



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: Zoo Southside
Title of Event : Scottish Dance Theatre
Type of Event: Edinburgh Fringe 2008 performance
Date of Visit: Saturday 23 August
Overall Rating: 4 - GOOD

This is a strong double-bill of innovative, imaginative medium-scale dance from Scotland's flagship contemporary dance company. Schecter's *Dog* is a torrent of eclectic movement performed at breathtaking speed; Lorent's *Tenderhook* an ethereal dream sequence that packs an emotional punch. Two complementary pieces performed with passion by very able dancers.

Name: Ellie Carr Date 15 Sept 2008

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.	4	<p>Scottish Dance Theatre has become known for double and triple-bills of dance-theatre where dramatic skills and personalities matter as much as choreography. Focussing more on pure dance, this Edinburgh Fringe double has less of that 'something-for-everyone' appeal. But both Liv Lorent's <i>Tenderhook</i> and Hofesh Schechter's <i>Dog</i> have vision and imagination in spades. From choreography to music and costumes, there is nothing borrowed or copied about these two group pieces. With Schechter's piece in particular this means segments can seem a little obscure, but there is no doubting their originality. Quite different aesthetically they contrast well.</p> <p>With its intricate ribbon twirling, girls and boys on pointe, velvet/chiffon costumes and sweeping, filmic soundtrack it has a delicacy and lyrical beauty rare in medium-scale contemporary dance. With little lights on the ends of their gymnastic-style ribbons the eight dancers seem like human fireworks, a parade of fireflies, an ethereal Mardi Gras. But it is not just a pretty diversion. As their lights fade so too does the performers energy; the piece becoming a poignant study of fading power and even the struggle against impending death. As with Lorent's other piece for SDT there is an emotional charge that grows unexpectedly from this quite beautiful, otherworldly work.</p> <p>Hofesh Schechter's <i>Dog</i> is almost prodigious. With dancers in stylised street clothes it has a semi-urban, mob-like feel to it. The movement – a typically magpie-like mix of everyday, contemporary and street dance – comes in a torrent. Powered by the equally eclectic soundtrack (also by Schechter) it changes from salsa footwork to rave-style 'hands-in-the-air', from explosive to melting, mercurial in the blink of an eye. As the eight dancers react almost animalistically to the sounds they are bombarded the whip-cracking pace is almost too much to take in.</p> <p>Some of Schechter's music and movement is quite harsh and difficult to watch. But the way he edits it together; the pace and sheer energy of his work is quite breathtaking to watch.</p>
All (if relevant)	<p>Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.</p> <p>If the event is part of a Festival,</p>	4	<p>As always these two works have been commissioned and produced by Scottish Dance Theatre itself. Artistic director Janet Smith has a history of choosing innovative international choreographers over the most popular – but retaining an air of accessibility relevant to SDT. Lorent's second SDT work marks a growing and</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	<p>please say how it contributes to the overall programme.</p>		<p>hugely successful relationship with the company; Schechter's <i>Dog</i> was his first major commission outside his own company and a coup for SDT with his star very much in the ascendant. The two works chosen for this year's Fringe appearance were originally commissioned for the company's 2008 <i>Defined</i> tour, celebrating both its 21st anniversary and Smith's 10th in charge. Intended to demonstrate SDT's 'coming-of-age' they are both suitably eye-catching works that showcase the company's dance and performance skills: the only flaw being that with a few key dancers having left the company is still not yet as tight as it has been in previous years. The company is becoming a regular fixture at Zoo Southside during the Fringe; doing a great job of flying the flag for Scottish contemporary dance.</p>
All	<p>Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.</p> <p>Education events – see ¹below for guidance</p>	5	<p>Janet Smith leaves a personal message on the SDT printed programme explaining that: “SDT regularly commissions, creates and tours original work by a diverse range of innovative choreographers”</p> <p>It is a simple, refreshingly unpretentious aim and this double-bill does exactly what it says on the tin. There are comments from both Lorent and Schechter – more on their choreographic process than actual 'aims'. These are helpful and illuminating nonetheless; demonstrating how organic and collaborative the creative process can be for contemporary dance. Lorent describes a desire to create work that expresses those feelings we sometimes cannot articulate. <i>Tenderhook</i>, like her previous SDT work <i>Luxuria</i>, very much has that 'inutterable' emotional charge that dance does so well.</p>
All	<p>Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.</p> <p>Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.</p>	4	<p>The technical skills of SDT are high and particularly appropriate to the type of dance-theatre they specialise in. In many ways their ability to communicate and engage is their biggest strength. With some new-ish recruits and apprentice dancers company has a sparky energy at the moment which suits this particular double-bill. But as mentioned previously the maturity and roundedness of previous years is not as strong.</p>
Dance, Theatre	<p>Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc</p>	5	<p>The use of original movement vocabulary is outstanding throughout. From everyday movement to social dance styles, from beautiful lyrical steps to gawky, awkward ones; both Schechter and Lorent have an astonishing, pick n mix palette. The Zoo Southside stage is a slightly awkward shape but space is used well and fully, with the number of</p>

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
			dancers (eight) and length of performance (80 mins including break) ideal for a Fringe dance show.
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.	3	Issues of interpretation and presentation less relevant here as both are original pieces debuted by Scottish Dance Theatre. Casting is mostly excellent with all company members used well. Though some of the newer dancers possibly overstretched. The use of men on pointe in Lorent's <i>Tenderhook</i> is questionable; not for aesthetic reasons but because feet and ankles in one case were simply not strong enough and looked very unstable. This was a clear case for either changing the choreography to suit technical ability or using another dancer (even if female) in the role.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	4	<p>Original recorded soundtracks from Exio Bosso (<i>Tenderhook</i>) and Schechter himself for <i>Dog</i>.</p> <p>Bosso's soundtrack has an expansive, near filmic quality and emotional undercurrents that chime beautifully with <i>Tenderhook</i>'s otherworldly feel.</p> <p>Schechter's role as both choreographer and musicmaker comes into its own here. Flicking back and forth from ecclesiastical to industrial it is impossible to separate the music from the dance. At times the music is pretty abrasive, but so intertwined with the movement it's impossible not to be swept along at its breakneck pace.</p>
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>Both pieces are performed on a bare stage. But lighting design in both cases (Jon Clark for <i>Tenderhook</i>; Bruno Poet for <i>Dog</i>) is effective and atmospheric and well suited to both the Zoo Southside stage and the other small-medium-scale venues SDT visits.</p> <p>Paul Shriek's costume design for <i>Tenderhook</i> is lovely and essential to the effectiveness of the choreography. Raspberry and mint velvet and floaty chiffon over sheer figure-hugging base layers complement the twirling ribbons of the piece beautifully. It's nice to see medium-scale dance where costumes have as much thought invested as steps.</p>
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</p>	4	Technical presentation was tight for both pieces lending an air of professionalism you don't always get on the Fringe.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	<p>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>		
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>		<p>This show was a great find for Fringe dance-lovers; though those unused to contemporary dance may have found it more challenging.</p> <p>The auditorium was around 5/6s full when I attended. There was a good buzz with a mix of ages and types and the audience was very appreciative. The few I spoke to in the interval were impressed by the standard of the dancers and the complexity of the choreography.</p>
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>	N/A	<p>No evidence of any additional interpretative activities at this venue. Though SDT regularly hosts education activities linked to repertoire both at its Dundee base and whilst on tour.</p>
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>	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	Zoo Southside is becoming SDT's Fringe home and is adequate for its purposes. A slightly bigger stage/auditorium would be great for this company's repertoire and audience-building but not easy during the Fringe.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Pretty poor at this venue. Some material posted in the small foyer area; but on the railings outside every company except SDT had been given a display. Passing trade would not be aware that SDT was performing at this venue.
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.	I didn't see much in the way of pre-publicity for this event. Press releases were sent out and a news story posted up on the SDT website plus info on Zoo venues website, but not much else seen in the Fringe melee. All materials seen were of good quality and easily understood. The SDT website is excellent and very user-friendly.
Ease of booking and payment	Tickets bought through Fringe website. This experience was frustrating at best and shambolic at worst.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	As Fringe venues go Zoo Southside is pretty easy to find. It is within easy walking distance of the High Street and served by a host of city bus routes.
External signage and signposting	External signage and signposting is prominent and inviting.
Internal directional signage	This is a small venue so not too difficult to navigate. However more prominent signs indicating the different stages would be helpful.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Disabled access to the building is via a footpath around the side. Disabled toilets on first floor. Main hall accessible via lift at rear of building.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	At one-hour ten minutes (inc ten minute interval) this was ideal length for a Fringe performance. The start time was an early-evening slot of 6pm – again quite good for a Fringe performance as evening slots are prime and this leaves time to catch another show or go for dinner.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Zoo has a rather relaxed attitude to FOH which is not untypical for the Fringe. In this case FOH had to be prompted to break private conversations and direct me to the correct auditorium. Ushers within the auditorium seemed more efficient.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Scottish Arts Council Funding displayed prominently on all materials.

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 (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.