



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 Youth Theatre

Venue: The Citizens Theatre

Title of Event: 'His Dark Materials' Parts 1 & 2, Adapted from the Novels of Philip Pullman by Nicholas Wright.

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: 01 / 08 / 07

Overall Rating: GOOD

While I still harbour doubts over the feasibility of creating a workable play from Pullman's novels, Scottish Youth Theatre certainly worked hard to make both parts of this epic, two part, seven and a half hour play enjoyable and exciting for both the young people involved and the audience watching. I'm excited that such challenging material (dark or otherwise) is being tackled.

Overall, this was a very professional production, conveyed gloriously by some very talented youngsters and a production team who believe in themselves and the abilities inherent in their young cast.

Name: Steve Slater

Date: 06 / 08 / 07

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.	Good	Scottish Youth Theatre certainly challenged themselves and their young participants in choosing Philip Pullman's novels as the basis of this year's Summer Festival. This gargantuan task was talked with huge amounts of energy and enthusiasm by the cast.
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.	Good	Certainly a project of this size would have challenged anyone. It is good to see SYT opting to follow the difficult path of presenting a highly complex (and long) story, which focuses on characters which teenagers can readily identify with. As a production it also works as an easily identifiable product for the theatre to promote – given its popularity and current media interest in the forthcoming film.
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	Good	Pullman's complex interwoven themes of love, death, independence, belief, sacrifice, religion and sexuality are a heady mix to engage with on such a large scale production. It is hard to say, on an individual level, what each of the young people got from being involved in this production – but I doubt very much if they did not come through the experience unchanged – the sheer diversity of ideas presented are a rich melting pot of experience.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	Good	Obviously with such a large group of young people, split into two distinct companies in order to deal with the scale of the production there is going to be a huge variation in skills and abilities on stage. However the company seemed to deliver a well balanced production, with outstanding performances to the fore. Of special note were all three 'Lyra's', Kirstie Steele, Fiona Murray and Sarah Helena Ord.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	Competent	Where choreography was required, the company fell into a more formal 'west end chorus line' like mode, with little originality. A slight disappointment compared to the performance and theatre skills on show.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Competent	My main problem with the entire production was with Nicholas Wright's adaptation of the novels. Having read all three books – I found his adaptation frustrating. I am sure that anyone sitting in the audience who had not read the books would have struggled to follow the story. I am still not sure if adaptations such as these are a good idea. Pullman's epic works because it is a series of three novels. I doubt he considered how this would play

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
			out on stage – indeed, it is this conflict between the theatre if one’s own imagination and the constraints of presenting a coherent theatrical experience on stage that dominates and colours the background of this production. It is a conflict that still needs to be resolved.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Good	Both Mary McCluskey (Part 1) and Carter Ferguson (Part 2) did exceptionally well in steering this behemoth of a production through its complex story arc. Both have a distinct vision, and it was intriguing to see the differences each brought to their take on the novels. I doubt that either could have dealt with the problems of condensing the story any further without losing the plot completely. Though full marks for getting both the talented cast and the audience through a bum numbing seven and a half hours of stage time!
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	Good	Andrea Possee’s atmospheric music played a great part in creating the sense of wonder and mystery throughout 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.	Good	Kenny miller worked wonders with the limitations of the stage, creating from a number of basic sets a furious variety of worlds and landscapes through the use of well placed lights and smoke. Particularly useful was the deployment of an upper gallery to split the stage, as well as generous use of the stalls by many of the cast.
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>	Good	Performing Arts: Given the scope and scale of the production the overall quality was to a high standard for a youth theatre production, and many a professional show would be hard placed to produce some of the quality on show here.
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>		Overall, there was a very appreciative audience for the production. Obviously from some of the comments I overheard, many of the people attending were related to members of the cast. Others were obviously fans of the books that had come along to quench their thirst prior to the opening of the film later this year. As mentioned earlier, I would find it a hard production to follow in any great detail had I not read the book already. But the audience seemed very enthusiastic and supportive of both parts. I estimate around 200 people attended both performances.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
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.	Good	Obviously the production itself was the focus of the SYT Summer Festival, therefore deeply involving for all those taking part. However, I did not see any sort of additional interpretive material specifically for the audience on my visit to the theatre.
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)?	Good	Again , I would assume that for those taking part in the production this would have to be an amazing experience.

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 main theatre was perfect for this production. Providing an atmospheric space in which to create the work.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Programmes were available at the door for £2.00 with detailed information on the project.
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.	Posters and leaflets were available / visible around town prior to the event. With good previews and press attention.
Ease of booking and payment	Booking was made by phone with no complications during the transaction.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	The Citizens is located just south of the City centre with good transport links by bus, car and tube.
External signage and signposting	External signage is good. The Citizens makes good use of it's exterior walls for advertising. Although I have never liked the frontage to the theatre, the company work hard to make it jump out at you and hide the modern additions to the old building.
Internal directional signage	The foyer / bar area of the Citizens has never been one of my favourite spaces – this is no fault of the company, more to do with the architects who redesigned the space. I never really feel like I'm in the building until I get into one of the theatres.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Ramps are provided from the street level to the theatre and upper bar. Although I did not see a lift or signage for one, I assume that they would have such facilities.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	There seemed to be no problem with the timing of the event from an audience point of view.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	All the staff I spoke to were polite and helpful, being able to tell me the running time and length of interval.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	SAC logo was present on all publicity material.

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.