



### 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.

<b>Artist/Company:</b>	<b>Royal Lyceum Theatre Company</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Royal Lyceum Edinburgh</b>
<b>Title of Event:</b>	<b>Mary Rose</b>
<b>Type of Event:</b>	<b>Play</b>
<b>Date of Visit:</b>	<b>01 / 11 / 08</b>
<b>Overall Rating</b>	<b>Competent</b>
<b>Name: Chris Dolan</b>	<b>Date 13 / 11 / 08</b>
Specialist Advisor	Scottish Arts Council Officer <i>Please circle the relevant title</i>

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.	2	<p>The ideas behind the play struck me as confusing to the point of contradictory. This could be my problem – I find everything by Barrie inconsistent and a little baffling. Mary Rose even more so than Peter Pan. The latter, however, has a disturbing / magical balance that this earlier work never achieves – no doubt the reason it is seldom revived. The production did little to unify the various incongruous elements and concepts. It is supposed to be a comedy. I cannot imagine how <i>any</i> production could square the circle of Barrie's comic dialogue with the darkness of the story – other than laughing at the eccentricities and (exaggerated) language of the WW1 era English.</p> <p>I am told (I do not know the script) that the ending has been changed from the original redemptive to a dark question mark, removing the whole further still from comedy.</p> <p>The production looked good – lavish, with some neat theatrical tricks. But the people, their strange story, and Barrie's meaning all remained elusive.</p> <p>A ghost story for Halloween / All Souls time of year, it failed to frighten or entertain, or even at times hold the attention.</p>
All (if relevant)	<p>Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection</p> <p>Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.</p> <p>If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme.</p>	5	<p>Part of the rep programme, well-timed for Samhain and the ghost-story season.</p> <p>Reviving a seldom seen Scottish play is to be lauded, but this one feels like it needs to be radically reworked for our times. Perhaps more of the pagan/early Christian mythology that triggers Barrie's story would interest us more. Only one major script change (the ending) was made, so far as I'm aware, and even that was an odd choice.</p> <p>In programming terms, the matinee I attended attracted a nearly full house of all ages, looking forward to being spooked. To be fair, a few of those around us were.</p>
All	<p>Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.</p> <p>Education events – see <sup>1</sup>below for guidance</p>	3	<p>We generally only know Barrie as the creator of Peter Pan. Revisiting lesser known work is important. Especially as, beyond the saccharine Hollywood versions of Pan, there is something deeply at odds with our modern take on the world. He is therefore worth exploring. This production, however, did not seem to me to want to probe very deeply into Mary Rose's world. Barrie's Edwardian-inspired world distanced us from the characters. At times the play felt like a prolonged TV sketch sniggering at silly old-fashioned Englishmen. Visually it conjured up its magical island, but nothing in the production let <i>us</i> into that world.</p>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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>	4	<p>A difficult task for all involved. Michael Mackenzie and Anne Kidd were solid and believable as Mary Rose's parents. The devastating tragedy of a daughter returning from the dead, as young as on the day she disappeared whilst everyone else has aged, was hardly conveyed. Barrie gives them so little to work with. Una Mclean and John Ramage provide some of the comedy, which is generally at odds with the central story. Robin Laing's Presbyterian islander was this side of parody. The script asks him, first, to be a stock Scotsman, then later to have the gravitas of the bringer of bad news and the only voice of other-worldliness. Laing pulled it off as well as anyone could. Perri Snowdon, Mary's husband, could hardly escape from being a parody of Noel Coward Englishness, and Guy Fardon, her son, an early Crocodile Dundee Aussie. A lot was asked of Kim Gerard and, by and large, she found ways to deliver. However, you felt that as neither Gerard nor her character, Mary Rose, could explain what had happened to them that any actor would have found motivation difficult. Exactly <i>what</i> she becomes by the end of the play and <i>why</i> she decides to kill her only son remained as mysterious to the entire cast as it did to us (or at any rate, me).</p>
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	1	For a piece that moves from southern English drawing rooms to remote Hebridean islands, and from this world into the next, where there are ghosts and insanities and murders, the whole piece was bizarrely static. Much of the atmosphere relied on music and stage design.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	2	<p>No doubt deeper knowledge of Barrie's work and intentions on my part would be useful, but a production – and particularly a popular / populist production – should explain itself to some degree. Barrie's obsessions with youth and aging and death are our obsessions today too. Yet much of his work feels either dated to me, or so personal that it only connects on the periphery (so we love Tinker Bell, and enjoy Peter's adventures, but are left merely <i>uncomfortable</i> with the sadness of the Lost Boys and suspicious of life at the Darling's. It seems apt that when we think now of Neverland we think first of Michael Jackson). This version of Mary Rose only deepened my sense of alienation. A play does not need to explain itself, but it does need to connect. But we never get to know Mary in any depth, and the mystery of her fate, rather than beguiling becomes merely baffling.</p>
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	3	<p>On the one hand, the stage-craft was clever and atmospheric, while the direction of actors, movement, and text analysis, minimal. It's surprising that not more was cut from the original script, which is very wordy. The production was simply too long; entire sections were dramatically unnecessary, and didn't make up for the fact in wit or comedy. The transfer from real world to mystic isle was all in the visuals and the music – again, Barrie's fault: we never get a glimpse beyond the veil. Tony Cownie directed a handsome piece of theatre</p>

			that never quite got to grips with the story or the emotions.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	5	Philip Pinsky's music was one of the play's two best attributes. Without it, we would have had little more than a dull drawing room drama. The music bridged the gap between the now and then – and this world and the next - more effectively than anything else in the play. Intelligently throughout.
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	The other successful feature of the piece. Curtains, lights, darkness, simple props all moved us seamlessly through the play's various worlds. At one point Neil Murray's stagecraft pulled off one of theatre's oldest tricks – by directing the audience's attention elsewhere, a 'ghost' is made to appear out of thin air. The transformation between the lived-in house to the abandoned house was expertly done.
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	Technically, Mary Rose is demanding, but the production was flawless and professional in what seemed (and doubtless was meant to seem) a pleasingly old-fashioned way, despite the use of modern rigging, staging and sound techniques.
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  Education/learning – pre-event involvement, participants/ schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc		A good mix of ages, although at my matinee performance the more elderly end of the Lyceum's audience. Obviously also seen as a Halloween treat for families. In that, it may have worked for some better than it did for me.
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.		There were, at various points during the run: a pre-show talk (ticketed and priced), a post-show discussion with members of the cast, and audio-described performance, a touch Tour for the visually impaired, and a BSL signed performance
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)?		I was unable to attend any of the above, and admit they may have helped me in my understanding of the play.

## 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?*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Suitability of the venue for the event	Perfect.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	A satisfying programme booklet with an interesting article by Owen Dudley Edwards (some of his thoughts could have done with being included in the production).
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	No problem.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Yes.
External signage and signposting	Fine (despite endless building works cutting the Lyceum off from its surroundings).
Internal directional signage	Fine.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Fine.
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)	Fine.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>	Yes

<sup>2</sup> 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.

It is our strong view this is an assessment of extremely poor quality.

The assessor's repeated declared lack of understanding of the play constantly gets in the way of objective assessment of the qualities to be assessed.

The assessment reads like a personal condemnation of the script. To mention (under Vision and imagination) that "Barrie's meaning all remained elusive" is an extraordinary comment given that any attempt to *solve* Barrie's play would be an act of idiocy and arrogance and imply a lack of confidence in the play (which of course the assessor has.)

The statement that "*The ending has been changed from the original redemptive to a dark question mark, removing the whole further still from comedy*" is odd to say the least. Darkness and comedy have been bedfellows since Greek drama through Shakespeare and McDonagh. The implication is that the production needed to land on one or had to *solve* this "problem" is bizarre.

The assessor's confession that he did not understand the play recurs throughout the assessment with many comments desiring some kind of "explanation." The idea that a production should "explain" a play is entirely against most theatre practitioners' idea of good theatre. Elucidate – yes.

It is perfectly understandable that an assessor may have a personal opinion of a new or classic text. However, I feel quite clearly that this assessment has been damned by the simple dislike of the play we were producing and as such feels unbalanced, unhelpful and frankly inappropriate.

