



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:	Old Sheriff Court, Glasgow & Tron Theatre, Glasgow
Title of Event:	Oh! What a Lovely War
Type of Event:	Rehearsal & Performance
Date of Visit:	Tuesday 22 July 2008 & Thursday 14 August 2008
Overall Rating:	Good

An ambitious production of a difficult and demanding text which resulted in a glossy, tightly rehearsed show. A great ensemble piece with some outstanding musical performances but which ultimately failed to get to grips with the complexities and subtleties of the script and to deliver the language with sufficient clarity to expose the underlying irony and impact of the piece.

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Date: 1 September 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.

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	<p>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.</p>	Good	<p>Oh! What a Lovely War was first performed by Theatre Workshop in London in 1963 and has since become a stage classic. Somewhat disingenuously termed a "musical entertainment" it is, in reality, a hard hitting indictment of WW1. Juxtaposing songs of the period with chilling statistics detailing the numbers of war dead Oh! What a Lovely War is a satirical attack on the "old cliché" and a compelling commentary on the class inequalities in British society. SYT are to be congratulated for their ambition - attempting to stage such a complex piece of theatre with a young, non-professional cast is brave. While the company produced a very professionally put together piece of theatre with some outstanding musical performances they did not convey the complexities and subtleties of the script with sufficient clarity to expose the irony and deliver the full impact of the piece.</p>
All (if relevant)	<p>Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.</p> <p>If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme.</p>	Good	<p>The annual Summer Festival is SYT's flagship event which comprises a variety of different courses including the Junior, Foundation, Intermediate and Performance & Production Courses. This year the Performance & Production Course took place in Glasgow, Inverness and Aberdeen during the school holiday. Open to 14 to 21 year olds, it is an intensive course lasting for five weeks. Participants take part in training and rehearsals for the first four weeks of the course and stage a full scale production in the final week. This year they presented 3 different shows Geordie, Hero and Oh! What a Lovely War. Participants on the Performance & Production Course work with a range of theatre professionals including a Director, Designer, Musical Director and Choreographer and are treated like part of a professional theatre company. Oh! What a Lovely War was presented at The Tron from 5 to 9 August for 10 performances. Oh! What A Lovely War is a good choices for a youth theatre production as it allows for a large cast and also gives the participants an opportunity to develop their skills in a range of performance techniques including acting, singing and dancing.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	<p>Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.</p> <p>Education events – see ¹below for guidance</p>	Competent	<p>Oh! What a Lovely War is ironically known as a “musical entertainment” and it was described in SYT’s Summer Festival programme as a “comedic musical journey through the harrowing events of the First World War”. On the whole the show fitted this description but I felt that, particularly during the spoken word scenes, a lot of the impact was lost as the young cast struggled to deliver their lines with sufficient clarity to deliver the show’s complex satirical message. The programme stated that “the action on stage contrasts wildly with the realities of battle” but during the (beautifully delivered) musical numbers they were sometimes in danger of delivering little more than enjoyable “musical entertainment”.</p>
All	<p>Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.</p> <p>Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.</p>	Good	<p>A very demanding choice of play for any company never mind a young cast of non professionals but this company rose to the challenge and delivered some very impressive performances. However, with few exceptions, the young cast did not sufficiently project their voices and their poor enunciation meant that some of the impact of the piece was lost particularly in the spoken sections. However, the show came alive during the musical numbers where the singing and stage presence was exemplary.</p>
Dance, Theatre	<p>Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc</p>	Good	<p>The dance routines were simply but effectively choreographed by Jenny Dougan and complimented the period songs nicely.</p>
Theatre	<p>Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.</p>		<p>The script was virtually unchanged from the original Theatre Workshop text devised in 1963.</p>
Theatre, Dance	<p>Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.</p>	Excellent	<p>Kenny Millar did an excellent job of guiding these young people through a difficult and demanding production. He managed to create a great ensemble piece which also produced one or two outstanding performances. The combination of text, design, music and choreography was confidently handled to create a coherent whole despite the fact that the text is little more than a series of fragmented scenes with no continuing narrative. The high production values did justice to the committed performances by the tightly rehearsed young cast.</p>

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
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	Good	The whole piece was interwoven with music and songs from the period which provided an effective counterpoint to the dramatic action. All the songs were beautifully sung by the cast and accompanied by music pre-recorded by the Musical Director Andrew Morrison. Particularly moving was the candle lit number sung from the side of the stage – one of the few moments which illustrated the gravity and power of the show.
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.	Excellent	Design by Kenny Miller. A striking, multi-level, monochrome set – a nod to the Pierrots in the original script – accommodated the multifarious scenes and settings well. In place of projecting images of the war into screens Miller opted for a simple, poppy red LED display which scrolled a constant stream of horrific war statistics. The starkness and restraint of this display contrasted shockingly with the action going on around it. The costumes were beautifully realised and appropriately lavish.
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>	Excellent	The whole production was beautifully put together. Despite the rapid fire changes of scene and movement of people on and off the stage all the cues were hit bang on, so much so that it was easy to forget that there was a cast of 27.
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 Tron was at approx 70% capacity and the audience consisted of what appeared to be mostly family and friends of the company. The audience were engaged throughout and responded to the performance warmly although it was quite noticeable that much of the humour of the script was lost as there was very little laughter.

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.		Not aware of any additional interpretative activity.
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)?		<p>I visited rehearsals for Oh! What a Lovely War on Tuesday 22 July and observed the company going over various scenes with the Director, Musical Director and Choreographer. The rehearsals took place at SYT’s headquarters at the Old Sheriff Court in Glasgow and were identical to the rehearsal process that all professional theatre companies go through. I joined rehearsals just as the participants on the three week Intermediate Course had joined the participants from the five week Performance and Production Course. While this could have caused lots of problems for both the participants and the creative team it appeared that integration was going smoothly. The cast were being worked extremely hard rehearsing lines, blocking scenes, learning songs and choreography almost simultaneously but they all appeared to be relishing the challenge and responding enthusiastically, and very professionally, to instruction from the Director and other members of the creative team. For their part, the creative team treated the young cast as professionals, without condescension and with respect for their ability. According to SYT’s website the company are about “giving young people in Scotland the opportunity to explore and to reach their creative potential through a quality theatre experience” and judging by my observation they are meeting that aim.</p> <p>The big question in my mind, however, is the focus on excellence apparently at the expense of access. There can be no denying that the Summer Festival is a “quality theatre experience” and I would not argue against the idea that striving for excellence should be the ultimate aim of everyone involved in the arts. However, I also think it’s impossible to deny that SYT’s Summer Festival is not accessible to all children and young people in Scotland and particularly not those from socially or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The 5 week Performance & Production course costs £600 and participants who do not live within travelling distance may also have to pay for accommodation for the duration of the course. In addition it costs £10 just to apply for the course to cover “some of the administration costs involved in processing applications” and, beyond that, some applicants may be asked to audition. While £600 does represent good value for money, this level of financial commitment is beyond the reach of many families. SYT may well be committed to the principles of socially engaged practice and use</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			youth theatre to connect with hard to reach sections of the community but my observation of their flagship project drew me to conclude that the young people involved in Oh! What a Lovely War were not representative of Scotland's socially, economically and culturally diverse society. As SYT say on their website, the Summer Festival is "not just about becoming a star - participants gain in confidence and social skills to equip them for whatever career they choose" and surely that kind of experience and opportunity should be available to everyone?

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	Rehearsals – Old Sheriff Court SYT's headquarters is a centrally located and well-equipped space and suitable for accommodating large scale youth theatre activity. The rehearsal room was quite small. Performance – Tron Theatre The performance worked well on the main stage of the Tron.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	There were large scale posters front of house and programmes for the whole 2008 Summer Programme were on sale.
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.	There was information on the production on the Tron Theatre's website. However, SYT's website was out of date and the only information on the Summer Festival (apart from the generic information) related to last year's production His Dark Materials.
Ease of booking and payment	All fine.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Both venues are centrally located in Glasgow.
External signage and signposting	External signage for both venues is not conspicuous.
Internal directional signage	Fine.

Criteria	Comment
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Both venues appeared to accessible to disabled people.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Performance started and finished on time.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Fine.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	SAC acknowledged by both the Tron and SYT.

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.