



## 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: Lyceum Theatre Co**

**Venue: Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh**

**Title of Event: Curse of the Starving Classes**

**Type of Event: Theatre**

**Date of Visit: 11<sup>th</sup> April 2009**

**Overall Rating: Good**

This was a perfectly paced and beautifully performed production of Sam Shephard's curiously comic family drama. Never less than riveting, it swung wildly, and appropriately so, between kitchen sink melodrama, absurd surreal farce and deeply moving tragedy.

**Name: Stewart Ennis**    **Date: 18<sup>th</sup> April 2009**

**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.	Excellent	Everything from the portentous buzzing neon, crackling with each new visitation upon the dysfunctional family, to the North American Indian music, added to the palpable strangeness and tension. This was a world where anything could happen and often did. But at its heart was a family whose members, despite their strangeness, we cared about and whose relationships we recognized, and it was this that made the piece so effective. The live lamb on stage could have been a cute distraction but the fact that the tension was maintained- despite the lamb having a mind of its own- was a testament to the focused playing and strength of script and direction.
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.	Good	This is a good challenging addition to the Lyceum's programme
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 <sup>1</sup> below for guidance	Excellent	Director's programme notes and interview with the writer made clear that Shepard's plays "always elude easy definition" and this play is a case in point. Mark Thomson's programme comments about the play's "absurd, comic flair" and its inhabiting of a place where "comedy and tragedy meet" were spot on. The physicality and verbal games were performed with such enormous élan so that the collapse of the family and the death of its dreams hit home all the harder.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.  Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	Good	In particular Christopher Brandon's measured mental and emotional disintegration was beautifully paced throughout. Christopher Fairbank and Carla Mendonca too were extremely effective in their portrayals of the lost burnt out father and optimistic mother going on their own particular journeys from hopelessness to hope and back again. Only at one point, did a character seem not to arrive on stage quite fully formed or fully dimensional, and while this may have been deliberate stylistic decision, the piece did appear to falter slightly. On the whole though, the performances were fully rounded and believable.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	N/A	

<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.

<b>Artform</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Comments and key reasons for rating</b>
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Excellent	This is a wonderful tried and tested Sam Shephard script full of glorious comedy and emotional swings and roundabouts and the cast clearly enjoyed playing every word.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Excellent	The absurd physical and verbal humour and the deep tragedy were melded perfectly in a tight, well cast, well paced production. Only on one occasion did a character's entrance seem not fully realised. But on the whole, the pace of the piece felt exactly right, building up an atmosphere tension and portent, each character's entrance signifying some new danger and revelation
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	Good	The use of recorded music and sound was used well to create tension and an –at times- 'other worldly' atmosphere.
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.	Good	The fairly realistic set of the house, seemingly surrounded by a dusty desert no mans land worked well and the crackling neon sign behind the house was used to particularly good effect.
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement  Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).	Excellent	All sound and lighting cues seemed spot on throughout
All	Audience  Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction		The audience seemed engaged throughout, responding well to the humour of the piece and displaying an enthusiastic appreciation at the end.
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.	N/A	
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)?	N/A	

## 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	This was a Lyceum production and fitted the space perfectly.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	The programme notes and interviews with writer and performers were particularly 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.	The Lyceum website was full of useful information and easy to negotiate. Leaflets, posters and brochures all well produced and informative.
Ease of booking and payment	Smooth, friendly and problem free.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Easy to find on bus and train routes.
External signage and signposting	Good.
Internal directional signage	Good.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	These were adequate from what I could see.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	This was a show aimed at adults and the timing seemed quite appropriate.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Good and friendly.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>	SAC acknowledged where appropriate.

<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.