



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 Orchestras of Scotland (NYOS)
Venue:	Perth Theatre (Studio)
Title of Event:	NYOS Futures (Harrison Birtwistle, <i>Secret Theatre</i>)
Type of Event: (e.g. performance, exhibition, informal showing, work-in-progress, workshop, screening, lecture etc)	Concert with illustrated introduction (conductor and presenter William Conway)
Date of Visit:	16 February 2008
Overall Rating:	2/3
<i>(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.)</i>	
NYOS is to be commended for programming a major piece by this important composer. William Conway and the players are also to be congratulated for performing it capably. However, such a long and demanding piece needs plenty of rehearsal time for the performance to be really convincing, and its presentation needs very careful thought. More rehearsal time and greater resources (for example, a separate presenter and some visual enhancement, if only lighting) would have been needed to really bring this off. It's also good that NYOS decided to take this event to Perth, but unfortunate that the venue was so unsuitable. On the face of it, a small studio theatre might seem right for a contemporary music event - but a claustrophobic black box with too little space and a dry-as-dust acoustic did nothing to enhance the experience for either the performers or the audience.	
Name: Hugh Macdonald	Date: 11/03/08
<u>Specialist Advisor</u>	Scottish Arts Council Officer <i>Please circle the relevant title</i>

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	NYOS Futures is an ambitious idea which is definitely to be encouraged. The choice of Birtwistle's 'Secret Theatre' is also admirable, because it's a very challenging work that stretched these young players to the limit. However, it's long at 30 minutes, and needs enough rehearsal time for the musicians to really get inside it. This is especially true of inexperienced young players, and on this occasion one felt they needed more time. In the circumstances William Conway did a good job as conductor, but he had enough to concentrate on without having to turn round and talk to the audience as well.
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	If NYOS is going to foster an appreciation of modern music amongst its young players and classical music listeners, it should include the most difficult recent music in the NYOS Futures repertoire. However, more thought needs to be given to how such pieces should be presented. Even careful use of lighting could help to create an atmosphere appropriate to the music, though in this venue that may have been difficult.
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	2	It's not quite clear what the aims of this event were, other than to present new music as part of the NYOS repertoire. It was successful in the sense that the players gave a competent performance of a very difficult piece, but as an introduction to the musical world of Birtwistle it was less effective.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	3	These are talented young players, reaching a level that is in some aspects close to professional. However, the work they were playing is extremely demanding and long, and there was a sense that they were some way from being 'inside' the music, and at times hanging on by their fingernails. In terms of the relatively short rehearsal time available, this piece may have been a bridge too far.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc		

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
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.		
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	The NYOS Futures concept is a good one: a performance of a contemporary work with a workshop element, including an illustrated ‘deconstruction’ of the piece being played. It didn’t quite come off this time. Conducting such a difficult piece needs maximum concentration and requiring the conductor to ‘present’ it as well as asking too much. Using a separate presenter allows for more flexibility in the style of presentation and for the conductor to relax and get on with the (already difficult!) job in hand. The claustrophobic feel of the Perth Studio, with its very dry acoustic and the audience squashed up against the performers, was not particularly conducive to a more relaxed atmosphere.
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 theatre could only accommodate a smallish audience once the ensemble, seated on the floor, were in, but it was almost full and the audience was enthusiastic in their appreciation of the players’ efforts.
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.	3	It seemed to be targeted at a general audience interested in (or at least not indifferent to) contemporary classical music. However, the venue would have made any visual presentation aids difficult logistically, though they might have enhanced the event. There was unfortunately no opportunity for audience discussion, but this may have been due to the length of the piece.

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)?		

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 venue was too small and acoustically dry. What it gained in intimacy it lost in atmosphere and the players were not helped by the acoustic. It really isn't suitable for this type of music.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Minimal programme information, because the performance was being presented by the conductor.
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.	Pre-publicity was adequate, though perhaps more could have been done to make the event seem enticing!
Ease of booking and payment	I booked with Perth Theatre by phone and there was no problem.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Reasonably easy to find.
External signage and signposting	Once you realise the studio is behind the main theatre there's no problem.
Internal directional signage	Adequate.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Seems adequate. The entrance is at street level.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	OK.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Service OK. There is no catering in the Studio. One would have to go to the main theatre, which is a separate building not directly connected.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Yes.

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.