



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: Promote YT, Craigmonie Centre, Drumnadrochit

Title of Event: Skills Up,

Type of Event: Youth Theatre skill development & networking event

Date of Visit: Feb 9th & 10th 2007

Overall Rating: Excellent. Promote YT Skills Up is an excellent workshop/networking weekend with the focus on building skills, sharing skills and experiences, networking with others in a work area which is fragmented and can leave workers feeling isolated. I feel the integrity, drive, ambition and understanding of the work being done seem to be at the heart of this organisation and a commitment to support the future development of Youth Theatre and those involved in the work. This event is one which creates a ripple much greater than a series of workshops over a weekend.

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Name: Alexandria Patience

Date: Date: 20/02/07

Advisor



Scottish Arts Council Officer



Please tick the relevant title

This report has been commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council to evaluate the artistic quality of the production named below. 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 may be made available to Scottish Arts Council Officers, Council and Committee members, and specialist advisors as appropriate. It will 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 Council to report on the overall performance of its Core 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:

Very Poor – standard falls well below what is acceptable.

Poor – not attaining acceptable standards of conception or presentation.

Competent – routine rather than especially interesting.

Good – well conceived and executed

Excellent – conceived and executed to a high standard.

1. Artistic Assessment

Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event, taking account of the following:

1.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
1.1	Vision and imagination	Excellent	This event gives the opportunity for participants to not only upgrade skills and assess their skill level in relation to others but to return to the experience of 'learning' in a working life where the focus may be the continual 'teaching' of others. The shape of the weekend schedule was well thought out and bore the mark of understanding what youth theatre workers/directors need. The placement of this weekend in the Highlands made a very strong statement in regards to inclusion and decentralising the power from the Central Belt – although I am sure the organisers would have understood that this decision would impact on the numbers willing to attend. Within the current staffing I feel sure that the structure of this event will continually be re-shaped and re-invented in response to the feedback they receive from participants to ensure it offers this community what it needs to continue to develop.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Good	The choice to allocated the Skills Up sessions 5 hours is in theory a very good idea since the ability to engage in a workshop topic for a focused amount of time makes wonderful sense – there is the possibility of learning something new. Fabulous! The scattershot approach can be very frustrating and leave one coming away having learnt very little – but the commitment to a session does mean that the participant is vulnerable if the session they have selected doesn't reach the agenda they felt would be covered. This could be overcome if a number of actions were taken. The workshop leaders could give a much more fully articulated description of the workshop they would lead and in particular, the experience level of the workshop participants to whom this session will be directed. This could be available on the web rather than weigh down the print material. The session I participated in seemed focussed at an entry-level theatre workers or even for those coming to youth theatre work with little or no background in the work. This seemed out of line with the group participating – to my knowledge there were only two of the group of almost 20 who were at this level. I have heard this leader is very good as a youth theatre worker but this session was lead in a way so it was 'by example' and was very slow moving. I realised early on in the session that I was not going to be challenged and could see there were a number of others in the group who also felt this which meant although I was thinking perhaps I could find a way to shift to one of the other sessions this seemed unfair to the group and to the leader. One young theatre worker

		<p>in the group was quite upset at the end of the day since she felt she alone had responded in this way to the session and it certainly coloured her response to the whole weekend.</p> <p>Responses by participants to other sessions seemed on the whole very good although there seemed a common feeling that too much time was spent in talking about the background to the work before moving to engaging in the focus of the session. The sessions where the content was more challenging and the form and content were embedded into workshop seemed to create much more energy and therefore a greater understanding of both the material and an interesting means of working.</p> <p>The Skill Share session was an hour and a half on Sat morning. Last years Skill Share had had a leader for the session but it had been felt that this year this could be done without. Unfortunately there seemed to be a little confusion as to what the focus of this time should be – some thought it was sharing the Skills we had learnt over the weekend – hence sharing and de-briefing on all the workshops but others felt it was meant to be about sharing warm-up games and practical aspects of YT practice. We went for the games and getting on our feet and doing these because one of our number had spent too much time being talked at and was desperate for action. This culminated in a rather scattered look at Forum Theatre.</p> <p>The 6 Skills Up Surgeries, which took place on the Sat afternoon, lasted 2 hours each and offered participants a very interesting range of topics. The session I participated in was excellent and showed not only the means of working in a very engaged way but responded to the participants in this specific group. This allowed issues and questions to arise from within the group and to raise questions and share ideas based in our own experiences of our practice. I left this session with renewed energy and lots to think about.</p> <p>Gaining a greater understanding of other practitioners practice and strategies the other participants use within the sessions was very valuable as was networking. The sense of a larger community around you and hearing about the kinds of projects happening across Scotland was very healthy and perspective broadening.</p>
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2. Strengths and Weaknesses

Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the event with reference to the following:

2.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
2.1	Script – As You Like It – Glenurquhart Youth Theatre	Good	Much abridged version of, As You Like It, performed by Glenurquhart Youth Theatre. Selected for this YT group as a part of the Shakespeare Schools' Festival 5 th – 9 th Feb 2007.
2.2	Direction:	Good	Eden Court Theatre Outreach worker, Amanda Luscombe, directed this production. The programme cites 'The creation of this piece was a group effort and skills and ideas flowed from all participants' Which is very good to read since my sense of the style was that it felt a little overly controlled and more opportunity for the cast to show us more of themselves would have made it more engaging.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	Good	Glenurquhart Youth Theatre Group has been running 6 years the cast has a range of experience and skill level but all seemed very committed and supportive of one another and the staff working with them.
2.4	Use of Music ¹	Good	Some live music provided by the young people in the cast was a very good idea and gave the chance to broaden the talents shown. If the skill/confidence level of the cast could allow more music, it would have added even more to the performance.
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	Good	The movement/choreography aspect within the production allowed all of the cast to have ongoing participation in the action. This meant those with smaller roles were therefore threaded through the show and it allowed the jumps in storyline to glue together
2.6	Design ² – including set, costume and lighting design	Good	Very simple with all props carried in and out by the youth cast. Effective for the show
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	Kept understandably simple.

¹ In particular, please comment on the quality and appropriateness of any original music composed for the production. Please indicate whether the music was performed live or recorded, in whole or in parts, and what effect this has on the quality of the production.

² Take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue and, where appropriate, the touring schedule

2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction		The majority of those attending the Skills Up weekend – approx 100 - were present at the production and supportive of the production. Some concerns were voiced regarding the level of the casts understanding and ownership of the material.
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3. 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.

3.	Criteria	Comments
3.1	Suitability of the venue for the event	Craigmonie Centre was very supportive of our presence The venue worked well for the event although the Glenurquart Hall as an off site workshop area was a bit cool for a 5-hour workshop so the group moved into a room within the Craigmonie Centre.
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue ³	All the information for the Skills Up event was very well organised and easily accessible. An idea might be for Promote YT to request participants to bring material from the organisation each were representing and the inclusion of a promo table by the registration area would give the opportunity for a greater level of sharing of current initiatives and upcoming projects. If Promote YT were also to request organisations to provide material to inform Scottish practitioners of their organisations and initiatives even more sharing could happen – local, national & international representation.
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity ⁴	Very well organised – saw flyers in lots of venues and the web page and email response was very fast and yet personal.
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	Very easy and human. I'm unsure why the Skills Up application form couldn't have been available to complete and return on-line but feel sure there was a tech reason for this - otherwise I'm sure it would have been on-line.
3.5	External signage and signposting	Drumnadrochit is a small community and everything was very easy to find
3.6	Internal directional signage	Not that many actual signs but Caroline, Andrew and the other volunteers were always present and made finding locations very easy.

³ These include programmes, displays etc., including the range, quality and clarity.

⁴ Publicity/pre-publicity (leaflets, posters, etc), including the range, content, and when and where available. Be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event. Also view and comment on the company's website where one is advertised, commenting on the ease of use, and quality of content and presentation, and currency of information

3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	All areas appeared to be wheelchair accessible. Do not consider myself disabled but I am a wheat intolerant Veggie and the care taken to ensure I was catered for were reassurance that inclusion was a priority for the organisation.
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Seemed good timing in relation to the year and to use only one of the weekend days is excellent. The programme schedule choices had been made to ensure it fit as many folk as possible. The commitment to provide a shuttle bus over the weekend from Inverness to Drumadrochit was probably costly but necessary. I do wonder if the shuttle would have proved to have been used by more, if a stronger push had been made in the Promote YT material to encourage folk to see how easily the journey could be accomplished by rail. There's no reason to hold folks hands but this might have put the idea more firmly in folks minds.
3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	Excellent by Promote YT and Craigmonie Centre. The Craigmonie staff very supportive of our presence and the catering for all meals was really great. An example of the care taken was when it obvious there was going to be a wee grumble that no teas/coffees were to be provided at lunch but it was completely routed when it was instantly provided. The only wee glitch was all the information given said the Inverness shuttle bus collection point was by the TKMaxx parking lot, when it was actually at the other side of the Inverness Railway Station.
3.10	Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding ⁵	SAC was well acknowledged in all print material.

⁵ The following is an extract from the Scottish Arts Council's conditions of grant for funded organisations:
 "The company should acknowledge Scottish Arts Council funding in press releases, at launches, on all published materials (including leaflets, brochures, programmes, posters, notices display, exhibition materials, websites and advertising). Acknowledgement of the Scottish Arts Council grant must also be made in any secondary or indirect products arising from the revenue funding such as recordings, publications, video, broadcasts, computer programmes etc."
 Please comment on whether these conditions of grant were met, including use and prominence of the Scottish Arts Council logo on the company's website.