describes how the concert made you feel?

## Appendix 3. Focus group

1. We are interested in understanding everyone's experiences attending the QSO's concert today. What really sticks with you about the show?

*Prompts: Was it your first time going to an event like that? Do you remember the music and how it made you feel?*

2. Why did you want to attend?
3. QSO is keen to understand if these concerts affect people's sense of **happiness**.
  - a. First, what comes to mind for you when you think of the word happiness?
  - b. Do you think the concert affected your happiness? If so, how?

*Prompts: The music, being with others, going to a new place, having a shared experience.*

4. We are keen to learn more about how the concert contributes to people's **health and wellbeing**.
  - a. What does being healthy and being well mean to you?
  - b. Do you think the concert affected your health and wellbeing? If so, how?

*Prompts: The calming nature of the music, opportunity to get out of the house and be physical, socially connecting with others, an opportunity to connect or reconnect to part of your culture.*

5. One of QSO's goals for these concerts is to offer audience members a sense of **hope**.
  - a. How would you define hopefulness?
  - b. Do you think the concert shifted your own sense of hopefulness? If so, how?

*Prompts: having a joyful musical experience leading to a sense of optimism, feeling a moment of satisfaction in life, feeling more positive about friendships and/or potential for new social connections in the future.*

6. Finally, we wanted to talk a little bit about how this concert might build social connections.
  - a. Do you think the concert was helpful for building social connections? If so, how?

*Prompts: Did you attend with friends or family? Did you meet anyone new? Did you connect with anyone after the concert?*

7. We'd love to hear what you think the best thing about the concert was.
  - a. Are there things that would have improved the experience for you?

*Prompts: Travel, timing, accessibility at the venue, sound.*

8. Before we go, is there anything else anyone would like to share?

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