



## 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.

<b>Artist/Company:</b>	<b>MULL Theatre</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>TRON Theatre</b>
<b>Title of Event:</b>	<b>SWINDLE &amp; DEATH</b>
<b>Type of Event:</b>	<b>Theatre Performance</b>
<b>Date of Visit:</b>	<b>11<sup>th</sup> June 2008</b>
<b>Overall Rating:</b>	<b>GOOD</b>

**This was a broad humoured, often surreal, scattergun of a satire, though at times it appeared uncertain of its many targets.**

**Important questions of art (its function and its funding), notions and portrayals of national identity, and personal hopes & dreams, are all here, even if they sometimes slip out of view.**

**However its irreverence, style and élan, drawing from recognizable Scottish performing traditions of pantomime and variety, together with characters that were often disconcertingly familiar, resulted in a rollicking if over long farce.**

**(It would have been good and interesting to see this show playing in the kind of small village hall venue that *Swindle & Death* themselves purported to have played.)**

**Name: Stewart Ennis Date: 16<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

**Specialist Advisor**

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.	GOOD	The style of the piece was distinctive enough, with a nod to Scottish Panto as well as Roald Dahl's 'Tales of the Unexpected'. But, as a satire, at times the plays targets were hard to define. However, this satirical, farcical and surreal exploration into – among other things-art (its function and its funding), conflicting notions & portrayals of national identity as well as personal hopes & dreams, were generally thought provoking and very funny.
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.	EXCELLENT	Peter Arnott was commissioned by Mull Theatre to write this production, a fine example of Mull Theatre's genuine commitment to Scottish touring.
All	Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.  Education events – see <sup>1</sup> below for guidance	GOOD	At times its studied messiness seems indistinguishable from its occasional <i>real</i> messiness but it seems also, that in many ways this show really does achieve the writer's ambition of bringing to life "the dream of irresponsibility and decadence".
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.  Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	GOOD	The performers were generally excellent throughout, maintaining a continuity of playing style appropriate to this production; only rarely did there appear to be an uncertain grasp of text and an unsure vocal performance.
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	The excerpts from the self consciously awful plays within the play seemed to stretch the joke beyond its capabilities at times. Also, the scatter gun approach to the satire meant that at times it seemed uncertain of its targets. Certainly, as is always the case with Peter Arnott's work, important questions are always being asked; in this case, questions of art (its function and its funding), notions and portrayals of national identity and personal hopes & dreams; they are all here, but

<sup>1</sup> 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
			occasionally seemed to slip out of view.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	GOOD	The presentation of a timelessly tawdry, touring theatre company was suitably and recognizably tacky. There was an appropriate continuity of heightened playing style; a combination of surrealism, ham and cynicism, which seemed quite apt.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	GOOD	Sound Design is credited to Martin Low and was nicely anachronistic and added much to the atmosphere of the piece.
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 evoked well the slightly tawdry and timeless touring set associated with the theatre company of the plays title. Perhaps it could have looked even more grimy, a little more tattered and around the edges. The design worked well in the Tron though it would have perhaps worked even better in the kind of small village hall venue that <i>Swindle &amp; Death</i> themselves purported to have played and Mull Theatre does.
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement  Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).	GOOD	There were one or two sight line problems which allowed the audience, seated higher up, to see some side/off stage machinations...though this could have been a deliberate “ <i>Swindle &amp; Death</i> ” moment! Generally though, sound and lighting cues appeared smooth and unobtrusive throughout,
All	Audience  Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction		The Tron theatre was about 75% full and the audience appeared engaged throughout, responding well to the humour of the piece.
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.	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	The piece worked well enough though (as stated above) it seems that the piece is perhaps tailor made to the kind of village hall venues that Swindle & Death themselves purport to have played.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Good and appropriate.
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.	Tron and Mull web sites/ brochures informative and easy to negotiate.
Ease of booking and payment	No Problems.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	On main public transport routes.
External signage and signposting	No problems.
Internal directional signage	No problems.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Adequate.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Timing seemed quite appropriate to audience.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Good throughout.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>	SAC acknowledged where appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> 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.