



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

Venue: Royal Lyceum Theatre

Title of Event: The Mystery of Irma Vep

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

Date of Visit: 24 Feb. 09

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.)

Whilst there were some amusing moments, this production leaves one disappointed. The references to the Gothic horror genre are laid on thick. In addition, it is a curious choice of programming, the script feels very dated and it was unclear how this enhanced the Lyceum season. Costume and set are good and make up for some of the disappointment. There are professional performances from Steven McNicoll and Andy Gray.

Name: _____ Sita Ramamurthy _____ Date: 1 March 2009

Specialist 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 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	This production of Charles Ludlam's gothic horror fantasy is largely uninspiring, apart from an excellent set. There are amusing moments which appealed to students in the audience.
All	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.	Poor	It was unclear what the point was of reviving this play was. It is a piece very much of its time and feels extremely dated.
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	The production is advertised as a fast-paced and wickedly funny parody of the horror genre with references to several well known films. It is fast paced-ish, nothing exceptional. As regards the humour, neither my companion, nor I found it very funny.
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	Steven McNicoll and Andy Gray give accomplished performances which allow for laughter, particularly from younger members of the audience.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	n/a	
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Competent	Established script, but dated.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Poor	Uninspiring direction from Ian Grieve. The jokes and references were all very obvious and lacked ingenuity. The references are so clichéd. The direction lacked inspiration.

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
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	Competent	Sound effects and good choices of music are used appropriately
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.	Competent	A good design, conventional, but well executed and certainly conjured up the environment of Mandacrest.
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>	Competent	The presentation was OK. Lots of quick changes some of which could be a little quicker, but OK Lighting and sound were good. Nothing out of the ordinary.
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 reaction was mixed, with the large young people/ students present laughing a lot and enjoying the production a great deal. The response from the older members of the audience was mixed. My companion and I left bemused, not having laughed a great deal and wondering what the purpose of reviving this piece was and in truth a little bored.
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.		Pre-show talks are taking place as part of the run.
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)?		Not aware of any education activity

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	Standard theatre production in an appropriate venue
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Programmes were available. There is one essay in the programme which averagely interesting
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.	Leaflets, posters and website were informative. There are short films on the website about the show and interview with the actors which are helpful.
Ease of booking and payment	Easy to book
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Centrally located and easy to find.
External signage and signposting	Fine
Internal directional signage	Fine
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Wheelchair access available
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Standard evening timing and an average running time for a piece of theatre
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	SAC was acknowledged appropriately

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 (e.g. 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.

As a company Horsecross takes pride in reviewing and evaluating all aspects of our work in the knowledge that there is always scope to improve so are happy to be assessed on our work. While we recognise there will always be an element of subjectivity in artistic assessments there is a strong case here that this assessment oversteps the mark and as a result badly fails to fulfill the Scottish Arts Councils own assessment criteria or a useful critical function for Horsecross.

To be as productive as possible in any review of SAC assessment processes we would like to note the following inconsistencies and shortcomings which I hope SAC will find constructive and will provide better assessment in future both for SAC and for Horsecross as well as other funded clients. We would also hope you would agree that due to the shortcomings detailed, this should not stand as an accurate assessment record of this co-production.

- The note at the beginning of the assessment document says *"specialist advisors should avoid making judgements based on their own personal tastes and preferences"* This instruction has clearly not been followed in this assessment where personal opinion is frequently asserted despite the assessor themselves identifying contradictory responses from the audience. While the text tells both sides of the story the scores do not. For example:-

The clear statement of personal taste *"As regards the humour, neither my companion, nor I found it very funny."*

Conflicting with the observation "a large number of young people/ students present laughing a lot and enjoying the production a great deal." and "There are amusing moments which appealed to students in the audience."

Summarised in a "Competent" rating.

- The success of the production in appealing to SAC key target audience of young people is reflected, again subjectively as a negative thing. It is not scored positively in terms of "success of the event against stated aims," instead the assessor chooses to disregard the obvious enjoyment of a large number of young people in favour of his own personal taste to give it a "competent" rating
- The assessment is also contradictory and the explanation for the rating doesn't match the rating given. Despite the fact that the assessor acknowledges "an excellent set." and "good design," design is assessed as 'competent' ie 'routine. How does an "excellent set" and "good design" suddenly become rated as 'routine?' The assessment form states quite clearly that work described as "good" should be rated as good and work described as "excellent" should be rated as "excellent"
- Again there are clear inconsistencies under "Skills and ability to communicate" the

assessor while commenting “Steven McNicoll and Andy Gray give accomplished performances which allow for laughter, particularly from younger members of the audience.” Scores the production as “competent” We wouldn’t expect adjectives like ‘accomplished ‘ (dictionary definition talented, gifted, expert) to be used to describe a performance which was then rated as ‘routine’

- The intensely subjective approach to this review is again evident in the inappropriate use of comments such “I left bemused” and “in truth a little bored” . This is not only subjective but also condescending and disrespectful both towards the experienced practitioners involved in creating the production and the paying audience who clearly did enjoy it and for whom it was created.
- The fact that this show is dismissed by the reviewer as not being theatrically relevant or important just shows a lack of knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and again a subjective willingness to base a assessment on this ignorance rather than refraining from passing judgement where they are not equipped to judge . It is clearly and indeed famously relevant as a loving tribute to a vast collection of historic, melodramatic and comedic styles. Many hours of discussion were had with the two actors in presenting this “theatre of the ridiculous.” Many critics and academics in the United States have felt it important to write about Charles Ludlum’s theatrical style which has been formed using many traditional British music hall techniques. Just because the assessor admits to not understanding the context and purpose doesn’t mean there isn’t one or make it invalid to interpret.

As it so clearly contradicts SAC’s only stated assessment guideline on subjectivity, this does not seem to be a useful assessment either for us or really for SAC.

On a separate note this assessment is misleading in a different way, outside the control of this assessor. Irma Vep is part of a season of artistic output. It was always intended to balance the season by providing an accessible entry point to live theatre, which even by this assessors admission (though not scoring) it achieved.

This review cannot realistically be used for useful assessment of any kind other than of the assessors taste, partly because of its self confessed subjectivity, but also because it is an inherently misleading to use it as a representative sample as opposed to a single facet of our creative output.

I hope you will find this response helpful when using this assessment and when training assessors and developing assessment systems which can provide the useful critical framework which is clearly intended.