



## ARTISTIC EVALUATION

This evaluation is intended to represent an objective aesthetic judgement. **Specialist advisors and officers should avoid making judgements based on their own personal tastes and preferences wherever possible.**

**Artist/Company:** Mull Theatre

**Venue:** Resolis Hall (Resolis Community Arts)

**Title of Event:** Laurel & Hardy

**Type of Event:** Performance

**Date of Visit:** 5<sup>th</sup> April 2010

**Overall Rating:** Excellent

*(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.)*

**A charming, funny, moving and poignant play that successfully tells the story of Laurel and Hardy's early lives, their coming together, their marriages and their movie career, whilst dipping in and out of some of their most famous comic routines from their best loved films.**

Name: Nick Fearne  
Specialist Advisor

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> April 2010

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 on 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 future 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:**

**Very poor**- standard falls well below what is acceptable.

**Poor** - not well conceived and executed

**Satisfactory**

**Good** - well conceived and executed

**Very Good** – well conceived and executed to a very good standard

**Excellent** – Inspiring and executed to an exceptionally 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</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality of ideas</li> <li>if you have seen other work of this artist(s)/ company before, please comment on any relevant comparisons</li> </ul>	Excellent	<p>This was the late Tom McGrath's first play (1976) and a year after his death it seems appropriate for Mull Theatre to be touring this comic, engaging and moving play again. I saw the 1992/3 Mull Little Theatre production with Alasdair McCrone playing Stan Laurel – this is now the 6<sup>th</sup> time he has played the part.</p>
All (if relevant)	<p>Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does it fit within the artistic vision of the organisation?</li> <li>If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme.</li> </ul>	Very Good	<p>The company website states <i>Mull Theatre provides an environment of creativity and exploration in the arts. It supports education and community theatre programmes, new writing initiatives, creative apprenticeships and a diverse range of opportunities for individuals and groups to release their creative potential. The company regularly commissions new work from some of Scotland's leading dramatists. It also runs a playwrights' workshop, a further-education drama course in association with Argyll College, and has a close involvement with schools and community groups.</i></p> <p>Although this is not a piece of new writing this production fits with the artistic vision of the company in that it is producing a high quality piece of theatre for a wide audience. Attached to this production are three student placements</p>
All	<p>Success of event against stated aims of project and/or performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does it relate to information contained in the programme, the website or other printed material?</li> <li>How well did it communicate the artistic themes?</li> <li>How did the event originate eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, from the artist or from commission?</li> </ul> <p>Education events – see <sup>1</sup>below for definition</p>	Very Good	<p>Again from the website <i>Mull Theatre is one of Scotland's foremost touring theatre companies. It makes a significant contribution to the cultural life of its own island community and throughout Argyll and Bute as well as to the overall provision of theatre activity within Scotland. With its new Production Centre, it aims to be a hub of creative opportunity where exciting new work is produced, great projects conceived, skills acquired and nurtured, creativity encouraged, ideas developed, collaborations fostered and careers launched.</i></p> <p>This production is touring extensively throughout Scotland – rural and main venues – and will form part of Mull's summer repertory season at it's Druimfin production centre on Mull</p>
All	<p>Performers/tutors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the expertise of the performers? Where performers are amateur, please reflect this in your comments.</li> <li>How successfully did the performer(s) communicate with and engage the audience?</li> <li>In your view, was an artist as a tutor key to the success of the workshop?</li> </ul>	Excellent	<p>Alasdair McCrone (who also directs) played Stan Laurel (his 6<sup>th</sup> time!) and Barrie Hunter (with padding) played Oliver Hardy. This is a demanding piece for two actors – they have to inhabit (rather than 'impersonate') the persona and mannerisms of the most famous double act of all time, they have to be able to clown, sing and dance (it's a very physical show) as Stan and Ollie one moment and in the next be having a serious discussion about their contracts, marriages, illness and getting old. Interestingly McCrone is now playing the part at an age that more closely mirrors Laurel's as he and Hardy look back over their lives, rather than playing up from the 28 McCrone was the first time he took</p>

<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
			<p>on the role – thus creating an empathy with the issues of the body getting older and breaking down. For his size Hardy was a very nimble, delicate man – both on his feet and in his mannerisms' (his hand movements particularly) and Hunter probably gets as close as one can to this facet of Hardy's character. Throughout both actors sing and dance well and their comic timing is spot on, although I think this element does lose something when seen off the screen. Both actors also play other parts including Hal Roach and various wives. Particularly funny was Hunter playing Hardy playing Stan's Australian wife (Mae Dahlberg?).</p>
Dance, Theatre	<p>Choreography/Use of choreography</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the work original?</li> <li>• How was the space used?</li> <li>• How many dancers were there and how were they used?</li> <li>• How long was the piece?</li> </ul>	Excellent	<p>Choreography – Andi Stevens. There are several moments when classic dance routines are recreated. These could so easily have been either too polished or too over the top however they successfully captured the essence of the bond that Laurel &amp; Hardy had, particularly the 'Commence the Dance' routine from <i>Way Out West</i> towards the end of the show</p>
Theatre	<p>Script</p> <p>Please comment on this for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new work</li> <li>• second productions</li> <li>• classics where the original has been substantially changed</li> </ul>	Excellent	<p>This was the late Tom McGrath's first play in 1976 and will have had countless productions. Director Alasdair McCrone has played Laurel in 6 including 1988 when McGrath was working on changes to the script prior to publication. Although the play is about two dead movie comics the themes (and to some extent the humour) are contemporary – the relationship between two people, their personal and professional lives, their insecurities, dependence on each other, getting ill and growing old.</p>
Theatre, Dance	<p>Direction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the work well interpreted?</li> <li>• Was it well cast?</li> <li>• Was it well presented?</li> </ul>	Excellent	<p>Alasdair McCrone directs as well as playing Laurel. In a two hander this might seem like a bad idea but having appeared in 6 productions he clearly has a love and understanding for the part and the play. The play is well paced particular when moving to/ from comic screen routines from/to 'historical narrative'. The (fairly tight) space was used well</p>
Dance, Theatre	<p>Use of music</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the music/ sound used enhance the production?</li> <li>• Is it live or recorded?</li> </ul>	Excellent	<p>This was all recorded and (according to the programme/booklet) sound designer Martin Low used original recordings but where this was not possible he found a band, The Beau Hunks, who had pieced together much of the original music. Obviously music was key to silent films and the early talkies and the Laurel &amp; Hardy theme is iconic. All the music was used well and not 'overdone' ie the L&amp;H theme was used sparingly rather than at every opportunity. A sound track was used for backing during the live songs. As important as the music were the sound effects – in particular Laurel shaving Hardy with a wood plane and 'twanging' the blade –the timing (throughout) was spot on. Any miss-timing would have stood out like a sore thumb. For me this element of the production stood out and credit should go to the technician for this.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
Dance, Theatre	<p>Design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How were the costumes, set and lighting?</li> <li>• How did it work in the venue?</li> <li>• Was it technically proficient? (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).</li> </ul>	Excellent	<p>Production Design Alicia Hendrick, Costume Shirley Robinson, Lighting George Tarbuck.</p> <p>As a touring show going into a variety of venues from rural village halls to large venues set design is always going to be a challenge. I understand that not all the set was used for this performance. The production was played on the floor with a raised area upstage that had at the centre a lift with sliding doors and moving arrow floor indicator – in fact Laurel appears stuck between two floors. At the end L&amp;H pass through the open lift doors into a brightly lit smoke filled eternity. There is a ramp stage left from the raised area which is called into play for the sequence from <i>The Music Box</i> when Stan and Ollie have to take a piano up several flights of stairs. Up stage right is a poster for <i>The Nightingale</i> surrounded by dressing room mirror lights. This poster folds down to create a bed. Stage left is a flat with a frosted window bearing the words Mickey Finn's Palace.</p> <p>Being of the black and white era the temptation might have been to have gone for a monochrome set but Hendrick has gone for light brown, almost sepia tones, thus evoking fond remembrance.</p> <p>Costume is as one would expect – bowler hats and braces. Black trousers and jacket for Ollie, tweed for Stan (reflecting his Scottish roots). On top of this they add various costumes for different characters and routines – ranging from a simple hat to full sailor costumes that are pulled off piece by piece. My only criticism would be that I thought McCrones wig was not quite right in terms of style and colouring.</p> <p>The production had many sound and lighting cues. Given this was a touring production in a non equipped venue the lighting design was good particularly the changes of state for L&amp;H's scary scene. As mentioned above the sound cues were spot on.</p>
All	<p>Quality of Public Engagement</p> <p>Performing Arts/Education -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the production/event targeted at a particular audience?</li> <li>• Was the production /event appropriate for the audience/participants?</li> <li>• Were you/ engaged/inspired?</li> <li>• Did the audience/ participants appear to be engaged/inspired?</li> <li>• What was their response?</li> <li>• Approximately how many people were there?</li> <li>• Did there appear to be a broad mix of people – age, cultural diversity or disabled?</li> <li>• Are BSL/captioned/audio described performances offered as part of the run/tour/? If so how many?</li> <li>• What activities or supporting materials were available to</li> </ul>	Excellent	<p>Although this was a mainly adult audience (of about 60 – on a bank holiday Monday) the production has a broad appeal. There were a few children in the audience and I wondered if (a) they had ever seen any of Laurel &amp; Hardy on film/TV and (b) if they hadn't would they get it. They did get it – mainly the physical slapstick stuff eliciting young laughter. All the adults would have seen Laurel &amp; Hardy's work and seemed totally engaged by the piece. Laurel &amp; Hardy, along with other similar stars, are not everybody's cup of tea but this production could not fail to charm.</p> <p>Although not part of this venue's activity (school holidays) a workshop and resource pack is available to schools as part of the tour.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	<p>enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups programmes, on line info?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were these targeted at specific age groups?</li> </ul> <p>Education/learning events: In addition, please provide comments on the following (if appropriate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How was it taught/led eg one to one, group, child centred?</li> <li>• What was the composition of the participant group – age range, gender mix?</li> <li>• Is it strategically linked to the curriculum or national policy areas e.g. Early Years, Community Learning &amp; Development</li> <li>• What learning/skills development took place?</li> <li>• What was the quality of the art produced by the participants?</li> <li>• Did the workshop tutor have a teaching plan for the session and/or project?</li> <li>• How were participants recruited?</li> <li>• Did participants' views and choices help inform the structure and content of the project?</li> </ul> <p>Crafts/Visual Arts Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang?</p>		

## 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
<p>Location and suitability of the venue for the event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it easy to find?</li> <li>Is it on a main transport route?</li> <li>Are the spaces clean?</li> <li>What were the sight lines like?</li> <li>How big was it?</li> </ul>	<p>Rural village hall on Black Isle. Signposted. Accessible by car – plenty of parking. Suitable venue for this production.</p> <p>Played on floor so sitting 4 or 5 rows back I missed the dance footwork</p>
<p>Information/ interpretive material at venue–</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there programmes, posters and displays about the event?</li> <li>Is there information on the venue's website?</li> </ul>	<p>Information on venue website</p> <p>Free single sheet cast list available and 16 page programme/'book of the play'. This was £3.50 and the price probably put many off buying it but it is actually a very good, informative booklet</p>
<p>Publicity/ pre-publicity –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What leaflets, posters, websites, did you see the event listed in?</li> <li>What publicity materials are produced?</li> <li>Is it easy to understand?</li> <li>Where can you get the information?</li> <li>Is there Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>?</li> </ul> <p>Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event and comment on the company/organisation's website.</p>	<p>Event listed on Mull Theatre and Resolis Community Arts websites</p> <p>Publicity flyers seen prior to show in various places in the region. Listed on HI-Arts What's On, ICA (Inverness) listings magazine</p> <p>Mull Theatre acknowledges SAC support</p>
<p>Ease of booking and payment</p>	<p>Reserved by email with Resolis Community Arts. Paid on arrival</p>
<p>Timing of the event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?</li> <li>Was the length appropriate?</li> </ul>	<p>7.30pm. 20 minute interval. Slightly late going up. Finished 9.45pm. good length for the piece</p>
<p>Signage and signposting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the entrance clearly marked?</li> <li>Is there clear internal directional signage?</li> <li>Is there Braille signage or signage for audio loops?</li> </ul>	<p>N/a</p>
<p>Access and provision for disabled people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please insert yes/no in the boxes to reflect what you notice about the venue/event</li> </ul>	<p><b>Yes/No</b></p> <p><b>Yes/No</b></p>

<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.

Criteria	Comment
<p>Please add in any additional comments below the table</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many BSL/captioned/audio described performances are there at the venue?</li> </ul>	<p>BSL interpretation - No</p> <p>Audio description of performances - No</p> <p>Captioning - No</p> <p>Lift/ramp – ramped entrance</p> <p>Accessible toilets - yes</p> <p>Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English</p>
<p><b>Customer service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How was the quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)</li> <li>• If possible, comment on how responsive they were to the needs of disabled customers?</li> </ul>	<p>Good, friendly</p>

**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.