



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 Music Centre

Venue: City Halls, Glasgow

Title of Event: n/a

Type of Event: (e.g. performance, exhibition, informal showing, work-in-progress, workshop, screening, lecture etc)

Website

Date of Visit: n/a

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.)

The Scottish Music Centre provides a unique range of services for composers, professional musicians, young musicians, and the general public.

(The nature of this evaluation did not fit the format of the standard Artistic Evaluation form.)

Name: Rachel Nelken

Date: 13/10/2008

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.

Overview

Overall Rating: 3/4

In general I would say that the SMC website is broadly achieving its aim of delivering an online and comprehensive resource for all those involved in or interested in the Scottish music scene. With such a large outreach and portfolio of work however there are opportunities being missed both from a technical, creative and financial point of view and the website could be improved even in small ways to broaden and expand its reach and scope. Further development would require time and resources but could yield additional funds thereby paying for themselves.

First Impressions

Rating: 4

The URL for this site www.scottishmusiccentre.com is clearly intuitive- however my first thought was that it would be a.org or a.org.uk site – this domain name is currently not held and it would make sense for the SMC to purchase it if funds were available or to get it redirecting to the .com site as .org.uk currently posts up a 'failed' page.

The size of the home page is reasonable as it downloads pretty quickly (a key factor in conveying an efficient impression of the organisation). With a wide screen monitor the home page fits vertically on one screen so I did not have to scroll up and down but there are wide 'blank' spaces on either side; when we tested this on different screen resolutions we found this was also true of the now fairly standard 1024x768 and on further testing that the site had obviously been designed some time ago for a small monitor size of 800x600 as on this screen size the page fills the screen horizontally but you do have to scroll up and down. One recommendation could be to redesign the pages for 1024x768 – as this is the average screen size now it would mean that more information could fit on horizontally therefore no longer requiring users to scroll.

Readability is satisfactory with pages clear and easy to understand, and not cluttered with too much text or images. The font size is large enough to read but perhaps could be a bit darker.

However the 'mouse over' sectioning of the part of the page being read is effective.

The home page does not totally convey its 'unique selling point' communicating clearly to the user that this site is of use to them. The instant links through to services such as music jobs and news clips are helpful but the message from the home page is slightly confused by the headers which to give one example (these change regularly) are advertisements for the Tramway & Cryptic theatre and the free software available from the Sound Library. A user who was not familiar with the organisation's work may not get a clear impression from the home page of what the SMC was. There could be some kind of header with the SMC's mission statement/statement from management clearly across the top of the home page – this would allow the user to see the vision and values of the organisation straight away and it would then be clear why the rest of the information/links followed. Another aspect which could make the homepage more dynamic, help to clarify its purpose and add to the feeling of currency, would be a 'news' ticker along the top of the home page – where major new events/ programmes, funding opportunities, SMC projects, album releases etc. could all be advertised. This service could even be offered as an additional membership benefit for a small fee either as a one-off fee to members or as a higher rate of membership...or could be offered to anyone (with editing control) for a fee in order to raise additional revenue to support the site.

The site does encourage interaction and user participation from the outset by its direct links to key action points, and the impression from the home page is that the site has depth and should be explored further. The contact details are also shown at the bottom of the homepage which helps to give the site an open feel and a personal touch; these could be emboldened as I had to look for them.

Navigation

Rating: 4

The site is intuitive and easy to use and provides direct access to various content and facilities on the site. There is no site map but a side bar provides an alternative means of navigation with easy

to use drop down menus and the top main menu stays static throughout so users can return easily to the home page at any time.

The internal search engine on the site is essential as there is a substantial amount of content. On trial, using the jazz songwriter 'Niki King' it worked very well, giving locations for mentions within previous news items, projects and two albums of hers in the online shop. However it seems that the 'Music Jobs' vacancies are not included in this search facility – I typed in a couple of the jobs currently on site into the search engine and they did not come up. A user would need to go to the jobs page to find any jobs. As within the page itself there is no search facility, they would need to scroll through all the jobs available to find one they might be interested in. There are only 10 jobs currently advertised so it does not require much effort; if the numbers are generally this small then perhaps a search facility is not required but if they were larger this could be frustrating to a user. The site makes good use of internal links through the actual content as well as the navigation system to other pages on the site, other organisations, and forms such as print requests or personal contact emails, allowing the users to navigate through the site following the natural progression of the content. All links that I tested were working. Navigational links were constantly visible and consistent throughout the entire website.

Content

Rating: 3/4

The site is full of useful information which is generally of a high quality and clearly presented. It is not wholly clear where the 'authority' for the information has come from – again this would be made clear by the missions statement on the homepage (which could link directly to the 'about us' section for further information). The date shown on the home page helps to ensure the site and its information appears current although a date showing when pages were last updated would also support this.

The focus of the site is clear and the headings illustrate an outline of the content. The content appears objective and sources of information for factual data are generally obvious – some are direct such as the events listing which is a direct link to The List pages. This seems a sensible way to offer this function rather than duplicating the same information twice (which would require an enormous amount of management resource). Affiliations to partner organisations such as The List are made clear as are the funders (SAC and PRSF) whose logos are part of the static sidebar which is shown on every page.

There is a good level of interaction possibilities in this website, affording the casual user the opportunity to engage with it both by searching for events, individual composers/bands or jobs or utilising the free online software or online databases. For musicians who wish to register as a member there is a straightforward process to do this – however it appears that you can't sign up online but only request an information pack. This may put some potential members off – a facility to sign up online including a direct debit facility for the monthly membership fee could be considered?

With regard to the industry directory which lists members a few searches undertaken discovered that while some listings were extremely comprehensive there were no details on others. Is this because in order to have a full listing you must be a member? If so then this is not entirely clear and someone (e.g. a student or a promoter) who was wanting to find out more information on an artist (e.g. Catriona Macdonald who is only listed as a fiddle player but with no biographical details) would wonder why this was the case when some of her contemporaries have full listings in the directory. Perhaps there needs to be a clear statement that the industry directory features in full only those who are members. This also raised a questions as to how the directory was promoted to the wider Scottish music scene - perhaps if artists/suppliers etc currently not listed were in some way directly targeted with information as to the value of being onsite this would encourage those who had not signed up to do so.

Another cause of some confusion from personal knowledge of the centre's work was that under the 'Projects' section there seemed to be no mention of some of the excellent education work I am aware the SMC has undertaken over the last 2 years, particularly that which is funded by YMI. The 'Projects' section focuses entirely on artist development and promotions e.g. Tune Up and Showcase Scotland. Further research found a heading 'Learning' under the 'Resources' section. This lead instantly to the online composition chart which is an excellent resource for young composers – nicely presented and straightforward process for submission. However when I wanted to listen to some of the featured music I was required to download an Apple plug-in to

listen, which would not install on my PC. This is a proprietary Apple format which probably works better on Macs than PCs and the most straightforward way to present the samples now would be MP3.

I then moved onto a sub heading 'SMC outreach' which is where I expected to find details of the YMI projects. While there was an excellent range of project information with regard to previous projects the most recent listed was October 2006. Finally I used the search engine for 'YMI funded projects' but found no results. Perhaps there is no longer a staff member responsible for uploading details of project work onto the site but this seems like a real opportunity missed for the centre to shout about some of the exciting work it is undertaking.

In general the content of the SMC website is well presented, and certainly to keep such a huge amount of information current is clearly an enormous task.

Additional aspects which could be thought about to improve the content to wider groups could include making the site's content available in other languages and accommodation for those with visual and audial disabilities. An 'FAQ's' section would also provide the site with the ability to quickly introduce the content to an unfamiliar user.

Attractors

Rating: 3

Attractors which might draw visitors to the site currently include a regular list music sector competitions and funding opportunities, and the Centre's newsletter which anyone can sign up for. I imagine the SMC site would be a first port of call for musicians who were looking for funding or performance opportunities or links to external agencies. Although there is a link to 'music news' it feels a bit static and a 'news' ticker on the home page (as previously mentioned) could be another attractor for users as would some sort of 'special offer' or 'freebie' – perhaps those organisations currently advertising shows on the home page could offer a small number of free tickets through a website competition?

Even current opportunities which exist could be further highlighted – e.g. many users may not be aware that if they visit SMC they have access to time on computers with free up to date music industry software – this could be made more of.

Findability

Rating: 3

The URL www.scottishmusiccentre.com is intuitive as was previously mentioned. In terms of search engine performance this could be improved. I used Google initially and typed in 'Scottish music'. SMC came only 4th after 3 less important organisations. 'Scottish musicians' did not bring the centre up at all and 'Scottish music scene' only listed it in 3rd place. 'Scottish music culture' did not bring the centre up either. I found similar results with Yahoo. This is an aspect that could easily be updated through the use of meta-tags whereby the site's ranking would be improved - it would be a simple job for any basic web programmer to undertake along with assistance from management.

Other advertising options could be thought about – perhaps Cryptic and the Tramway are already paying for their listings on the homepage at this time? There could also be the opportunity to raise funds through a facility such as Google AdSense which automatically crawls the content of pages and delivers ads (users can choose both text or image ads) that are relevant to the audience and the site content. Other possible facilities could include an SMC forum with different threads for discussion of issues facing the Scottish music sector; a 'musician's networking' board where musicians could contact each other and bands could advertise for players? even an on-line 'recommend a friend' which can be very useful in helping to promote a website and particularly with regard to further promotion of the Directory.

It is not clear how many partners and affiliate sites the SMC website is currently linked to but updating these could substantially increase flow of traffic and can also boost the ranking of the site with search engines.

Browser Compatibility

Rating: 2/3

I tried the website on both Internet Explorer and Firefox browsers and it worked well. However when a sample of the pages were run through the W3C HTML Validator a number of errors were exposed, meaning that it is likely that the site would not appear the same to each user depending on the browser they were using and may not conform to accessibility standards. These errors were apparently fairly basic and easy to fix and as the WC3 Validator is a free online service, a website programmer would be able to make the amendments to the code fairly easily.

User Satisfaction

Rating: 4

I accessed and used the SMC site over several days over a period of 2 weeks and the site was both robust and reliable – it was on-line each time I tried and did not crash at any navigation. All clicks went to completion and using the online shop I found the process straightforward – I did not progress to buying something but got to checkout easily and as the site uses the Wordpress facility would imagine that the process would be non problematic.

Other Useful Information

Rating: 3

The History section and contact details supplied which are visible at the bottom of each page are useful.

Additional information which could be included which is not obviously evident at the moment would include the following:

- Mission statement (as initially mentioned)
- Staff list/organisation structure with contact details for each ('Contact us' section only has details for the Information Manager and the Board)
- List of current career opportunities at SMC itself (or volunteering opportunities)
- Up to date press coverage and testimonials/references

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.

The Scottish Music Centre's website is subject to a rolling programme of review, updating and improvement and thus we view the evaluator's comments as not only fair, but also constructive. Many of the creative and practical suggestions echo our own plans for the site. However as the assessor has clearly understood, our current resources are insufficient to significantly accelerate the speed and range of the website's development.

Webmaster Dave Simpson would like to answer a few specific points raised in the assessment.

1. Dimensions/scrolling. There are still many websites which support 800x600 screen resolution - statistics from W3C indicate that 8% of web users still use this monitor resolution. Compare this with only 5.5% of web users using an Apple Mac: it would certainly not be suggested that we stop supporting these users. It's also now common practice for websites to use vertical scrollbars.

2. Projects. Development of a web presence for the education projects which we run is currently being undertaken. The Learning section of the site will be completely revamped by the end of the year to include this.

3. Meta-tags. In fact, the meta-tags on our site conform to the Dublin Core metadata standard, defined by ISO in 2003 ISO Standard 15836 <http://www.iso.org/iso/iso_catalogue/catalogue_tc/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=37629>, and NISO Standard Z39.85-2007 <http://www.niso.org/kst/reports/standards?step=2&gid=&project_key=9b7bffcd2daeca6198b4ee5a848f9beec2f600e5>. Meta-data no longer has much weight with regard to search engine rankings but other suggestions for improving this were very helpful.

4. Directory. Inclusion in the directory is open to any Scottish musician, related business or organisation. However, if we are not supplied with sufficient data to make a complete entry, holding details are put up. There is a link on every directory page to notify us of errors and omissions and any communication received regarding this is processed within two days and the entry updated.

5. Compatibility. While the validation errors do need to be corrected, during development the website was tested and optimised for the following browsers:

Windows

Internet Explorer (v5.5-v7)

Mozilla Firefox (v2-v3)

Opera (v8-v9)

Apple Safari (v2-v3)

Macintosh

Safari (v2-v3)

Mozilla Firefox (v2-v3)

Opera (v8-v9)

Linux

Konqueror (v3-v4)

Mozilla Firefox (v2-v3)

Opera (v8-v9)

Since this testing covers all modern rendering engines (Gecko, Trident, Webkit,KHTML and Presto) and is backward compatible with IE back to its 2000 release of v5.5, we can be certain that the site will be correctly viewable by more than 99% of site visitors.

G Maxwell 17.11.08