



Scottish **Arts** Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION

It should be noted the views expressed in this evaluation are intended to represent, as far as possible, an objective aesthetic judgement. Specialist advisors and officers should avoid making judgements based on their own personal tastes and preferences.

Artist/Company:	Mull Theatre
Venue:	Tron
Title of Event:	Swindle and Death
Type of Event:	performance
Date of Visit:	12/06/2008

Overall Rating: **Good** This was a highly entertaining production that was at times quite hilarious. Although there were some references to more serious issues about the freedom to create art and the relationship between reality and fantasy, this was essentially a light-hearted piece, that poked fun at the arts establishment and contemporary notions of political correctness. It would have benefited from some further dramaturgical work as the second half dragged a little at the start.

Name: Jaine Lumsden Date: 29/08/2008

Scottish Arts Council Officer

This report has been commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council to evaluate the artistic quality of the production named above. It has been prepared by either a specialist Advisor, or an officer of the Scottish Arts Council, as indicated at the end of the form. The report will be circulated to the organisation which produced the work and to the management of the venue, if the venue is core funded by the Scottish Arts Council.

The report will form evidence for the Artistic Leadership and Public Engagement sections of the Quality Framework and be taken into account in assessing the work of the producing company in relation to applications for funding to the Scottish Arts Council. It may also be used by the Joint Board to report on the overall performance of its funded organisations.

Evaluators should enter their rating under each section, explaining briefly their reason for the rating with reference to their comments under each section. Ratings should be given in accordance with the following:

- 1 - Very Poor** – standard falls well below what is acceptable.
- 2 - Poor** – not attaining acceptable standards of conception or presentation.
- 3 - Competent** – routine rather than especially interesting.
- 4 - Good** – well conceived and executed
- 5 - Excellent** – conceived and executed to a high standard.

1. Artistic Assessment

Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event, with particular reference to the strengths and weaknesses of the following:

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	Vision and imagination of work - Quality of ideas, skills in execution; if you've seen the work of this artist(s)/ company before, please comment on the comparison.	Excellent	<p>This was a highly entertaining production that was at times quite hilarious. Deeper themes (the purpose of art and its control through funding structures, identity and personal ambition) were touched on, but this was essentially a light-hearted farce which at times bordered on the surreal.</p> <p>I have seen a lot of Mull Theatre productions. They produce a commendably wide range of styles of work which are always good or excellent.</p>
All (if relevant)	<p>Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.</p> <p>If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme.</p>	Good	Artist-led, script commissioned by company
All	<p>Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.</p> <p>Education events – see ¹below for guidance</p>	Excellent	<p>“In their sinister and stupid celebration of all things theatrical and Scottish, Messrs Swindle and Death can promise you an evening of unfettered weirdness, leaving no cliché unpunished and no sporran unturned.” (publicity material) “a cure for being so bloody serious and businesslike all the time” (playwright’s note, programme)</p> <p>This was successful in that it certainly had its own brand of weirdness and despite some more serious underlying subject matter was at heart a comedy.</p>
All	<p>Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.</p> <p>Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.</p>	Good	<p>Good ensemble playing, with all of the performers appearing comfortable onstage. Hamish Wilson in particular seemed to relish his part and gave a very engaging performance. Helen Macalpine grew more convincing as her true character became revealed. Sarah Haworth handled her character’s switches between apparent imbecility and comparative rationality very well.</p>

¹ Education is a bridge between artform excellence and increased access and participation, and it is people centred. Providing opportunities for learning and progressing in an artform or using an artform to address other, non-artistic, outcomes are equally valid; in either case a high quality strategic approach is required in order to benefit the participants and the organisation. Delivery can be through workshops, post/pre-show discussions, outreach work, etc aimed at any age group.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc		N/A
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Good	<p>By Peter Arnott. This had some exceptionally funny scenes, notably the politically correct version of Mary Queen of Scots' final speech before her beheading, and some great one-liners. Although there were some references to more serious issues about the freedom to create art and the relationship between reality and fantasy, this was essentially a light-hearted piece, that poked fun at the arts establishment and contemporary notions of political correctness.</p> <p>The second half meandered a little at the beginning and would have benefited from some cuts – specifically the scene around the ruby – (if the audience need to know the effects of drinking king's blood as part of the story there could be a quicker and neater way of conveying this). The final revelation about the company being un-dead came as no great surprise, but that didn't in any way impede enjoyment of the piece.</p> <p>The structure used plays within the play and switched between the two. This was skilfully handled and worked well. The confusion and gradual merging of the final scene was especially effective.</p>
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Good	<p>By Alasdair McCrone. There is an obvious directorial challenge in mounting a production about a truly terrible theatre company: There is a fine line to be drawn between portraying the hammy acting and allowing the whole production to slide into this mode. McCrone kept his cast just on the right side of this line, to great humorous effect.</p> <p>The piece bowled along at a fairly fast pace apart from the start of the second act, where it dipped. This may well be related to what appeared to be an over-long and over-complicated opening scene (see under script.)</p> <p>The set was appropriately tacky (see under design). However the cast had problems opening and closing the curtains and in masking the box at times. While this could have been entirely appropriate for the Swindle and Death theatre company, it was unclear if this was a deliberate directorial choice or if there were genuine problems with the set.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	Good	Pre-recorded sound Martin Low that worked well.
Dance, Theatre	Design – costume, set, lighting. Take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue and, where appropriate, the touring schedule.	Good	Set design by Robin Peoples. This was a suitably tacky and battered touring set. It was difficult to decide if functional problems were deliberate or accidental (see under direction.) Costume by Shirley Robinson was appropriately tawdry. Lighting design by Mick Andrews, which was fine for a touring show. However there were severe problems for the first few queues at the start of the show and I can only assume that this was operator error.
All	<p>Quality of Presentation/Engagement</p> <p>Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).</p> <p>Crafts/Visual Arts - Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang</p> <p>Education events - relevance/appropriateness of presentation and teaching methodology (one to one, group, child centred); details of participant group and activity, including genre.</p>	Poor	Professionally presented on the whole, but see above re. problems with lighting queues.
All	<p>Audience</p> <p>Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction</p> <p>Crafts/Visual Arts – time spent, interest, activity, and visitors' books comments, number of visitors/ participants at the time of visit</p> <p>Education/learning – pre-event involvement, participants/schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc</p>		Very good reaction at the end, laughter throughout.
All	Additional Interpretative activity – what activities were available to enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups? Please indicate age-groups targeted.		Not that I'm aware of.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	Outcomes of education activity – what learning/skills development took place? What did participants take away with them? Are education resources being provided for follow up work? Is it strategically linked to the curriculum (formal or informal)?		N/A

2. Management of Event

Please evaluate the way the event was presented/organised by the organisation and the venue, with reference to the checklist below, including additional comments/observations. Please try to view the venue and the services, and interpretative material as though you had never visited it before eg if you did not know the venue's location, how easy would it be to find your way there, and to find your way around once you had arrived?

Criteria	Comment
Suitability of the venue for the event	Fine
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Posters, programmes with a striking image. programmes had usual biogs and some entertaining notes from director and playwright.
Publicity/ pre-publicity – leaflets, posters, websites, etc. What is produced, is it easy to understand and where can you get the information? Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event and comment on the company/organisation's website.	Flyers, inclusion in venues' brochures and websites, Mull Theatre website and listings.
Ease of booking and payment	By phone, no problems.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	.Fine
External signage and signposting	Fine
Internal directional signage	Fine
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Accessible
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	A little too long (see under script.)
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Friendly and efficient.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Acknowledged

² In press releases, at launches, on all published materials (including leaflets, brochures, programmes, posters, company's website, notices display, exhibition materials, websites and advertising, recordings, publications, video, broadcasts, computer programmes etc.) Where the event is publicised in the programme brochure of another organisation (eg venue, gallery, etc) then SAC acknowledgement should appear against the particular programme entry for this event.

3. Organisation's Comments (optional)

This is the organisation's opportunity to respond to points raised within this assessment. Please do not feel obliged to fill this section in. In the spirit of the Quality Framework, we would ask that any comments are self-evaluating, providing an insight as to why, if there is, a major disagreement of response between the organisation and the evaluation, in a constructive way.

This will not alter the rating given by the assessment, but will allow the organisation the opportunity to give their opinion/feedback. The Scottish Arts Council reserves the right to edit comments if they are deemed to be libellous or defamatory.

As the Scottish Arts Council implements the Quality Framework internally, we intend to publish artistic evaluations on organisations that we support regularly on our website. The final artistic evaluation, including the organisation's response will be published on a quarterly basis on our website.

Please keep your response to max 500 words. If we do not hear from you in 15 days, we will assume that you do not want to respond.