



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:	Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh / Horsecross Arts
Venue:	Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh
Title of Event:	The Mystery of Irma Vep – A Penny Dreadful by Charles Ludlam
Type of Event:	Performance
Date of Visit:	6 March 2009
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.)

The Mystery of Irma Vep is an enjoyable parody of gothic, horror, melodrama written for two men to play multiple roles, quickly changing between characters and sexes to comic effect. Comic timing needed to be sharper and characterizations could have been more unique, as well as taken further into parody, to achieve the intentions of the script. The production values were of high quality. Though there was good audience engagement and good reaction from the audience, the performance remained routine rather than especially interesting.

Name: **Tim Licata**

Date: 08 / 03 / 2009

Specialist Advisor*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.	Good	The vision and imagination of the play itself is quite good and fun as a spoof and 'romp' which also 'comments on the sexual politics of the time' (program). I have seen other productions by both the Lyceum and Horsecross and Irma Vep is typical of the high production values of both companies. At times performance skills in executing sharp comic timing of quick changes demanded by the text, and skills in creating specific characterization could have been sharper. Though the play is a 'spoof' and deals in parody, some character portrayals appeared not more than routine stereotype.
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.	Good	Irma Vep is a co-production between the Lyceum Theatre and Horsecross Arts and seems a fine choice of programming for both organisations in terms of a varied season for their audience's. I believe the production originated by the producing organisations.
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	I believe the main aim of Irma Vep in this production is to provide a 'gloriously daft' and enjoyable programming choice for audiences. This was successful and the audience enjoyed the evening (see below). Aims implied in program and publicity as follows: "Charles Ludlam's fabulously witty play pays homage (as well as parodies) the great horror stories of history... It's gloriously daft and just the thing to bring a smile to your face... [with] moments of high tension and occasional terror." – Mark Thomson, Artistic Director, Lyceum. From program – Irma Vep "...[plays] with the conventions of theatrical genres for comedic effect and with a thoughtful challenge to conventional society." For a spoof of this type to truly achieve it's desired effect, it should be truly hilarious and 'wickedly funny'. This production was enjoyable, but most of the comic portrayals did not rise above the routine and did not achieve the 'gloriously daft' romp that was intended.

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
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>	Good	<p>Andy Gray and Steven McNicoll are both professional actors and experienced performers. Both were required to play multiple characters (as a central comic aspect of the production). Steven McNicoll in particular provided good, detailed, energetic performances. He achieved the comic effects intended as his characterizations seemed quite particular and individual, this believability being a necessary element of the humour. Andy Gray is also a technically skilled performer and his comic timing and character portrayals had good reactions from much of the audience. However his characterizations came across as more routine, often relying on 'pulling faces' and purely technical means of gags and timing, all appropriate but routine.</p>
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	NA	Not really applicable to this production. Fine use of stage space and the spacious well designed set.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Good	Irma Vep by Charles Ludlam, is a fun well written, witty parody. Strong use of language and theatrical styles in the script. The script offers the opportunity for a gloriously daft production.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Competent	The production, directed by Ian Grieve, was clear and well staged. Pacing of quick changes, which were a central element to the comedy, could have been sharper. This timing was good at some moments and less successful at others. Overall comic timing needed to be sharper and more varied. I felt that the comedy was hindered in that characterizations remained fairly general and not taken far enough to achieve the parody and spoof intended. This was a well staged, entertaining production, but the comedy remained fairly routine and did not fulfil the 'daft' potential of the script.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	Excellent	Alan Penman, Sound Design / Composer, Excellent use of recorded music. Not only appropriate but integral to the effects (comic and dramatic) and atmospheres of 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.	Excellent	Excellent, very effective stage and costume designs by Becky Minto and Lighting design by Kai Fischer. The Production values of Irma Vep were high and used to great effect. Both stage and lighting design are integral to the performance and play of the actors, Becky Minto's and Kai Fischer's designs achieved this very well.

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	<p>Good professional standard of presentation. There was a nice interplay between the actors and both lighting and sound cues, though at times could have been sharper.</p>
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>Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh was circa 2/3 full. Irma Vep was very appropriate for the audience. Good response from the audience and the audience enjoyed the play throughout. Hearty applause before the interval and strong applause at the end. I would say the audience was all adult, a range of ages, though it appeared much of the audience were 40 or 50+. The older members of the audience in particular had a strong favourable reaction to the play with lots of laughter. Much of the audience appeared very engaged by both actors performances, laughing and applauding at moments.</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>	NA	<p>Discussions with the director and cast were listed on posters in the foyer. I did not attend these events.</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>	NA	<p>Performance evaluation.</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 Lyceum was an excellent venue for this performance.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Very good, high quality, informative programme and photo displays in the lobby.
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.	Very good, high quality publicity materials; posters & leaflets. Listings in all major and expected press. Well conceived and distributed information. Excellent, useful, informative websites. Good use of film trailer created for Irma Vep on the Lyceum's website.
Ease of booking and payment	Fine.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Fine, central Edinburgh.
External signage and signposting	Fine.
Internal directional signage	Fine.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Good. Accessible toilets, lift to different foyer & bar levels, auditorium wheelchair accessible.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Fine and appropriate.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Excellent.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Scottish Arts Council acknowledgement on all publicity materials and website.

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.