



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: National Youth Choir of Scotland Training Choir
National Youth Choir of Scotland Boys Choir-Changed Voices**

Venue: RSAMD Glasgow

Title of Event:

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

Performance under the auspices of the 20th Festival of British Youth Orchestras

Date of Visit: 17/08/07

Overall Rating: 3

The presentation of this event detracted a fair amount from my enjoyment. While the singing was of a high quality, the staging, presentation and serious expressions let down the whole experience. I struggled to see any choir member smile, even between songs. Artistically, the highlight was a piece not on the programme which involved placing members of the choir around the audience seating area. I found the introduction to this from the stage rather confusing and, as a result, I am unaware of the title or composer. I think that if ALL of the NYCoS choir conductors do not meet the standard of audience communication set by Christopher Bell, then a separate competent presenter ought to be available.

Name: Tommy Fowler Date: 14/09/07

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. | 3 | There was little vision and imagination here. The choirs came on, sang, and went off again. |
| All (if relevant) | Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned. If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme. | 2 | I found it rather strange that the Festival of British Youth Orchestras would programme choirs into their schedule. Perhaps with orchestral accompaniment but in isolation at this festival it just feels wrong. |
| 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 ¹ below for guidance | N/A | There were no stated aims |
| All | Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments. | 4 | Here, both of these choirs sang to a high standard within their specific limitations. However, neither choir gave what could be termed a performance. It was visually disappointing and the choir members never really looked at ease and enjoying themselves. |
| Dance, Theatre | Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc | | |
| Theatre | Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed. | | |
| Theatre, Dance | Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation. | | |

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 | Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production. | | |
| 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. | | |
| 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> | 2 | Further to what I've said earlier in terms of presentation and audience communication, the two conductors were like chalk and cheese. Gordon Jack (Changed Voices) looked awkward and nervous (dropped his memory aids more than once). Perhaps a separate presenter would have made a difference. Dominic Peckham, on the other hand, was just what the NYCoS audience has become used to as his style of conducting and communicating is very much like the choir's artistic director Christopher Bell. I'm not sure why there was a long hiatus between house lights and 2 nd half start but that did not help the atmosphere which lacked life and sparkle. |
| 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> | | All that being said, the audience appeared happy with the concert and I heard many compliments on the way out. There is no doubt that, in musical terms, the concert was well thought out but the presentation needed some vitality. |
| 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. | | |
| 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)? | | |

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 | This venue is well used to these types of events. |
| Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc. | The programme was a double-sided A4 sheet with no information on the music (this was delivered orally) and brief biographical notes on each choir. |
| 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. | I was aware of one A5 flyer and some wall posters for the entire festival but did not see anything about this specific concert. It did not feature on the RSAMD web site box office and tickets could not be bought on line. |
| Ease of booking and payment | Booking and paying for tickets by phone was easy. |
| Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route? | The venue is well located for parking and public transport. |
| External signage and signposting | adequate |
| Internal directional signage | adequate |
| 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? | The length of the concert was just right. |
| Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering) | This venue has always had pleasant and efficient customer care staff and the NYCoS chairman was on hand in the foyer greeting the audience. |
| Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ² | None |

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.

We have a problem with this evaluation as the overall rating seems to have been influenced by factors either outwith NYCoS control and a possible lack of understanding of the nature of the performers and the context in which they operate.

The negative comments against the Federation of British Youth Orchestras (FBYO) are irrelevant re an evaluation of the performers. The fact is that NYCoS has been invited to provide an input to the Festival over a number of years as these concerts are amongst the best supported of the Festival. The FBYO is responsible for the presentation of the event (see ref to delay in start of second half) and state requirements for programme content etc

The negative comments re 'vision and imagination' have to be viewed in the context of the level of vocal development these choirs are at and the importance of choosing suitable repertoire for their voices. The positive aspects of having a NYCoS Training Choir in the first place and of 60 teenage boys from across Scotland singing together (smiling or otherwise) seems to have been overlooked – although it is noted that 'both choirs sang to a high standard'. Whilst the Specialist Advisor may not have been 'entertained' it was obvious from the reaction of the audience that they certainly were (a point which is acknowledged in 'Audience' section).

The concert was designed on the simple format of a choral presentation and was never intended to include dance/movement etc.

There seems to be conflicting comments on the quality of the presenters/conductors. At one point the impression is given that the whole event was poorly presented but elsewhere there is praise for the style of one of the conductors and in the closing comments it is stated that 'the concert was well thought out'.

We welcome constructive criticism on any NYCoS event and note the content of this evaluation. However the overall rating seems to have been influenced by factors outwith NYCoS control and/or on a rather harsh assessment of this group of young singers.

Finally – a minor factual point – the reference to 'NYCoS Chairman' (under customer service section) should be NYCoS General Manager.