



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: Pitlochry Ensemble Company

Venue: Pitlochry Festival Theatre

Title of Event: The Philadelphia Story

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

Date of Visit: 18/8/07

Overall Rating: Competent

(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.)

After a sluggish first act when the playing lacked pace and the characterisation definition, the production picked up and the show moved to its “happy ending” with some aplomb. But whilst the comic misunderstandings on the morning of the wedding in Act III offer ample opportunity for laughs, by then these were slow in coming from the large and albeit seemingly content, but all in all somewhat underwhelmed, audience. The monochrome set was striking and several performances exploited the comic potential of the play so the overall feeling of the event was lacklustre rather than exuberant. Set on a Midsummer’s night it is a play that should feel giddy but I never quite felt the Lords of Misrule were at play here.

N.B. This report should, ideally, be read alongside the report for A Snake in the Grass, seen on the same weekend.

Name: _____ Jack Bradley _____ Date: 30 / 8 / 07 _____

Specialist Advisor X

Scottish Arts Council Officer

Please circle the relevant title

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.	Competent - 3	There is little to remark upon this faithful rendition of this popular American comedy. Having seen <i>A Snake in the Grass</i> the night before by the same company – also directed by John Durwin – it is fair to say both provide solid entertainment. Each play is <i>Middle-of-the-Road</i> but each also has a dark undertow. In the <i>Ayckbourn</i> , a glimpse of past cruelties; here, there is the self-inflicting damage that privilege can bring. In both case, Durwin allows these themes to emerge without unduly stressing their presence. The emphasis is “to keep it light” so even the firebrand Mike Connor is played without revolutionary zeal.
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.	Competent - 3	If <i>Snake in the Grass</i> is a small-cast play, this choice shows off the ensemble. Set in 1939 in New England, it gives us an entirely different world to the rest of the season: it is the stylish moneyed classes at play; Barry's attempt to give us American Oscar Wilde. It is not half so aphoristic but it is wise-cracking enough to spear the balloon of high-flown social pretensions.
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	Competent - 3	The explicit aim of a season called <i>Past Imperfect</i> doesn't really bear examination here. Yes, Tracy has been a spoilt brat and an ice queen but to suggest the play is a “sombre tale about learning from past mistakes” is to skew the author's intentions. We know that she made a poor fist of her marriage to Dexter and her father – rather ludicrously – claims his affair with a chorus girl can be attributed to his unrewarding relationship with his selfish daughter, but Tracy does not learn from past mistakes: she realises she is about to make another bad marriage to someone who puts her on a pedestal. It is because of her poor behaviour in the present that the future does not turn out as expected. What makes it more successful in terms of programming is the present day obsession with celebrity and the seemingly endless cataloguing of such “stars” in tittle-tattle magazines. In the play, the wedding is to be covered by a society magazine and whilst ostensibly horrified to be attracting such attention, there are some that relish the publicity. Equally, the starving artist hacks who supposedly disapprove of their subjects prove – in at least one case – to be rather seduced by it all. Moreover, there is, as part of the denouement a trade-off bordering on blackmail – or spin. So the play actually is a timely revival.

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

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	Competent - 3	Initially, I was dismayed by the accents which seemed to vary between mid-Atlantic, East Coast and one reminiscent of the South, but either I attuned to this or the actors settled down and the accents became less distinctive. The women were well characterised in particular (though the actress playing Tracy did not give us as highly-strung a character as one might expect.) and the men were almost uniformly four-square. And if Gavin Kean lacks the devil-may-care loucheness of other Dexters, there was terrific comic acting from Robin Harvey Edwards. In short, given the potential of the parts, I felt I only saw that realised intermittently.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	n/a	This was efficiently "blocked" but it is an undemanding piece to stage with most scenes requiring small groupings to be present at any one time.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Good - 4	If truth be told, Barry's play feels prolix compared to the later, sharper and wittier film version which sheds itself of the bogus semi-Freudian psychological analysis of Tracy and trims the lumbering social comment from the journalists reluctantly forced to sip champagne, but it works eventually because it delivers a feel good factor.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Good - 4	Having seen both shows by John Durwin, I would describe his work as that of a safe pair of hands. I do not mean that disparagingly: it is important for an audience to be at ease with the production from the very first minute and he successfully transports them into whichever world he is attempting to re-create. He understands the stage he is working on and clearly has a good working relationship with his designers. This play – being a very specifically located comedy in locale and genre – stretched the casting a little. Company members on the afternoon I saw it were off the pace at the outset, but the show did pick up early enough to redeem itself if not soon enough to guarantee the audience a side-splitting afternoon.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	n/a	Very little use of music, except pre-set music of the period as mood setting.
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 -4	As with A Snake in the Grass, this was of a very high calibre. The set – and indeed, many of the costumes – were monochrome, so that when colour was introduced, such as Dinah's outré outfits, they were all the more noticeable.

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
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>	Good - 4	This was a smoothly run show from the subtle, but audible, mood setting pre-show to the deft, to the interval scene changes between the Acts (achieved swiftly and soundlessly). As the night before, the lighting was extremely proficient with neither spills nor shadows. The key feature is of the unobtrusiveness of the technical support.
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 audience were a little subdued for what should be a laughter driven experience in the theatre. Whether it was the rain-sodden day, the size of audience (70%?) or the uncertain start to Act I, the matinee took time to lift off and the afternoon offered fewer gales of laughter than I would normally expect. It might have been that this rather mature audience were quiet for reasons of their familiarity with either other productions, the Stewart and Hepburn film or indeed High Society. Act III won them over.
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>	Competent - 3	There is 1 post-show discussion for each show in the season.
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>	Competent - 3	There is a summer school for performance for the 5-18s, as well as other workshops (not linked to the play's in question, i.e. in painting and the fine arts)

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 play sits up well on the stage, the lavish design a snug fit.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	There are season programmes available as well as individual programmes with background on the plays and playwrights included. There is also a TV monitor in the foyer offering information.
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.	There is a good web-site and season brochure.
Ease of booking and payment	I booked by phone after having difficulty with the online system.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	It is a conspicuous landmark in the village, on the Loch.
External signage and signposting	This is tastefully discreet in the village, but the Theatre is hard to miss.
Internal directional signage	V. good.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	This seemed v. good. It includes disabled parking, 4 wheelchair spots, loop facilities, amplifiers and audio description.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	At just under 2.5 hours, this matinee was fine.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Box office and Bar/buffet staff were v. friendly
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.