



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 Ensemble
Venue:	Wigmore Hall, London
Title of Event:	Scottish Ensemble with Toby Spence
Type of Event:	Concert
Date of Visit:	13 October 2007
Overall Rating:	4

(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 an excellent concert by a performing ensemble of the highest quality. The programming, while fairly safe (focused on 20thC English composers), was imaginative and featured an arrangement created especially for the ensemble by Artistic Director and lead violinist Jonathan Morton. The pieces chosen showcased the ensemble's virtuosity and their combined rich resonant tone. Of particular note was the Benjamin Britten 'Three Divertimenti' (arranged by Morton) which was a wonderful beginning to the concert. The string writing which featured much vigorous and driving '*marcato*' string playing, clearly suited the players and they performed this piece with great commitment and obvious enjoyment. Finzi's 'Dies Natalis' with Toby Spence (tenor solo) was slightly less successful in that it was a longer and less dynamic piece of music, much of which involved the ensemble acting as accompanists rather than soloists. It did not have quite the impact of the other pieces and felt as if it lost the audience and was overly long. In addition the sound relationship between singer and strings was not quite in balance.

The second piece – Finzi's 'Romance' – after the interval was more successful in that the players took centre stage again and the piece included more contrapuntal and vibrant string writing where the strength of the ensemble seems to lie. Finally, Walton's 'Sonata for Strings' was an intense and challenging piece for the ensemble. The more vibrant and lively sections really stood out but in contrast some of the very exposed slower sections felt a little unsure. However overall the piece came across very well and it was an ambitious choice. The sectional solos of this (and the other pieces) were very well executed in particular the lead viola Catherine Marwood. She has a fantastic rich and mellow tone and performed with passion and intensity.

It was a shame that there was not a larger audience for this excellent concert and I would encourage the Ensemble to think about working with venues down South as they do in Scotland to market future events to a wider circulation or offer some sort of deal to schools or colleges who would undoubtedly benefit from the opportunity to hear such a high quality of performance and professionalism.

Name: Rachel Nelken

Date: 18/10/2007

Specialist Advisor

~~Scottish Arts Council Officer~~

Please circle the relevant title

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	An interesting and fairly imaginative programme with a clear chronological stylistic theme. The three composers featured are fairly safe choices but the pieces chosen were not necessarily obvious and the arrangement of Britten's 'Three Divertimenti' for the double forces and bass of the Ensemble worked extremely well and created a huge and rich sound.
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.	4	The programme I think was chosen by the artistic director Jonathan Morton, who also leads the ensemble as first violin. The Scottish Ensemble aims to work with guest artists and this is how the collaboration with Toby Spence had come about. I assume that Finzi's 'Dies Natalis' was chosen first and the other composers fitted around as all English from a similar time period.
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 event achieved its aims in terms of being a committed and well executed performance of the programmed pieces. The only aspect that didn't work was the balance between the tenor soloist Toby Spence and the ensemble for the Finzi. His voice was occasionally lost in the 'tutti' sections especially when singing mid-range (which obviously blended too well with the majority of the strings).
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	The performers are of the highest quality both technically and artistically. This was obvious in their delivery and commitment to the performance they gave. Their individual biographies (listed as part of the programme) demonstrate impressive track records and each appear to be experienced soloists in their own right. They communicated with each other very well, immediately engaging with the audience, and they obviously take a real joy in playing together. Jonathan Morton leads them with a firm definition but without being obtrusive.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	n/a	
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	n/a	

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
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	n/a	
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	n/a	
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.	n/a	
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>	4	<p>The quality of the musical presentation of this concert was top-notch. The players looked fantastic as well as performing beautifully. Stylistically the overall presentation hit the right balance between formality, glamour and intimacy e.g. all were dressed in all black and the women wore evening dresses but the men didn't wear ties. Likewise, all players stood (I thought this was a little hard on the very pregnant violinist but assume she was happy to do so!) and I liked the very physical nature of the performance – a lot of movement and expression. Production wise the sound was fantastic apart from the Finzi with Toby Spence which as stated earlier had balance problems sound-wise and his voice was drowned at times. I am not sure if he was using a mic or not but I think he needed one or needed it turning up.</p> <p>The non-verbal cues from Jonathan or Toby during the Finzi worked very well with all players clearly responsive. I would, however, have liked to see a little bit of verbal communication with the audience by Jonathan and Toby by way of introduction to each piece, which was not offered – even just a brief word at the beginning of each half of the concert would have created a context for the feeling of musical intimacy which the ensemble through their playing did so well to provide.</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>The audience for this concert perhaps predictably were not particularly wide-ranging in socio-demographic terms. The venue was roughly 65% full and the majority of those attending were 30+ white and middle-class – a fairly standard 'classical music' audience. It seems a real shame that there were not more people there to witness such a wonderful performance, in particular string students who would no doubt have been inspired by the fantastic playing. Would it be a possibility to offer some free tickets to students or schools when performances look unlikely to sell out? The venue may also have something to do with the type of audience who looked to me like they were a 'Wigmore Hall' audience rather than perhaps a</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			'Scottish Ensemble' audience (inevitable perhaps when the ensemble is not so well known down south).
All	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.	0	I was not aware of any other events linked to this performance. A pre-concert talk on the 'pastoral movement' of 20 th C English composers or the chosen pieces would have worked extremely well and provided those in the audience who might not have been so familiar with the particular piece increased knowledge and understanding in advance of hearing the pieces.
All	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)?	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	The Wigmore Hall is a beautiful concert hall with a resonant acoustic very well suited for strings and was just about the right size. The nature of the venue however potentially may have dictated the audience make-up (as above).
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	A stall with Scottish Ensemble display material and CD recordings was positioned in the main lobby. The programme was nicely produced with information about each piece of music, photos and biographical material of the performers.
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.	The event had been advertised on the Wigmore Hall's website and the Scottish Ensemble's website. It was included in an overall programme of events for the Autumn Season at the Wigmore Hall but in addition I also found a generic 'Scottish Ensemble' programme available free in the leaflet racks which advertised the series of 2007/2008 concerts by the ensemble at the Wigmore Hall.
Ease of booking and payment	Very easy using their online booking system. However I found later that I had been charged twice for the tickets and had to ring the box office to arrange a refund. Once the mistake had been identified the box office refunded immediately.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Yes it is a central London venue and very easy to locate, very near a number of tube stations.
External signage and signposting	There was none that I saw relating to this particular event.
Internal directional signage	As above.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	The venue was accessible with a separate disabled entrance and the main hall is on the ground floor. I believe there is a lift downstairs to the bar.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Yes the timings were good, the whole concert was just under 2.5 hours with interval and felt like the right length. The start and finish times were extremely standard for such a concert and what would have been expected.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Excellent, good and helpful service.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Scottish Arts Council is clearly credited as a supporter in the programme and on the Scottish Ensemble's website.

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.