



Scottish **Arts** Council

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/Karen Matheson/Inverness Gaelic Choir

Venue: Inverness Cathedral

Title of Event: Blas Festival

Type of Event: Concert Performance

Date of Visit: 1 September 2007

Overall Rating: 5

Name: Ian Smith, Head of Music

Date: 4 September

~~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.	4/5	A really diverse and imaginative programme featuring Karen Mathieson with the Scottish Ensemble, but also providing an important platform for the Inverness Gaelic Choir, considering that Blas is a bilingual presentation equally featuring Gaelic.
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.	5	The event was part of the opening weekend of the Blas festival, now in its third year and establishing itself as a significant event, not least for the multiplicity of venues used throughout the Highlands and Islands, which whilst an administrative challenge, is extremely successful. The concert would have satisfied a wide variety of tastes and also included a much valued local support slot for the Gaelic Choir, who performed well.
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	4/5	Blas is a Festival that features community input alongside high profile professional artists. Its engaging and innovative programming is matched by the geographical diversity of the venues utilised and the support that creates for locally based promoters and venues.
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 Inverness Gaelic Choir are amateurs, but their opening contribution featuring a commission from Scottish composer; Stuart McRae whose opera was featured at the 2006 Edinburgh International Festival. This was a commission for the National Mod and was very effective. The high quality input from the Scottish Ensemble, featuring Greig's Holberg Suite, Walton's sonata for strings (3 rd Movt) and Bill Sweeney's Scottish Ensemble tour commission Gabhail a Chreig was performed with consummate professionalism and élan. With a backing band consisting of Donald Shaw, Ewen Vernal and James Grant, the audience was assured of a fantastic live experience. To add the Scottish Ensemble with arrangements from the pen of the late great Kevin McCrae was an added bonus and amply demonstrates that when the genre cross-over incorporates musicians and creative writing of such a high quality, the major beneficiaries are the audience, of which I was privileged to be one.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc		

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	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.		
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.		
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.		
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.		
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>	4/5	<p>The quality of the listening experience was only slightly diminished by the fact that Inverness Cathedral is not primarily a performance venue, but it does have an excellent live acoustic, especially relevant to the performers in this concert. Sight lines were a small problem, but all sections of the concert were introduced in English and in Gaelic by the Director of Blas, which was most helpful.</p> <p>Karen Matheson introduced all her songs personally and my personal highlight was an original song written for her by James Grant; All the Flowers on the Bough.</p>
All	<p>Audience</p> <p>Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction</p>		As reported above, the engagement with the audience was interactive and the response which included very generous encores was ample evidence of that.
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	
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	A cathedral is often acoustically good but not a perfect venue for audience. This was no exception, but the quality and diversity of the performance ensured that there were no complaints other than the queue for the outside toilets.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	No evidence outside the venue, but still a full house.
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.	Blas information has been being distributed liberally online and through mail-outs for a considerable time. The event was publicised by the Scottish Ensemble on their site too.
Ease of booking and payment	N/A
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Yes – in the centre of Inverness with adequate parking.
External signage and signposting	Poor.
Internal directional signage	N/A
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	There was a disabled access door with a ramp.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Good at 7.30pm.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Excellent and mostly Blas volunteers.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Scottish Ensemble acknowledged Scottish Arts Council funding in their programme.

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.

Comments from Arthur Cormack on behalf of Blas:

The Blas Festival is primarily a Highland Music Festival with a very strong Gaelic language input. We feel that it should be acknowledged that this was an innovative step for the festival to work with the Scottish Ensemble, and it was possible because of Karen Matheson's involvement which ensured a Gaelic element to what the Ensemble did.

We did not view the involvement of the Inverness Gaelic Choir as a 'support slot'. Blas makes a virtue of involving young people from Fèisean, the Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music and other Gaelic music groups in the festival programme, but none of them is necessarily viewed as a support to anyone else. Their input is an essential ingredient in fulfilling the remit of Blas.

There was signage at the door in the shape of a Blas pop-up banner which included the logo of the Scottish Arts Council, and Blas also acknowledged the SAC's support in all its publicity materials.