



### 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:** Scottish Dance Theatre  
**Venue:** Dundee Repertory Theatre  
**Title of Event :** Scottish Dance Theatre (Autumn tour 2010)  
**Type of Event:** Live dance-theatre performance  
**Date of Visit:** 20.11.09  
**Overall Rating:** **Very Good**

This is a visually appealing and atmospheric double-bill from Scotland's national contemporary dance company. New work, *A Visitation* (Ina Christel Johannessen), and 'signature' piece, *Luxuria* (Liv Lorent), share the winning formula of being both original and accessible: making for an entertaining evening of dance-theatre. The pieces share a similar aesthetic and the fast-flow pace suits the dynamic young cast. If anything they are too similar in look and feel: lack of contrast being the sole criticism.

Name: Ellie Carr

Date: 22.01.10

Scottish Arts Council Officer

**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 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	Vision and imagination of work <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>	Excellent	<p>Liv Lorent's <i>Luxuria</i> and Ina Christel Johannessen's <i>A Visitation</i> both overflow with vision and imagination. These vivid dance-theatre works are so redolent with ideas and imagery they border on fantastical: creating mini-worlds you want to step into.</p> <p><i>Luxuria</i> (2004) is a 33-minute work that conjures an otherworldly atmosphere with near childlike creatures dressed in all-white 'straitjackets' with trailing fronds and cocoon-like crinolines. Spinning across stage like rocket-fuelled tumbleweed, the eight dancers are so inquisitive and wide-eyed they seem newborn; turning simple exploratory movements (like the recurring spinning motif) into virtuoso displays of whirling limbs, skirts and fronds. <i>Luxuria</i> could be esoteric and drippy but its sheer dynamism is as energising as it is hypnotic.</p> <p>The piece has had a lot of exposure and is now described as 'signature'. It looks different on every cast and on this comparatively new, young version of SDT it feels invigorated.</p> <p><i>A Visitation</i> is new (February 2009) and SDT's first commission from prominent Norwegian choreographer, Johannessen. Taking its cue from a collection of short stories by Polish writer Bruno Schultz, it too creates a vividly palpable stage 'world', this time populated by five mannequins/puppets (each with its own character and back story), five people and five 'ghosts'.</p> <p>The action takes place in a Rennie Macintosh-styled attic (a nice touch) where the five living (in deconstructed tartan) and five ghosts (in wispy white) seem to battle for possession of the space. The fleet-footed ghosts are either eerily still or demonically disruptive, with Naomi Murray in frayed wedding dress noising up James MacGillivray's all-too-mortal character with brilliantly impish wit and devilment. She plays this as an expertly pitched update on the favourite 'woman scorned' from romantic ballet. But you need not know this to enjoy the fragments and suggestions of storylines evoked by this strong piece of dance-theatre.</p>
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection <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>	Good	<p>Both pieces are typical of the quirky but accessible brand of dance-theatre that is SDT's domain. The house style is aesthetically appealing and far more concerned with theatricality than highly technical dance routines. If anything though, <i>Luxuria</i> and <i>A Visitation</i> are too similar to provide a varied double-bill. Both are very design and costume-led for medium-scale contemporary work and even share</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			<p>a common pace and energy. A contrasting piece may have suited the bill better. It could also be argued that <i>Luxuria</i> has become over-exposed having appeared on numerous bills in recent years. However it is noted that SDT has toured nationally and internationally in 2009 with a rotation of seven pieces: a huge undertaking for a medium-sized company.</p>
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>	Very good	<p>SDT has always been very good at stating and fulfilling its aims. Artistic Director Janet Smith's words on the website encapsulate the organisation's vision nicely. "I think of SDT as a family sized cottage industry whose driving force is a passion to create and perform dance that explores the human condition and what it is to be alive in the world today". <i>Janet Smith</i></p> <p>The programme and other printed material back this up in clear and cohesive manner. SDT's method of printing audience quotes alongside press ones is both refreshing and grounding.</p> <p>As so often with contemporary dance both pieces aim to convey a 'feeling' rather than a theme or distinct narrative. With <i>Luxuria</i>, Lorent, talks of taking a personal feeling or experience and trying to express the universality of that through dance. The piece certainly produces an emotional response from the audience. But what's interesting is that each brings their own story and interpretation to it – and it is no less rich for that. Johannessen has drawn more directly from source material (Schultz's writing). But she uses this to inspire setting and mood rather than storyline. The resulting sense of overlapping worlds; of living co-existing with dead is powerful and compelling.</p> <p>This was a direct commission by Janet Smith for Scottish Dance Theatre. One of Smith's great strengths is her ability to pick interesting choreographers and give them space to create original work that still fits the company's remit.</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>	Very good	<p>This is a relatively young cast for Scottish Dance Theatre: full of energy and fizzing with life. All are lovely dancers but will be good to see them develop into more mature performers. The dramatic aspect of SDT's work means the company relies on a quota of mature, experienced dancers. These are a little thin on the ground at present.</p> <p>One of SDT's traditional strengths is its ability to communicate with its audience. The connection</p>

<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
			<p>here was strong, as ever, though a little more dramatic depth would be good. Naomi Murray stands out in this respect: a fireball of energy whose personality reaches out beyond the stage.</p>
Dance, Theatre	<p>Choreography/Use of choreography</p> <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>	Very good	<p>Choreography in both works was highly original. Both Lorent and Johhannessen have great dynamic energy and flow to their work and do not seem tied to any particular movement style. If there is something stylistic that unites them it is an underlying athleticism coupled with an ability to create instinctive movement that stems directly from the subject matter/aesthetic in hand. Johhannessen makes reference to the supernatural obsessions of romantic ballet in her work. But this is deftly and lightly handled.</p> <p>The space is used well in both cases. As touring pieces they play on compact stages and <i>Luxuria</i> uses this audience proximity well with dancers coming so far forward you can see the whites of their eyes. There is a real sense of intimacy here. <i>A Visitation</i> uses the back of the stage beautifully as a piece of visual framing. As touched on before, the tableaux set up with dancers holding poses, mannequins and assorted bits of junk-shop style set brings a real sense of depth and point of interest to the stage.</p> <p><i>Luxuria</i> is an eight-dancer piece; used fairly evenly as an ensemble with intermittent solos and small-group sequences. <i>A Visitation</i> uses the whole company of ten fairly equally; creating an effective showcase for both dance and dramatic talents.</p> <p><i>Luxuria</i> is 33 minutes; <i>A Visitation</i>, 38 minutes. It's a nice time frame for an atmospheric piece of dance. But oddly both feel longer than they are and could have done with a change of pace in both cases. The energy is good but too samey.</p>
Theatre	<p>Script</p> <p>Please comment on this for:</p> <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>	N/A	
Theatre, Dance	<p>Direction</p> <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>	Very good	<p>Both works well handled, with the dancers showing great sensitivity to the individual choreographer's style; though as mentioned previously maturity will bring greater depth to the current line-up.</p> <p>With a small company like this there the choreographer works with what they have, however the dancers were used well here and given tasks that suit their abilities and stretched them artistically.</p> <p>The production was slick and well presented, as is typical for SDT.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
Dance, Theatre	<b>Use of music</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the music/ sound used enhance the production?</li> <li>• Is it live or recorded?</li> </ul>	Very good	<p>Good use of music; the orchestral sweep of <i>Luxuria's</i> score (various composers; sound editor, Ben Ponton) is suitably emotive and makes a welcome change to the ubiquitous dance 'soundscape'.</p> <p>The original score for <i>A Visitation</i> is by two Norwegian composers, Svarte Greiner and Elegi. It's great to hear new music you might not otherwise be exposed to – and this atmospheric soundtrack is almost filmic (they are aspiring film composers) in its scope and scene-setting haunted feel.</p> <p>All music is pre-recorded.</p>
Dance, Theatre	<b>Design</b> <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>	Excellent	<p>The costumes in both cases are events in themselves. Paul Shriek's distressed straitjackets and stripped-bare crinolines for <i>Luxuria</i> are so striking and well utilised they become aspects of the choreography. No set for <i>Luxuria</i>; lighting suitably atmospheric.</p> <p>Costume, set and lighting all good for <i>A Visitation</i>. Scottish artist Keiron Sweeney's mannequins (crafted from old bits of furniture) make interesting objects; but I'm not convinced they add anything to the piece. Kathrine Tolo's costumes are fantastic; the deconstructed Westwood-style tartan a wry, witty touch. The set has a wonderful junk-shop/untouched attic magic to it.</p> <p>Technically excellent throughout.</p>
All	<b>Quality of Public Engagement</b> <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>	Excellent	<p>SDT has a searchlight approach targeting anyone and everyone it can! There is no room here for the idea that contemporary dance is for a small, specialist audience. SDT (and Dundee Rep in general) draws one of the broadest, most mixed crowds in the business. At first glance it looks like the work is too offbeat for the audience. But it's presented so warmly and with such inclusiveness it works.</p> <p>I was definitely engaged and inspired; though some drifting did take place due to lack of pace change. The audience were captivated. We were flanked by two elderly ladies on one side; a young adult with special needs and carer on the other. All chattered excitedly in-between pieces (and sometimes during) and were wowed by the skill and spectacle on display. A fantastic vibe and enthusiastic audience response.</p> <p>There was approximately 500 in audience and one of the best audience mixes in Scotland.</p> <p>BSL/captioned/audio n/a here.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			An 'SDT Interactive' event was available to those looking for a more in-depth experience. Lasting one hour 45 minutes and costing £5, the event is part lecture-demonstration, part matinee performance and offers an insight into the creative process. The company performs bits of rep and relates them to music, lighting and design. Participants are encouraged to articulate their responses and analyse what they see. Available to everyone, but seem targeted at school students. School and community workshops are also available.

## 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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dundee Rep is centrally located so easy to find for locals. For those coming from outside Dundee it is reasonably easy to find by car, train or bus; though could be better signposted from town centre.</li> <li>Train station and buses nearby, just off motorway – five minute walk from all main transport routes.</li> <li>Spaces are cleaned to standard for a busy arts venue.</li> <li>Sightlines are good throughout; no obscured views.</li> <li>A good-sized medium-scale stage and auditorium for a local arts venue.</li> </ul>
<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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wide range of posters and displays in foyer with striking dance photography featuring a dynamic action shot from Luxuria</li> <li>Both Dundee Rep and SDT's websites are full of useful and interesting information. Dundee Rep's is easy to navigate though links to SDT's site-within-a-site could be more obvious. SDT's has some great background on the company and its work for anyone curious to learn more. Since audiences associate so strongly with individual dancers perhaps there is room for enhanced profiles and more from the performers themselves.</li> </ul>
<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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coming from outside Dundee the main source of pre-publicity was from national and regional newspapers, arts websites and The List events guide etc. I did not notice much in the way of posters/leaflets in the Edinburgh area; though to be fair I didn't visit as many venues etc as usual in November. As a previous customer I received email and text alerts about the performance.</li> <li>The event was publicised in the general Dundee Rep brochure and with individual glossy fliers.</li> <li>All publicity materials are accessible and attractively laid-out.</li> <li>There is prominent acknowledgement of SAC funding throughout</li> </ul>

<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,

Criteria	Comment																
Ease of booking and payment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Booking made online; tickets collected on the night. This was easy and straightforward; dedicated FOH staff available on night to distribute pre-paid tickets: a nice touch which takes guesswork out of where to queue.</li> </ul>																
Timing of the event <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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traditional start time of 8pm/end time 9.30pm which seems to suit regulars. Many grab a bite to eat in the restaurant and stay for a drink afterwards.</li> <li>Two short pieces made the evening a little short; brief filler might have padded things out and brought contrast to the bill.</li> </ul>																
Signage and signposting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the entrance clearly marked?</li> <li>Is there clear internal directional signage?</li> <li>Is there Braille signage or signage for audio loops?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The entrance is clearly marked and the building highly visible with is glass-fronted exterior and welcoming open foyer.</li> <li>Good internal signage in general, although the foyer/restaurant area is a little cramped and the toilets can be hard to locate.</li> <li>There is Braille signage and signage for audio loops.</li> </ul>																
Access and provision for disabled people <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> Please add in any additional comments below the table <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many BSL/captioned/audio described performances are there at the venue?</li> </ul>	<table border="1" data-bbox="571 703 1490 1126"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Yes/No</th> <th></th> <th>Yes/No</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>BSL interpretation</td> <td>Yes (venue)</td> <td>Audio description of performances</td> <td>Yes (venue)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Captioning</td> <td>Yes (venue)</td> <td>Lift/ramp</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Accessible toilets</td> <td>Yes</td> <td>Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Dundee Rep is committed to at least one BSL/Captioned performance per company's own production; audio description is also available – two performances scheduled over a recent three-month period.</p>		Yes/No		Yes/No	BSL interpretation	Yes (venue)	Audio description of performances	Yes (venue)	Captioning	Yes (venue)	Lift/ramp	Yes	Accessible toilets	Yes	Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English	Yes
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Customer service <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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality and efficiency of staff excellent throughout. Staff seem to be well retained here and audiences benefit from their experience.</li> <li>No disabled persons in my party. But during this visit wheelchair users seemed well catered for and guided to relevant spaces throughout.</li> </ul>																

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.