



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: His Majesty's Theatre – part of Aberdeen International Youth Festival

Title of Event: Geordie

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

Theatre Performance

Date of Visit: 2nd August 2008

Overall Rating: Competent

There was a good deal about it that was impressive and real care had gone into ensuring that it was youth theatre that was properly resourced and supported by high production values. However, for all that the cast were enthusiastic, committed and talented the end result was an unimaginative production of a fairly inconsequential musical that did not really make best use of the obvious potential there was in the cast and company.

(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.)

Name: Stephen Stenning **Date:** 12/08/2008

Specialist Advisor

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.	Competent	It is an ambitious undertaking to create a large scale performance for youth theatre from what is a fairly simple and quite earnest story. There was a good deal of imagination put into the design and the staging and nearly every aspect of the execution was well done. However, the exuberant set-pieces that provided the focus for the skills and the imagination of those involved were diluted by the overall length of the piece and the pedestrian nature of the plotting.
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	The International Youth Festival provides a really good showcase for SYT to present a piece of work like this and it was a good curatorial decision for AIYF to programme it. Apart from the convenience of dates their seemed to have been little tie up between SYT and the Festival as there was not much of a mention of AIYF in SYT's literature and few signs of the Festival when attending the theatre.
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	The most clearly stated aim is SYT's commitment to operating as "Scotland's national theatre 'for and by' young people." This production appeared to meet most of the aims I would expect to go along with that ambition. I was really impressed by the sense of ownership that the SYT members had for the production (both those on stage and off it). It was very clear that the cast were committed to the project and willing to work very hard and thereby getting a rich and rewarding experience from it. Neither the piece chosen nor the adaptation of it felt particularly 'for or by' young people.
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	Voice production is often problematic with youth theatre productions in HMT. The cast was assisted with radio and pick up microphones but a good deal of attention had clearly been paid to ensuring that the cast projected. There were a number of strong performances and, although some cast members found the songs stretching, throughout the cast the enthusiasm, ebullience, confidence and levels of skill were impressive.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	Competent	The moments where short choreographed sections were used were all well done. The performers were all asked to do things that were within their range and reasonably relevant.

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.	Poor	The story is a fairly simple straight-forward one with few plot twists. This could have been made into an advantage as it could have given room for a great deal of full cast ensemble playing. As it was some interesting and fun characters were created for the cast to get their teeth into but it was long, slow-paced and did not really use the musical numbers well.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Competent	It was a generally well presented piece of youth theatre. The cast was well schooled, they clearly understood what they were being asked to do, found a real joy in performing and a feeling for the play itself. In that sense it was well directed and led. However a large exuberant talented cast were not really used very imaginatively and little was done to inject pace or tension into the slow-paced over long adaptation. There were some wonderful ensemble numbers during which the whole production came alive. Unfortunately those ensemble numbers were not really used to move the plot forward and therefore they were diversions. In the first half particularly the lighting seemed to be used as a way of pointing up who was about to speak ensuring dialogue was not missed. For me, this became really irritating as there were often fifteen or twenty performers on stage all but one or two in near total darkness. Also the story is a simple one and most of the exposition is given within the first number so there was not the need for such earnest attention to be given to every bit of dialogue.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	Good	The musical score worked well and there were some very good numbers within it. The opening number was one of the very few that actually moved the story-telling forward (it contained an impressive amount of scene setting) from then the script and the songs could have worked better together.
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	The design revolved around a map of Perthshire on the floor cloth and two triangular blocks which were used in a variety of ways. It was simple but effective allowing the cast to change scene quickly.
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,</p>	Competent	The hitches were quite minor and mostly involved the projector although the lighting cues often seemed a little late which was particularly noticeable in a very ill-lit first half. The sound cues worked well and the live music enhanced the production and was well timed with the cast.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	including genre.		
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>		The audience was surprisingly small. HMT is a big theatre and I saw a matinee but it appeared to me that there were a little over fifty people in the auditorium other than an SYT class participants. The audience was appreciative although I noticed that the few non-SYT youngsters found it difficult to maintain focus.
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>	Good	The production was a part of SYT's summer festival 2008 and it was clear from the evidence of the young people on stage and those in the auditorium that they were enjoying and getting a lot from the courses.

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	It was a large-scale musical and HMT should have been very suitable although the large stage was not well-used and the auditorium appeared very large given a small matinee audience.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	There was very little either about AIYF or SYT
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.	I did not see much in the way of printed publicity but the SYT website had some information and AIYF make very good use of social networking sites and e-marketing.
Ease of booking and payment	It was straight-forward as I brought tickets at the venue
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	HMT is central and walking distance from the train and bus station there are also car parks nearby.
External signage and signposting	There are a number of signs both for pedestrians and for vehicles.
Internal directional signage	Very clear
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	I know there are disabled toilets, level access to the auditorium and lifts giving access to all levels.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	I felt it was significantly too long.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Reasonably efficient without being particularly friendly.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	There was acknowledgement on the SYT programme and also in AIYF brochure

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.

While appreciating that this evaluation represents the opinions of one individual, who didn't like the choice of play, Scottish Youth Theatre wishes to make the following points:-

- **Scottish Youth Theatre's Summer Festival endeavours to present participants with a range of challenging work. The personal development of each participant is at the core of the rehearsal and production processes.**
- **The production represented the culmination of 4 wks work for half of the participants and 2 wks work for the remainder of the group. Given the huge task of mounting a piece of musical theatre in the given time, it is remarkable what the creative team and the participants were able to achieve.**
- **The company, representing all areas of Scotland, ranged in age from 14yrs – 21yrs.**
- **The members of the acting company ranged in ability from those with specific learning, physical and emotional needs (Asberger's, ADHD, Asthma Dyslexia, Dyspraxia etc) to inexperienced newcomers to theatre and a few senior members of SYT Productions.**
- **Scottish Youth Theatre is committed to its 'for and by' philosophy. Bearing this core value in mind, the play has been developed through a scripting workshop process involving participants at every stage. The production also included members of the company in improvising and creating the set pieces.**
- **As part of an international festival, the production had restrictions on tech time, especially lighting and sound.**
- **The production received public and critical acclaim including the following:-**

'Witty tale touched hearts.....The huge ensemble cast brought joy to every role. GEORDIE is an all-ages journey through adolescent life and love. A universal story to which we can all relate.'

Evening Express. Aberdeen 2nd Aug. '08

'GEORDIE, is a clever choice of production for Scottish Youth Theatre. In SYT's dynamic production the national integrity of this wonderful work is beautifully restored and given a charming child-like innocence. It's stylish and the cast of principals and the ensemble are flawless and a joy to watch. highly recommended.'

Press & Journal, Aberdeen 2nd Aug. '08

'There was much to praise in this production. What director Mary McCluskey doesn't know about coaxing the best out of a young, inexperienced cast could be written on the back of a matchbox.

Hi-Arts online, Inverness 7th Aug. '08

Watching theatre is subjective – all opinions positive and negative, as long as they are constructive, are much appreciated.

MMC/26/08/08

