

THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL

ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: SCDA Broomlee Centre West Linton
Type Of Event Workshops as part of the SCDA youth summer camp
Date of Visit: Sat 5th August 2006

Overall Rating: GOOD

Workshop Programme

This was the last Saturday of a residential course for young people. The camp is located in the attractive rural setting of Broomlee Centre West Linton. It has been a fixture of the SCDA's calendar for some years. The young people work every day on a variety of drama and theatre related activities and are joined, on the Saturday afternoon, by two groups of young people from USA, appearing at the Fringe in the American High School Theatre Festival slot. They workshop together in the afternoon, share some of the week's work, and view extracts from the US visitors performances in the evening before going home the following day.

I visited for the Saturday morning, viewing 5 workshop activities, staying through lunch and meeting the US visitors before leaving. Throughout I was accompanied by Fiona Rogan, sometimes joined by SCDA Chair Colin Peter.

The workshops were all led by professionals, the remainder of the operation, the day to day care and supervision being taken on by adult volunteers, all SCDA members.

The rating is good, but I would have given the event good + if such a rating existed, only missing excellent because the next stage i.e. whether opportunity to put the learned skills into practice in their home clubs exists, has still to be explored and tested.

Quality

Content

There were five workshops in all covering drama/improv (2 of these); musical theatre; sets and props; street dance/movement. I had seen the work of the two drama tutors, Gerry Ramage and Joel Houck before, but had never previously experienced the work of the rest of the professional team.

Dance (Christine Naysmith)

Christine was teaching high-energy street dance sequences to a group of about 10 boys and girls. The focus was on memorising the sequences with the brain as well as the body and having the satisfaction of putting these sequences together to make a finished performance. There was no thematic thread, nor did there need to be – it was movement for the joy and athleticism of it. This content was absolutely appropriate for the group, all of whom were totally engaged by it to the point of rehearsing by themselves in corners during the 'water' break.

Drama (Gerry Ramage)

Gerry was working on improvised speech and movement as a preface to, and preparation for, working on a scripted extract from Jonathon Livingston Seagull. The participants were asked to work on single words which meant 'holiday' to them and then interpret the words through movement, a kind of moving tableau sequence. His aim was to help them feel free in improvisation, use their creativity, and feel relaxed about movement, being together and working as a team. The content was challenging and enjoyable in just the right balance

Drama (Joel Houck)

Joel had set his group the task of using body and face only – no speech – to interpret a variety of emotions in an improvised situation of their own choosing. The group was subdivided into groups of two or three for this exercise. We saw the outcomes of two of these, which were very successful in achieving the desired outcome. Again the content was very suitable for the group, but quite challenging as well, for young people some of whom would not have much experience of this way of working.

Sets and props (Emma McIntyre)

The participants were asked, in 2 groups, to design a set on paper for Midsummer Night's Dream, ' budget unlimited', and then having completed this task and discussed the outcomes, they were told the imaginary budget was no longer available and they must re-design on a zero budget. The suggestion was made that it could be set outdoors so all explored the woodland and environs to find the right spots, and then objects to complete a make do and mend set. These were then critiqued by their peers in the other group as to appropriateness, practicality and aesthetics. This was clearly an absorbing exercise for the young people and gave loads of opportunities for creativity and thought.

Musical theatre(Craig Serrels)

This was possibly the most challenging of the workshops, as Craig was working on the music for Les Miserables (although stage movement was also part of this workshop, I viewed only the music part). The music is difficult and the group was very small so putting together the harmonies was a challenge and at least one adult had been drafted in to give weight to the lower register. Despite this all were working with a will, but 'note-bashing' for an hour or two is hard-going, and I felt it could have been leavened with a change of activity for some of the time, somewhere in the mix.

Approach of tutors

All of the tutors without exception had an absolutely professional attitude at all times while interacting with the young people (in their different ways of course) admirably. All wore the same relaxed dress as the participants and all were firm, but friendly and humorous, while all were clear too about what they expected in the way of commitment and work. As an example, Gerry had a somewhat sticky group who found it hard to be free in expression both movement and speech. When he saw he wasn't getting the best out of them he went back to the beginning of the workshop trying to relax them with start-up exercises and so on then returning to the work at hand with great success. He was not willing to just let unacceptable standards of outcome slip by. I felt that Fiona Rogan had had a hand in ensuring that the standard of the professional team was high, and if this is so she succeeded admirably.

Response of participants

I spoke to several of the participants informally here and there and noticed how they reacted to their tutors and workshops. It was clear that all were getting a great deal out of what they were doing and out of the camp and the sharing of experiences with like-minded youngsters. In terms of the workshops, they were without exception focussed and absorbed. And there was the additional fun and interest of meeting the USA groups, and working with them. In fact I felt that this way of working would be very good for the visitors. In talking to their tutors it was clear that they do not pursue drama in the

classroom in the same way as we do in Scotland – it is more orientated towards theatre arts and acting skills.

Since the tradition of hosting the visit from the US has been in operation, another tradition has been ongoing. A theatre game learned from a previous visiting group is played right at the beginning of the visit with all the young people – this initiated by the young people themselves - and I have to say that it was very heart-warming to see them enjoying this game together and bonding on the spot. A great opportunity for both sets of young people.

Strategic contribution re Scottish Arts Council Aims

To increase participation in the arts

The summer camp certainly fulfils this aim, with around 60 young people having an intensive week of arts activities, all theatre related, which could only have sent them away, both more knowledgeable but also exited about the theatre and theatre arts. This is intensely valuable in itself of course, but SCDA is aware that the next step is to ensure that leaders, directors, and volunteers working within the SCDA membership need to be made aware that bringing these skills into dramaturgy, production and performance is very important. The next step is to train those people – the non-professionals – to allow them to increase their knowledge, and Fiona is, apparently working through plans for that next step now.

To support artists in Scotland to fulfil their creative and business potential

Not really applicable although the plans referred to above might fit into this category in terms of amateur artists.

To place the arts, culture and creativity at the heart of learning

This was an informal learning context, and none the less valuable for that. The use of professional tutors is vital and should be valued and maintained, so that the opportunities for learning are not lost. The learning is not simply about theatre. A great many priceless transferable skills are learned from working in this way.

Management of Event

Excellent, from both the administrative team and the volunteers – all of the latter seemed experienced, sensible, cheerful and willing. Broomlee is a terrific place to have a summer camp, with its rural setting. Although the fittings and fixtures are getting a bit dated it retains its rural charm and feeling of being a world of its own which I remember from my school camp days in the venue.

Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding

Although on the SCDA's website, it states that the post of Arts Development officer is 'funded by the Scottish Arts Council' there is no sign of the SAC logo anywhere on he site. I did not see any of the SCDA's printed material so cannot comment on acknowledgment of SAC anywhere else.

Name: SYLVIA DOW
Date: AUGUST 8 2006

Advisor

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Scottish Arts Council Officer

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