



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 Orchestra for Scotland

Venue: The Macphail Centre (in Ullapool High School) & the Ceilidh Place, Ullapool

Title of Event: 'Variations'

Type of Event: Residential tuition project for classical players, led by members of the Edinburgh Quartet

Date of Visit: 9 August 2007

Overall Rating: 4/5

The annual 'Variations' event achieves very high standards in terms of artistic quality, teaching standards, educational outcomes, organisational efficiency, and social benefits. The only perceived weakness is related to the rather low numbers of participants the event is able to attract. This is possibly to do with the relatively high costs of attending the event, which in turn raises a question of accessibility. The organisers are aware of this issue and feel frustrated in the knowledge that there is capacity within the current staffing levels to accommodate more participants. However, through marketing and publicity efforts, and through the event's growing reputation, there is evidence of a rising trend of numbers attending (year 1 - 8 participants; year 2 – 19 participants; and year 3 (current) – 25 participants). There are also plans to extend the scope of the event through introducing wind players next year. Another possible solution could be to secure additional funding in order to subsidise the participants' costs. This measure may also help address the lack of young people and local people attending this otherwise excellent event. In general, feel that 'Variations' is a high quality and unique event in Scotland, which deserves continued support.

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Specialist Advisor

Date: 22/8/2007

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.		Unfortunately, the assessor was not able to attend the concerts performed by the Edinburgh Quartet. These performances form an integral part of the overall week-long tuition residency, but they are also promoted as fully professional concerts in their own right, and are performed at the highest quality and commitment by the Quartet.
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.	5	The programming of the residency is designed to offer flexibility in groupings and individual coaching; variety within the range of activities offered, and options in terms of extra-curricular activities. There is also a strong emphasis on time for socialising, and this is an important feature of the event's success.
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	4	<p>The aims of the programme are to “provide an opportunity for amateur musicians of all ages to play chamber music over an extended period, and to develop their skills in a relaxed and enjoyable setting”. The event succeeds well in achieving most of these stated aims. The week-long, residential aspect of the project lends itself to creating opportunities for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extended coaching sessions • creating groupings for ensemble playing • selecting appropriate music for learning/performing • in-depth analysis/discussion of pieces • traditional music sessions • attending concerts • end of project performance • outdoor activities • and socialising and enjoyment <p>This is very much a `package' experience, which allows the participants and tutors to immerse themselves in the music, thereby enhancing the overall quality of the educational and social outcomes.</p> <p>A major flaw is the lack of young people taking up this unique opportunity, which would suggest an access problem. This may be due to the perceived high fee for the event, plus accommodation costs. The application form mentions the availability of discounts for students, but this needs to be more explicit. Enhanced funding support for the project would help the organisers to offer more subsidised places, and possibly bring down the costs of all fees.</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

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
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>	5	It is perhaps the skill and experience of the tutors that lies at the heart of the success of this annual event. The members of the Edinburgh Quartet are very much at ease in their teaching role. They have that special ability to put across a lot of valuable information, to gently push and challenge the participants, whilst maintaining a relaxed and informal approach to the sessions.
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.		N/A
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.		N/A
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.		N/A
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.		N/A
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>	5	<p>This is principally an education event. However, there are opportunities for the participants to attend concerts (both classical and traditional), and these are performances of a very high standard. These performance elements in the programme enhance both the social and educational outcomes for the participants, and relate to one of the projects stated aims –“to be inspired”.</p> <p>Within the teaching methodology, there is a strong emphasis on effective engagement between the tutor and the participants. This provides opportunities for the participants to achieve a deeper understanding of the material, and to improve their performance skills through interpretation, rather than merely `learning the piece`</p>

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
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>		<p>The participants are encouraged to perform at an end-of-project concert where they are able to share and display what they've learned. This provides a valuable experience, in terms of performance skills, confidence-building, and engagement with an audience.</p>
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>	5	<p>As indicated above, the overall experience of the programme is enhanced through a range of activities, both musical and social in nature. One of the most valuable experiences for the participants is the opportunity to interact with the tutors beyond the teaching sessions (at mealtimes and socially). This provides opportunities for extended discussions, and enriches the participants understanding of the music (and the world of music) from a professional viewpoint.</p> <p>A key feature of the programme is an optional workshop on Traditional music, and this certainly enhances the participants' overall enjoyment and experience, and the activity is particularly relevant to the setting and location of the event.</p>
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>	5	<p>The participants (at all levels of ability) leave with a number of enhanced skills including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • technique • interpretation • ensemble-playing • listening skills • performance • extended repertoire <p>I'm unaware of any resources for follow-up work, but several of the participants are in already-formed ensembles, and they certainly would be taking what they had learned forward in a very practical way. In terms of pre-project planning, the participants and tutors are aware of the materials that will be used during the week, and these resources are made available in advance.</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
Suitability of the venue for the event	The High School in Ullapool is a community facility, complete with library and theatre space. It is modern, light and spacious, and provides an ideal teaching venue. The Ceilidh Place is well known for its informal setting, its vibrant programme of arts events, and as a gathering place for interesting people.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	The daily programme of sessions and activities is well promoted and clearly displayed.
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 application form for the event is well set out and conveys both the detail and the atmosphere of the residential week very effectively. Information about 'Variations' is published on the NYOS website, and the event is also publicised through targeted mail-shots to academies and other appropriate organisations. It is also advertised in 'Classical Music' magazine.
Ease of booking and payment	The booking is very straight forward, and the application form also provides information about accommodation options. As stated earlier, the costs of the project could be inhibiting factor, and may have a negative impact on the project's growth and popularity. The basic cost for tuition alone is £350. The total cost of the week (including accommodation, transport, entertainment and excursions) could be in the region of £800 if all options were taken up.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	The venue is well signposted, and an organised transport option is offered in the application form.
External signage and signposting	Good
Internal directional signage	The organiser had provided temporary signs in key areas of the school.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	The school has full disability access.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The timing seems good as it coincides with a popular holiday period, and the week-long duration of the event is a positive factor in terms of the educational outcomes.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	The 'Variations' Manager is on hand at all times to provide information and services to participants and teaching staff. Her proactive, efficient and friendly approach is a key factor in the success of the event.

Criteria	Comment
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	The SAC is acknowledged with the NYOS website. However, there is no acknowledgement within the 'Variations' publicity material or application form, mainly because there is no direct SAC funding towards the event. Potentially, direct SAC funding for the event could assist with achieving subsidised fees, therefore helping address this aspect of access, whilst associating the SAC more closely with this high-quality project.

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 welcome this evaluation which we deem to be fair and constructive. In response, we would, however, like to make three points - mainly for clarification:

1. SAC funding: It should be noted that the Scottish Arts Council is funding NYOS Variations this year, from the 07/8 Education and Outreach fund, towards the cost of offering assisted places to enable people to attend NYOS Variations who would normally be unable to do so.' While we are most grateful for this support, the timing of the application process and the offer meant that we had a limited amount of time to advertise these places. In the end, we were able to offer one full bursary only, but were also able to welcome a local young fiddler to join in at no extra cost. For future years, we will be able to advertise these bursaries at the time of marketing the project.

2. Numbers: It is widely acknowledged that numbers for summer schools of this type grow by virtue of 'word of mouth'. This is borne out also by the evaluations returned by this year's participants (11 of whom are 'returners'). An example of this is in the Braemar-based Strings and Wind National Workshop whose numbers grew from small beginnings in 1999 to around 100 participants in 2006.

3. Cost: The full cost of £350 includes not only 6 days of tuition and advice by members of the Edinburgh Quartet, but also:

- the traditional music workshop led by Christine Hanson
- admission to two public concerts by the Edinburgh Quartet
- all daytime refreshments (tea/coffee breaks and lunch)
- a welcome reception