



ARTISTIC EVALUATION

This evaluation is intended to represent an objective aesthetic judgement. **Specialist advisors and officers should avoid making judgements based on their own personal tastes and preferences wherever possible.**

Artist/Company: *Shetland Youth Theatre*

Venue: *Garrison Theatre, Lerwick*

Title of Event: *Canterbury Tales*

Type of Event: *Youth Theatre Performance*

Date of Visit: *29th August 2009*

Overall Rating: **Very Good**

The production of Canterbury tales was billed as boisterous and bawdy and it absolutely was a romp from start to finish. It was a joy to see a cast of thirty young people totally committed and revelling in what they were doing. It was enjoyable and even liberating to watch such an imaginative, adventurous and completely unselfconscious production.

(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:** *18th September 2009*

Specialist Advisor

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 on 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 future 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:

Very poor- standard falls well below what is acceptable.

Poor - not well conceived and executed

Satisfactory

Good - well conceived and executed

Very Good – well conceived and executed to a very good standard

Excellent – Inspiring and executed to an exceptionally 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of ideas • if you have seen other work of this artist(s)/ company before, please comment on any relevant comparisons 	Very Good	It was a bold and imaginative production. Each tale has a brief narrative and a then a dramatisation. That structure could have become repetitive were it not for the inventive approach of the company. The cast very obviously enjoyed exploiting every comic opportunity and the production was full of clever well thought out ideas. I hadn't seen the work of this company before but I am familiar with the play. It is a piece that can fall very flat without a great deal of invention. This was a very daring, inventive and unselfconscious piece of youth theatre and consequently the play was a romp from start to finish.
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does it fit within the artistic vision of the organisation? • If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme. 	Good	It is a difficult piece to take on with young people because the bawdy tales are constructed around Medieval concepts of sexuality. However, it proved to be a great vehicle for the company who extracted such joy from the subject that that it was almost liberating to watch (and to perform by the look of it). The strength of the piece was that all of the Tales were treated as Tales – potentially exaggerated and overblown to make a point and not opportunities to comment on modern morality.
All	Success of event against stated aims of project and/or performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does it relate to information contained in the programme, the website or other printed material? • How well did it communicate the artistic themes? • How did the event originate eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, from the artist or from commission? Education events – see ¹ below for definition	Excellent	I know of Shetland Youth Theatre as an open access young peoples company that aims to embrace and develop young people at all levels. As part of that commitment to personal development and to creating learning opportunities through theatre, they seek to offer 12 to 21 year olds the chance to work together on large cast productions. Canterbury Tales provided a rich experience for the young company, it was technically well supported and resourced. More than that it was clear that a great deal of imagination had gone into it including from the company itself. This ensured that the piece was owned by and had the stamp of the company. The programme hails the production as “Bold, Boisterous & Bawdy” and I have to say it lived up to that promise. It was certainly the boldest and bawdiest version of Canterbury Tales I have seen. I think the Company deserve credit for taking it on in the first place and much more for making such a success of it.

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
All	Performers/tutors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the expertise of the performers? Where performers are amateur, please reflect this in your comments. • How successfully did the performer(s) communicate with and engage the audience? • In your view, was an artist as a tutor key to the success of the workshop? 	Good	<p>It was a big cast of 29 performers of differing ages, and whilst there were understandably differences in the levels of their performance skills, every one of them was completely whole-hearted and committed. Given the nature the subject matter and the fact that a good deal of front of cloth style performing is required it would not have been surprising if there had been some awkwardness from self-conscious teenagers but there were no such moments. On top of that there was some surprisingly assured playing to the audience and not just from the excellent MC.</p>
	Choreography/Use of choreography <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the work original? • How was the space used? • How many dancers were there and how were they used? • How long was the piece? 	n/a	<p>No choreographer was credited.</p>
Theatre	Script Please comment on this for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new work • second productions • classics where the original has been substantially changed 	Good	<p>This adaptation has been around for quite a while as I think Phil Woods wrote it in the 80's. I saw it a number of years ago and it felt a little dated and slightly too long. Either as a result of the imaginative production or the way they used the script but it worked as a very well balanced piece that gave a sense of the Medieval settings within a recognisable modern framework.</p>
Theatre, Dance	Direction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the work well interpreted? • Was it well cast? • Was it well presented? 	Excellent	<p>With youth theatre work I think that 'facilitating', 'leading', 'coaching' and 'inspiring' are all part of the director role. The production was full of imaginative ideas well communicated but just as impressive and exciting was the fact that there was an extraordinary sense of ownership amongst all the cast. Everyone seemed completely committed to every idea and that demonstrates that the process had been creative and fulfilling. The use of balloons of different sizes and at different stages of inflation to represent peoples "naughty-bits" in the Miller's Tale was inspired. Both myself and my young son were in stitches (for slightly different reasons I suspect).</p> <p>As well as having directed an impressive piece of youth theatre, John Haswell has brought together an adventurous, creative and inspiring group of young people.</p>
Dance, Theatre	Use of music <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the music/ sound used enhance the production? • Is it live or recorded? 	Very Good	<p>Philip Taylor played all the music live providing a wonderful range of musical styles taking in pop, jazz and a bit of cabaret. All of which are performed sympathetically to support the cast on stage particularly when accompanying some impressive renditions of songs (notably by Chris Halcrow as Chanticleer). The music is perfectly in sync. with the fast moving scenes and Philip Taylor works well with the cast to provide an impressive range of sound effects and to support and enhance the action.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
Dance, Theatre	Design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How were the costumes, set and lighting? • How did it work in the venue? • Was it technically proficient? (eg lighting and sound cues, etc). 	Good	<p>The design concept was necessarily simple given that it was not a huge stage and a cast of thirty. Brightly coloured boxes containing one props are used to create all of the tales and this all takes place within a tacky game show. The lighting, the MC's costume, lots of sparkles and a simple but effective clapometer create the game show atmosphere.</p> <p>When telling the tales one item is often used to suggest a costume and props are inventively used to support the storytelling (including one of the best designed kitchen utensil battle that I have ever seen). Occasionally a more elaborate costume is brought out to great effect, for example with Chanticleer the Cock in the Priests Tale.</p> <p>It is clear that a number of people were involved in supporting the design elements including David Wagstaff credited with the technical design.</p>
All	Quality of Public Engagement <p>Performing Arts/Education -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the production/event targeted at a particular audience? • Was the production /event appropriate for the audience/participants? • Were you/ engaged/inspired? • Did the audience/ participants appear to be engaged/inspired? • What was their response? • Approximately how many people were there? • Did there appear to be a broad mix of people – age, cultural diversity or disabled? • Are BSL/captioned/audio described performances offered as part of the run/tour/? If so how many? • What activities or supporting materials were available to enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups programmes, on line info? • Were these targeted at specific age groups? <p>Education/learning events: In addition, please provide comments on the following (if appropriate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was it taught/led eg one to one, group, child centred? • What was the composition of the participant group – age range, gender mix? • Is it strategically linked to the curriculum or national policy areas e.g. Early Years, Community Learning & Development • What learning/skills development took place? 	Very Good	<p>I saw the performance on the Saturday afternoon and the 280-seater Garrison Theatre was just less than half full. The Garrison Theatre is clearly an old cinema and consequently it lacks the intimacy you would expect from a smallish auditorium. That said, the game show conceit worked well in the venue and the MC in particular worked very hard to keep the connection with the audience going throughout. Because it was such an enjoyable accessible performance and so much had gone into it, it seemed a little disappointing that the auditorium was not full. However it was the third of three performances and I don't have a comparator for audiences in Lerwick.</p> <p>There was a broad mix of ages in the audience. I took my eleven year old son who tends not to volunteer himself for "shows with a second half" but he thoroughly enjoyed it. The audience were certainly engaged and for all that it was uncompromisingly boisterous and bawdy it was all delivered with such joy and verve that I could not imagine anyone being uncomfortable with it.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the quality of the art produced by the participants? • Did the workshop tutor have a teaching plan for the session and/or project? • How were participants recruited? • Did participants' views and choices help inform the structure and content of the project? <p>Crafts/Visual Arts Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang?</p>		

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
<p>Location and suitability of the venue for the event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it easy to find? • Is it on a main transport route? • Are the spaces clean? • What were the sight lines like? • How big was it? 	<p>The Garrison Theatre is relatively easy to find as it is near the bus station and the centre of Lerwick. It is a comfortable venue with good sight lines, although I suspect the auditorium was designed more for cinema than theatre. It is a venue with 280 seats and limited foyer area.</p>
<p>Information/ interpretive material at venue—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there programmes, posters and displays about the event? • Is there information on the venue's website? 	<p>It was relatively difficult to find out much about it from the mainland. The Hi-Arts website had some information but not very much. The foyer space is limited but there was good display of production photos. And there was a programme which gave all the necessary information.</p>
<p>Publicity/ pre-publicity –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What leaflets, posters, websites, did you see the event listed in? • What publicity materials are produced? • Is it easy to understand? • Where can you get the information? • Is there Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²? <p>Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event and comment on the company/organisation's website.</p>	<p>If Shetland Youth Theatre have their own website I was unable to find it. Consequently, I was unable to find out the start time of the Saturday performance until I telephoned and booked my ticket. The Scottish Arts Council logo appears on the programme and also on the Shetland Arts website.</p>
<p>Ease of booking and payment</p>	<p>It was a little difficult to get the box office as I imagine it is volunteer staffed but very easy once I got through on the telephone.</p>

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.

Criteria	Comment																
Timing of the event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience? Was the length appropriate? 	It felt like it should have been performed in the evening rather than early afternoon but I imagine there are logistic reasons for the timing. As mentioned above I expected to feel that the production was too long but it actually felt about right!																
Signage and signposting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the entrance clearly marked? Is there clear internal directional signage? Is there Braille signage or signage for audio loops? 	It isn't really very clearly marked but there again it is a relatively small theatre so it is not difficult to find your way around. I do not see Braille signage nor do I think they had audio loops.																
Access and provision for disabled people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please insert yes/no in the boxes to reflect what you notice about the venue/event Please add in any additional comments below the table <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many BSL/captioned/audio described performances are there at the venue? 	<table border="1" data-bbox="571 566 1251 1122"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="571 566 823 667"></th> <th data-bbox="828 566 916 667">Yes/ No</th> <th data-bbox="920 566 1163 667"></th> <th data-bbox="1168 566 1251 667">Yes/ No</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="571 667 823 768">BSL interpretation</td> <td data-bbox="828 667 916 768">No</td> <td data-bbox="920 667 1163 768">Audio description of performances</td> <td data-bbox="1168 667 1251 768">No</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="571 768 823 846">Captioning</td> <td data-bbox="828 768 916 846">No</td> <td data-bbox="920 768 1163 846">Lift/ramp</td> <td data-bbox="1168 768 1251 846">Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="571 846 823 1122">Accessible toilets</td> <td data-bbox="828 846 916 1122">Yes</td> <td data-bbox="920 846 1163 1122">Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English</td> <td data-bbox="1168 846 1251 1122">No</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Yes/ No		Yes/ No	BSL interpretation	No	Audio description of performances	No	Captioning	No	Lift/ramp	Yes	Accessible toilets	Yes	Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English	No
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Customer service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How was the quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering) If possible, comment on how responsive they were to the needs of disabled customers? 	The staff were very attentive and helpful.																

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.