



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: Auchtermuchty Village Hall

Title of Event: Swindle and Death

Type of Event: (e.g. performance, exhibition, informal showing, work-in-progress, workshop, screening, lecture etc)

Performance

Date of Visit: 16th June 2008

Overall Rating: Good

(Please rate the event overall, taking into account your ratings for each section. Please state the key reasons for your overall ratings – i.e. the particular strengths and weaknesses. If the management of the event affects the overall enjoyment of the event, please comment, but the overall rating should be based on the artistic merit of the event.)

Strengths: Swindle and Death was an eccentric farce that lightly touched on a variety of complex themes and ideas. The narrative was enacted through the medium of an 'un-dead' touring theatre company which allowed for some entertaining moments of heightened theatricality and melodrama.

Weaknesses: Though I found the production engaging, it was also, at times, rambling and lacking in clarity and the script also suffered from some dubious politics.

Name: Rebecca Robinson Date: 16 / 6 / 08

Specialist Advisor x Scottish Arts Council Officer *Please circle the relevant title*

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	<p>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.</p>	Good	<p><i>Swindle and Death</i> was an eccentric farce that lightly touched on a variety of complex themes and ideas – for e.g. the rational vs. the irrational, the nature of performance and the construction of ideology. The bizarre, and sometimes unfocused, narrative was enacted through the medium of an ‘un-dead’ touring theatre company which allowed for some entertaining moments of heightened theatricality and melodrama. Though I found the production engaging, it was also, at times, rambling and lacking in clarity and the script also suffered from some dubious politics (see below). While the production generally received poor reviews in the press, nevertheless, the performance that I saw appeared to be appreciated by the audience. Like other recent Mull Theatre productions that I have seen (i.e. <i>Macbeth</i>, <i>Cyprus</i> and <i>Brightwater</i>), <i>Swindle and Death</i> was an intimate, engaging and professional piece of theatre that befitted the production’s wide touring schedule.</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	<p><i>Swindle and Death</i> was a commissioned play written by Peter Arnott for Mull Theatre. The production toured throughout Scotland to, mainly, small-scale venues (e.g. village halls) as well as the Byre and Tron theatres. <i>Swindle and Death</i> are part of Mull’s excellent season of touring productions (alongside <i>Macbeth</i>, <i>Accidental Death of an Accordionist</i> and <i>Katie Morag</i>)</p>
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>	Competent	<p><i>Swindle and Death</i> was advertised as a comedy and “a cure for being so bloody serious and businesslike all the time” (Peter Arnott, programme note). The production sometimes succeeded in its comic intentions, although, as discussed above, its political message seemed more questionable.</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>The well-cast cast of five captured and sustained the audience’s attention throughout and never allowed the production’s pace to drop. However, perhaps in response to the plays generally negative reception in the press, I sometimes felt that the actors were not all completely at ease. Nevertheless, Sarah Haworth stood out for her committed and focused performance as Angela and Helen McAlpine brought conviction and charm to the challenging</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
			role of Marjorie.
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	Peter Arnott – script. As mentioned above, <i>Swindle and Death</i> touched on a variety of complex themes and ideas including an attack on bureaucratic thinking and processes and its potential influence on the making of art. However, this attack was weakened by its focus on, arguably constructive, inclusive policies. The specificity of this critique seemed to imply, even if inadvertently, a desire for a return to patriarchal power structures. As such, the production was, I would argue correctly, criticised for its worryingly misogynistic portrayal of women – for e.g. both the female characters were portrayed as willing pawns to male fantasies of control (although, ironically, the play did provide a welcome opportunity for two central female roles). Its narrow focus and specificity, as well as inaccuracies, on the role of the SAC obscured, I felt, potentially broader meanings. Nevertheless, the script did have a strong and engaging underlying narrative drive that helped to create an entertaining, surreal and farcical production.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Good	As mentioned above, the production was well cast by Alasdair McCrone (director) and the actors generally had a good rapport between each other and the audience. Even while the script was not always clear, the production was directed with confidence and clarity. Aesthetically, the production was unified and self-contained to suit its touring schedule.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	Good	The sound design, by Martin Low, complemented the production by creating unobtrusive music and sound effects that appropriately supported the staging.
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	The set – designed by Robin Peoples – comprised a raised stage, framed by colourful curtains that created the effect of a slightly eccentric and dilapidated proscenium arch theatre. This impression - of faded theatrical grandeur – was complemented by the mishmash of ‘timeless’ period costumes - by Shirley Robinson. The lighting – by Mick Andrew – was unobtrusive but helped to create a warm and intimate atmosphere. The overall design worked very well in the village hall and

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			created a sense of immediacy and intimacy with the audience; however, the set may have been swamped in the larger venues (e.g. the Byre and the Tron).
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>	Good	The production was presented professionally from a technical point of view.
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>		The venue was about 2/3rds full with approximately 45 audience members the majority of whom appeared to be in the over forty age-range. The audience were very attentive throughout; there was appreciative laughter during the performance and warm applause and some cheering at the end. I overheard several audience members commenting on the strangeness of the production but also saying that they had enjoyed it.
All	<p>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.</p>	N/a	
All	<p>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)?</p>	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	Auchtermuchty Village Hall seemed a highly appropriate venue – both technically and artistically - for the event.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	There were flyers on display and programmes on sale in the reception area. The glossy colour programme contained company member biographies, comments from the director and writer and information about Mull Theatre. The publicity image was relatively eye-catching though perhaps didn't quite convey the comic and contemporary elements in the production.
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.	The production was widely advertised and reviewed in the national press. The Mull Theatre website provided clear information about the production and its tour.
Ease of booking and payment	The Byre Theatre's computer was down when I phoned to book but I had no problem buying tickets at the door.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	The venue was located in the centre of Auchtermuchty village and was very easy to find.
External signage and signposting	No problem.
Internal directional signage	No problem.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Seemed to be ok.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The performance began at 7.30 pm and finished at approximately 10 pm – this included an interval. This seemed appropriate timing for the production.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Box office and front of house staff were all friendly and efficient.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	The SAC was acknowledged on all publicity material that I was aware of.

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

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.