



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: Scottish Dance Theatre
Venue: His Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen
Title of Event: Autumn 2007 tour
Type of Event: performance
Date of Visit: 15 November 2007
Overall Rating: Good

In this programme, Scottish Dance Theatre demonstrated its consistent ability to produce intelligent and thought-provoking choreography performed with commitment and rigour. The works presented, *Sorry for the Missiles* and *Tenderhooks* are two distinctive and original pieces of choreography. Overall, however, I wasn't convinced that on their own, the two works created a sufficiently substantial or diverse programme reflective of Scottish Dance Theatre's artistic ambitions.

It would appear that the company have a loyal audience base in Aberdeen and it would now be encouraging to see this grow.

Name: Anita Clark

Date: 30/11/2007

Scottish Arts Council Officer

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.	4	SDT presented a double bill of two distinctive pieces from the company's current repertoire; <i>Sorry for the Missiles!</i> choreographed by Vanessa Haska and <i>Tenderhooks</i> , choreographed by Liv Lorent. <i>Sorry for the Missiles!</i> was created through the Peter Darrell Trust Choreographic Awards earlier this year and I have seen the piece on a number of occasions including the company's performances at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. <i>Tenderhooks</i> was a new commission for the company's Autumn programme. They are two works distinctive and contrasting pieces of choreography, with <i>Sorry for the Missiles!</i> following a strong narrative, dance-theatre approach and <i>Tenderhook</i> working with the visual and emotional vocabulary of the movement.
All (if relevant)	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.	3	With two pieces, each approximately 30mins long, in the programme it was a relatively short performance. I am aware that in some of the venues a further piece was included in the programme. This is always a difficult judgement to make, but on this occasion, I felt that another work was needed to create a more substantial programme in terms of length and also to add to the journey that the audience was taken on. One of SDT's real strengths as a company is in the diversity of the work and a further piece would have given the audience more opportunity to experience this range.
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	4	The publicity offered the following description ' <i>Scotland's leading dance theatre company presents a new season of original dance to take your breath away...</i> ' The two works presented were original and innovative. The sheer visual beauty in <i>Tenderhooks</i> was breathtaking and I feel the company succeeded in achieving the aims communicated.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	5	Scottish Dance Theatre has seen some changes in the dancers in the company since the previous season. The quality of the performance – technically, emotionally and in connecting with the audience, is however consistent.

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	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	4	<p>Both pieces demonstrate originality of intention and strong artistic conviction. <i>Sorry for the Missiles</i>, utilises theatrical approaches, text and song as well as movement to explore issue of war on the life's of individuals and communities. It is strong on ideas and creates a distinctive impression, however it is difficult to sustain the level of intensity throughout the work and I feel that at points the movement vocabulary becomes repetitive. As a work created by an emerging choreographer as part of a choreographic award process, it demonstrates much potential, integrity and intelligence.</p> <p><i>Tenderhooks</i>, is a visually sensual work which plays with a recurring motif of swirling ribbons that the dancers manipulate from their arms to create shimmers of movement, radiating from their bodies. The delicate movement brings mystical qualities, especially at the beginning of the work with some dancers on pointe, hovering within the weaving patterns created by the ribbons. The piece includes effective and beautifully emotive partner work which struggles to defy the gravitational pull, however I would have enjoyed seeing the range of dynamics in the choreography given further exploration.</p>
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	-	N/A
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	4	The direction in both pieces was effective and with committed performances from all the dancers. I was aware that one of the dancers was not performing due to injury and that this was covered by one of the apprentice dancers and through changes in the execution of the choreography. This was not noticeable to the audience.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	4	Recorded music was used in this programme. <i>Sorry for the missiles</i> used a collection of traditional Romanian, Croation and Italian folk music which was important in establishing the overall feel and storytelling in the piece. The music for <i>Tenderhook</i> was by composer, Ezio Bosso and is sighted by the choreographer in being central to the choreographic inspiration. The quality of the musical presentation was good.
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.	4	<p>Costume design is appropriate to the works with everyday clothes in <i>Sorry for the Missiles</i>, distinctively honing the time period for the work. Minimal set is used to great effect in this work, especially the washing-line with the shirts.</p> <p>The costumes in <i>Tenderhooks</i> were short dresses and trousers, picking up the colours of the ribbons. There was no set. Lighting design in both works is evocative and extremely effective.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
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>	5	An excellent evening technically.
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 was about 30-40% of the venue capacity which is disappointing as SDT perform regularly at HMT and it would be encouraging to see the audience grow. It was, however, a broad audience in terms of age range and there was an enthusiastic reaction to the work, especially the second piece.
All	<p>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.</p>	-	A pre-show talk with Janet Smith, Artistic Director was open to all audience members, however I am unable to comment on this as I did not attend.
All	<p>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)?</p>	-	I am unaware of any education activities linked to the performances in Aberdeen.

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	The SDT programme worked well on the stage at HMT and sightlines are good from the auditorium. The venue was at approx 30-40% capacity but the given the intimate nature of the auditorium this is not off-putting for audience members.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	A free booklet-style programme was distributed to the audience. It included an overview of the company, as well as information on all the current rep and biographies of the collaborators and dancers. It was cleanly designed and included strong images serving as an effective interpretive tool for the company's work as well as a good souvenir of the occasion.
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.	This performance was presented as part of SDT's Autumn 2007 programme which opened in Dundee in September. The tour was publicised through leaflets, mailings and at the time of the season opening, preview coverage in the national press. Travelling to Aberdeen only for the performance I am unable to comment on the level of publicity of the performance in the city.
Ease of booking and payment	I booked over the phone and collected the ticket prior to the performance. This transaction was straight forward and box office staff were efficient and helpful.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	His Majesty's Theatre is in the centre of Aberdeen, close to public transport links and with parking facilities close by.
External signage and signposting	His Majesty's Theatre is very distinctive with strong signage and signposting in the city.
Internal directional signage	Internal signage is appropriate.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	The redeveloped HMT includes physical access to all areas of the building.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The performance started at 7.30pm and finished just before 9pm with one 20minute interval. It is always difficult to judge but perhaps a third piece of work in the programme might
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	All staff encountered were helpful and friendly.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	SAC funding was acknowledged on the publicity and the back of the programme. There is acknowledgement of funders on the company's website, however this is only on the contacts page and could be given more prominence.

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

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.

We agree it would be nice to be able offer a third piece in the programme at Aberdeen as befits a large scale venue. However, since in the past we have had difficulty achieving our technical aims with the quality of support offered at the venue, we decided not to include the third work with its extra technical needs.

An option to bring back a less technically demanding work previously shown at the venue – In the Middle of the Moment - would have worked well as a third piece in this programme. But our current scheduling did not allow time to remount the work.

In the event we found the technical support at HMT Aberdeen had improved and – as the evaluation report shows, we achieved excellent presentational values. We are encouraged to consider a more substantial programme for our next visit.

Thanks for the feedback.

**Janet Smith
Artistic Director
Scottish Dance Theatre**

