

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 Festival Theatre
Venue:	Pitlochry Festival Theatre
Title of Event:	Habeas Corpus
Type of Event:	Play
Date of Visit:	03 / 09 / 08
Overall Rating	Good
Name: Chris Dolan	Date 05 / 09 / 08
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.	4	Old-fashioned bedroom farce. But a production that understands the genre and found the darkness in Bennett's romping script. Spot-on timing, gustily choreographed, perfectly cast – which in my experience hasn't always been the case at Pitlochry.
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.	4	Part of the repertory season. But Ben Twist has found a near-forgotten little gem by Bennett, thus providing high quality fun for Pitlochry's regular audience.
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	5	On the surface Habeas Corpus is typical 1970s comedy-smut which borrows as much from Ronnie Barker and Brian Rix as from Alan Ayckbourn. Mistaken identities, dropped trousers, gratuitous one-liners, heaving bosoms, the lot. But it plays with middle-class frustrations and taboos, and fear of sickness and death. Ben Twist's production got, and delivered, the jokes, and found all the fears that underline them. I don't know the original script, but this production uses a 70's sitcom scenario to encase the drama within. If it's Twist's addition it works well enough. If it is original, it has been brought to life, giving an end-of-the-pier Dick Emery sauciness and a distinct period flavour.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	5	A large rep cast, who all worked well together. Dougal Lee is a perfect mid-life-crisis doctor. Much of the seriousness of the piece was carried by him, and he shuttled with grace between straight-forward comedy and the more sinister (especially his macabre little dance of death at the end). Karen Davies gave an ensemble performance all on her own – Penelope Keith, Hattie Jacques, Barbara Windsor were all in there. Yet the part of Muriel was still her own – hilarious and sexy – invention. Luisa Prosser negotiated the change from spinster to wild child cleverly; Robin Harvey Edwards was stately and berserk by turns, loved by the audience. Richard Stemp, Jonathon Coote, and all the cast threw themselves into the comedy without ever losing control.

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.

Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	4	No doors, but as you would expect in a farce no end of entrances and exits, set pieces, full-cast dance numbers. All in keeping with the comic rhythm of the piece.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	5	It's Alan Bennett. Bennett in beyond the Fringe mode, revelling in the sex comedy while sending the whole genre up. A minor piece but one which tackles sex and death without ever compromising the slapstick and song-and-dance routines. I didn't know the piece before so can't say how much this production has played with it. But it came across fully.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	5	All the tricks of the farce trade ably deployed by Ben Twist, plus a few deft moments to subtly underline the darker themes. Dance routines rousing, good physical comedy, perfectly cast. Use of backdrops by turns jokey and symbolic. A lot of people on stage, yet it never felt crowded or lost focus.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	4	Full-cast sing-a-longs, dance music, all fitting. If the melodies are new, which I suspect they must be, John Scrimger has done a fine job – populist tunes without overdoing the pastiche
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.	5	Looked bright and blousy throughout. A 70's take on an earlier dream version of Brighton. A lot of dresses and trousers had to fall off, and they all did, on cue, and without unplanned wardrobe malfunction. I have no doubt it's harder to implement Benny Hill sexy than it looks. Mrs. Swabb in drag, Cannon throbbing on a bicycle, Constance Wicksteed's false bosom... there's an art in getting all this just so.
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc). Crafts/Visual Arts - Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang Education events - relevance/ appropriateness of presentation and teaching methodology (one to one, group, child centred); details of participant group and activity, including genre.	5	Bright as day by the beach; clever backdrops, giving the action a real feel of space. Funny noises and music hit their cues every time. The cast used the entire space with complete confidence.
All	Audience Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction Crafts/Visual Arts – time spent, interest, activity, and visitors' books comments, number of visitors/ participants at the time of visit		Classic piece of rep theatre, and the audience lapped up every moment. Yet they must have got the darker side too – not because it was heavy-handed, rather for being cleverly placed. A fairly elderly full house the day I saw it – the memento mori didn't put them off for a moment.

	Education/learning – pre-event involvement, participants/schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc		
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.		None that I know of, or saw advertised.
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	Good.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	No individual show programmes, but season programme affordable and high quality.
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.	Fine.
Ease of booking and payment	Hard to get through to box office on phone.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Beautiful
External signage and signposting	Fine.
Internal directional signage	Fine
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Good
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Began on, and ran to, schedule.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Very helpful.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Yes – in seasonal programme and on site.

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.