



## ARTISTIC EVALUATION

This evaluation is intended to represent an objective aesthetic judgement. **Specialist advisors and officers should avoid making judgements based on their own personal tastes and preferences wherever possible.**

**Artist/Company:** SCDA

**Venue:** Dingwall Academy

**Title of Event:** Highland Divisional Final

**Type of Event:** Performances

**Date of Visit:** 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> March 2010

**Overall Rating:** Good

*(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.)*

This was a two night event where winners of SCDA district competitions presented their one act plays in competition to win places at the Scottish final in April. There was a range of productions with the main emphasis on comedy. As would be expected in such a festival the standard of productions and performances varied but on the whole were quite strong and showed high levels of commitment and enthusiasm.

The format of SCDA festivals has changed little over the years and because of its emphasis on competition and a set marking scheme there is little incentive for the participating groups to take artistic risks and develop their theatrical range.

Name: Nick Fearne  
Specialist Advisor

Date: 28 March 2010

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 on 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 future 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:**

**Very poor**- standard falls well below what is acceptable.

**Poor** - not well conceived and executed

**Satisfactory**

**Good** - well conceived and executed

**Very Good** – well conceived and executed to a very good standard

**Excellent** – Inspiring and executed to an exceptionally 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	<p>Vision and imagination of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality of ideas</li> <li>if you have seen other work of this artist(s)/ company before, please comment on any relevant comparisons</li> </ul>	Good	Over the two nights festival 6 plays were presented (including one youth group). Of these 4 would probably be classed as comedies. One of these ('Babysitting Calvin) was very funny and performed and directed with great pace and energy. The two other productions were more 'serious' and explored the psychology of individuals
All (if relevant)	<p>Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does it fit within the artistic vision of the organisation?</li> <li>If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme.</li> </ul>	Satisfactory	The SCDA states that ' <i>works to promote all aspects of community drama throughout Scotland</i> '. The cornerstone of the SCDA's work and its programming are its competitive festivals, in particular the one act competitions. As a result much of SCDA's energy (and presumably funding) goes into the festival programme across Scotland at district, divisional and national level
All	<p>Success of event against stated aims of project and/or performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does it relate to information contained in the programme, the website or other printed material?</li> <li>How well did it communicate the artistic themes?</li> <li>How did the event originate eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, from the artist or from commission?</li> </ul> <p>Education events – see <sup>1</sup>below for definition</p>	Good	<p>This particular festival was the 78<sup>th</sup> such event and as stated above this is primarily what the organisation does.</p> <p>Personally I am not a lover of competitive drama but it is clear that these festivals provide a very important focus for community/amateur drama groups across the country. Furthermore the festival affords the opportunity to perform outside the home venue and to meet with other groups and see their productions.</p> <p>It is clear that participating groups commit a lot of time and effort to their productions will provide an amateur drama experience for small, rural, highland communities.</p> <p>However, as stated above, the competitive nature and scoring system tends to mean that productions are often comedies from the past by writers that have become established material for SCDA festivals eg David Campton</p>
All	<p>Performers/tutors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the expertise of the performers? Where performers are amateur, please reflect this in your comments.</li> <li>How successfully did the performer(s) communicate with and engage the audience?</li> <li>In your view, was an artist as a tutor key to the success of the workshop?</li> </ul>	Good	All performers were amateurs. The SCDA scoring gives 40 marks out of 100 for acting. Inevitably there is a range of expertise in the productions, a range of cast sizes and one or two highly competent performances. By and large most projected well and I only strained to hear one or two performers. One of the trophies awarded was for top acting marks and the adjudicator decided this should go to The Donahue Sisters (Dingwall Players)

<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.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the work original?</li> <li>• How was the space used?</li> <li>• How many dancers were there and how were they used?</li> <li>• How long was the piece?</li> </ul>	N/A	None of the productions involved dance/choreography but some movement was required in
Theatre	Script Please comment on this for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new work</li> <li>• second productions</li> <li>• classics where the original has been substantially changed</li> </ul>	Good	A mixed programme of: A Fishy Business by Margaret Wood – over 30 years old, lame comedy with stock characters (vicar, dropout son etc) Babysitting Calvin by John H Newman – contemporary comedy performed by a young cast (how refreshing!) from Thurso. An interesting concept in which the baby in question is played by an adult. The Donahue Sisters by Geraldine Aron – an Irish play (accents an issue) in which three sisters relieve a violent incident from their childhood The Laboratory by David Campton – a comedy set in 16 <sup>th</sup> century Italy The Opposite of Claustrophobic by Rob Johnston – a two-hander in which a oppressed wife encounters a stranger in her kitchen Waiting for Pierrepoint by Paul Beard – John Christie reflects on his life as he waits to be hanged  A Fishy Business is the sort of script that does nothing to develop community drama. The Laboratory was performed by the youth group and seemed a strange choice for this age group. Babysitting Calvin was very moving, The Donahue Sisters and Waiting for Pierrepoint quite chilling in their own ways whilst The Opposite of Claustrophobic was an intriguing exploration of two flawed characters.
Theatre, Dance	Direction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the work well interpreted?</li> <li>• Was it well cast?</li> <li>• Was it well presented?</li> </ul>	Good	6 plays, 6 directors, mixed results. Some very wooden performances showing those directors that had difficulty with blocking and moving their actors about the stage. Some of the productions lacked pace. Some directors had difficulty in knowing how to deal with long speeches and pauses (without the prompter jumping in) 35 marks were awarded for direction and there was also a trophy for top directing marks- again the adjudicator decided this should go to Dingwall Players' The Donohue Sisters
Dance, Theatre	Use of music <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the music/ sound used enhance the production?</li> <li>• Is it live or recorded?</li> </ul>	Good	Most productions began with a suitable piece of recorded music
Dance, Theatre	Design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How were the costumes, set and lighting?</li> <li>• How did it work in the venue?</li> <li>• Was it technically proficient? (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).</li> </ul>	Very good	15 marks were awarded for stage presentation and a trophy was awarded for this. The Donohue Sisters again and probably deserved. There seems to be a high importance attached to 'set/costume' by participants and SCDA and this was reflected in the adjudicator's comments. Considering teams, I believe, are timed on how long they take to set

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			up/strike it is amazing what appears on stage – working doors, fridges, boiling kettles, attic beams and welsh dressers! There is a danger that too much emphasis is put on set/costume rather than going for a stripped down, representative set for fear of being marked down.
All	<p><b>Quality of Public Engagement</b></p> <p>Performing Arts/Education -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the production/event targeted at a particular audience?</li> <li>• Was the production /event appropriate for the audience/participants?</li> <li>• Were you/engaged/inspired?</li> <li>• Did the audience/participants appear to be engaged/inspired?</li> <li>• What was their response?</li> <li>• Approximately how many people were there?</li> <li>• Did there appear to be a broad mix of people – age, cultural diversity or disabled?</li> <li>• Are BSL/captioned/audio described performances offered as part of the run/tour/? If so how many?</li> <li>• What activities or supporting materials were available to enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups programmes, on line info?</li> <li>• Were these targeted at specific age groups?</li> </ul> <p>Education/learning events: In addition, please provide comments on the following (if appropriate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How was it taught/led eg one to one, group, child centred?</li> <li>• What was the composition of the participant group – age range, gender mix?</li> <li>• Is it strategically linked to the curriculum or national policy areas e.g. Early Years, Community Learning &amp; Development</li> <li>• What learning/skills development took place?</li> <li>• What was the quality of the art produced by the participants?</li> <li>• Did the workshop tutor have a teaching plan for the session and/or project?</li> <li>• How were participants recruited?</li> <li>• Did participants' views and choices help inform the</li> </ul>	Good	<p>On each night there were probably up to 150 in the audience.</p> <p>There was a good mix of age ranges. Obviously each competing team had its own supporters and friends in the audience. I would be intrigued to know how many of the audience are regular theatre goers and for how many attending SCDA festivals is the only time they attend theatre.</p> <p>I get the feeling that there is an 'SCDA audience'. This was reinforced by the truly embarrassing introduction by a SCDA Officer of the adjudicator and presentation party. she assumed everybody knew who was who, she couldn't read her own notes and just about managed to say who the local councillor was presenting the trophies (who was given a thank you present still in its plastic carrier bag).</p> <p>A word on the adjudicator – Marie O'Sullivan. This was her first time adjudicating in Scotland. At the end of each night she gave a comprehensive appraisal of each performance covering stage presentation, directing, acting and overall impression. She also decided where the trophies went.</p> <p>I have heard some pretty poor adjudicators in my time but I felt this adjudicator did offer some very good advice and constructive comments on the productions.</p> <p>She awarded first place to Dingwall Players/The Donohue Sisters and second to Thurso Players/Babysitting Calvin. Both go forward to the Scottish final.</p>

<b>Artform</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Comments and key reasons for rating</b>
	structure and content of the project?  Crafts/Visual Arts Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang?		

## 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
<p>Location and suitability of the venue for the event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it easy to find?</li> <li>Is it on a main transport route?</li> <li>Are the spaces clean?</li> <li>What were the sight lines like?</li> <li>How big was it?</li> </ul>	<p>The venue was Dingwall Academy – a new school with a performance space that is equipped with lighting, sound and drapes and retractable tiered seating (flip up individual) with a capacity of 200 approx. Sight lines are good although there is quite a space between performance area (at floor level) and front row of seating. Extra seating could be placed here</p>
<p>Information/ interpretive material at venue–</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there programmes, posters and displays about the event?</li> <li>Is there information on the venue's website?</li> </ul>	<p>Programmes available listing all productions and casts. Info available on other SCDA events – Patron Scheme; British One-At Finals; Youth drama Summer Schools</p>
<p>Publicity/ pre-publicity –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What leaflets, posters, websites, did you see the event listed in?</li> <li>What publicity materials are produced?</li> <li>Is it easy to understand?</li> <li>Where can you get the information?</li> <li>Is there Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>?</li> </ul> <p>Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event and comment on the company/organisation's website.</p>	<p>SAC acknowledged on SCDA website and programme. Listing in local paper Poster up in school</p>
<p>Ease of booking and payment</p>	<p>Booked through SCDA email, however they were not put aside but I was able to purchase on the door.</p>
<p>Timing of the event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?</li> <li>Was the length appropriate?</li> </ul>	<p>Appropriate start time of 7.30pm These were two VERY long evenings – unnecessarily so. There were 3 performances each night with full 20 min tea/coffee intervals, following the raffle the stage was set up for the adjudicator to give her notes meaning the first night finished after 11pm. The second night after adjudicator notes the stage was set up with trophies and presentation party. By the time trophies were presented it was midnight! These were very long evenings and I'm sure could (and should) be streamlined. Why for example is the winner of the Youth Festival in competition with the adults?</p>
<p>Signage and signposting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the entrance clearly marked?</li> </ul>	<p>N/a</p>

<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.

Criteria	Comment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there clear internal directional signage?</li> <li>Is there Braille signage or signage for audio loops?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Access and provision for disabled people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please insert yes/no in the boxes to reflect what you notice about the venue/event</li> </ul> <p>Please add in any additional comments below the table</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many BSL/captioned/audio described performances are there at the venue?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Yes/No</b></p> <p><b>Yes/No</b></p> <p>BSL interpretation No</p> <p>Audio description of performances No</p> <p>Captioning No</p> <p>Lift/ramp Ground level entrance</p> <p>Accessible toilets Yes</p> <p>The venue is fully accessible</p> <p>Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English</p>
<p><b>Customer service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How was the quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)</li> <li>If possible, comment on how responsive they were to the needs of disabled customers?</li> </ul>	<p>Fine</p>

**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.