



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – MUSIC

Organisation/Venue: St Magnus Festival (Pickaquoy Centre, Kirkwall)

Title of Event: Ring of Strings

Type of Event: Concert

Date of Visit: June 21st, 2006

Overall Rating (Please rate the production 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. NB: for multiple performances or festivals, or if you prefer please feel free to use headings for a more extensive commentary. Please note the artistic assessment according to the rating detailed below)

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Taking part: Scottish Ensemble: RSAMD Strings; Orkney Camerata; Hadhirgaan and Shoramere (traditional fiddle groups); Orkney Traditional Fiddle Project; Sanday Fiddle Club; Orkney Schools Strings; Jennifer Wigley (fiddle); Peter Maxwell Davies and James MacMillan (conductors).

A wonderful coming-together of classical and traditional musicians, with strong input from community and youth groups, performed to a large and diverse audience. This event epitomised the spirit of the festival: a mix of challenging repertoire alongside more familiar music that never patronised its audience. Would that all Scottish promoters could emulate this. Minor weaknesses in the presentation and programming pale into insignificance against the concert's resounding overall success.

Name: Hugh Macdonald

Date: 13.07.06

Advisor

8 This report has been commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council to evaluate the artistic quality of the production named below. 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 may be made available to Scottish Arts Council Officers, Council and Committee members, and specialist advisors as appropriate. It will 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 Council to report on the overall performance of its Core 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, taking account of the following:

Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
Quality of production – was the event successful overall in relation to any stated aims (e.g. in the programme or other printed material)	5	This was the closing concert of St Magnus, and the way it brought professionals and amateurs/students, classical and traditional musicians together made it an ideal climax for the festival. Eddie MacGuire's commission for the massed strings made an excellent finale, even if (because of having to give each group a spot) it seemed a touch on the long side. The one piece that seemed slightly out of place was Rossini's String Sonata No 1, which the Scottish Ensemble opened the programme with. Stylistically it didn't quite fit for me - something a bit less polite would have been welcome!
Vision and imagination	5	The vision is unimpeachable: challenge and entertain in equal measure. The programme did just that brilliantly. The Nicolson (played by the Scottish Ensemble) was not an obviously easy listen, but was clearly enjoyed. It was daring to ask so many players of such a wide ability range to perform a complex new work - MacGuire's 'Ring of Strings' - but it came off superbly.
Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments	5	All the performers were excellent within their own parameters. I was especially struck by the relaxed, fluid bowing of the kids in fiddle groups Hadhirgaan and Shoramere - they're clearly very well taught. And the amateurs who took part in Vaughan Williams's Tallis Fantasia looked confident and did very well in a difficult piece.
Quality of Presentation – was the professionally presented from a technical point of view	4	Logistically this must have been a nightmare, with different setups for every piece and a lot of musicians to coordinate, but it was very well handled. My only thought is that the show might have benefited from a good presenter/compere, given that so much of the music must have been unfamiliar in idiom to a good portion of the audience.
Audience – assess the appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	5	I don't know what the total capacity of the hall is but it was packed, and there were clearly many local people there who would not normally be classical music attendees. There was a real sense of community pride and excitement, and there was an enthusiastic reaction to everything on the programme.

Educational Value – comment where appropriate	5	Enormously important educationally. When young people from a small island like Sanday have the chance to perform a new work by a leading composer (PMD) specially written for them in such a big event, the 'educational value' is obvious, but extend that kind of experience to all the amateur participants in this concert (over 100 of them) and you're talking about a serious impact on the Orkney community.
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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.

Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
Suitability of the venue for the event	3/4	Pickaquoy is a leisure centre not a concert hall - the only venue in Orkney big enough for events of this kind. It is comfortable and acoustically acceptable. Additional side seating (used for large audience events) has limited sightlines. Bar/coffee facilities are too small to cope with large audiences.
Information/ interpretive material at venue ¹	4	St Magnus Festival offers a single well designed, informative souvenir programme covering all events – good value at £5. It has the usual disadvantage that some in the audience who were only attending this final event might have felt £5 a bit much.
Publicity/ pre-publicity ²	5	Well-designed, user-friendly website. Similarly, good easy to follow brochures. Good press coverage (outside Orkney as well as in). Plenty of festival awareness in Kirkwall.
Ease of booking and payment	4	As yet no on-line booking, and much of the pre-festival booking must be by phone. I found them very helpful, but there may be times when phone lines are busy.
Location of venue	5	Plenty of parking round the venue, which is also easily walkable from town centre, though the walk can be somewhat windswept!
External signage and signposting	5	Good
Internal directional signage	4	Internal signage is not great but there are plenty of Festival volunteers on hand at entrance to ensure audience is clear about where to go.
Access and provision for disabled people	5	The centre is well designed for disabled access as far as I could see.
Timing of the event	5	Fine

¹ These include programmes, displays etc., including the range, quality and clarity.

² Publicity/pre-publicity (leaflets, posters, etc), including the range, content, and when and where available. Be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event. Also view and comment on the company's website where one is advertised, commenting on the ease of use, and quality of content and presentation, and currency of information

Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	4	The festival staff and volunteers are well briefed and helpful. As stated above, catering and bar facilities at this venue struggle to cope with a full house.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding ³	5	Fully acknowledged on brochures, programmes and website.

³ The following is an extract from the Scottish Arts Council's conditions of grant for funded organisations:

"The company should acknowledge Scottish Arts Council funding in press releases, at launches, on all published materials (including leaflets, brochures, programmes, posters, notices display, exhibition materials, websites and advertising). Acknowledgement of the Scottish Arts Council grant must also be made in any secondary or indirect products arising from the revenue funding such as recordings, publications, video, broadcasts, computer programmes etc."

Please comment on whether these conditions of grant were met, including use and prominence of the Scottish Arts Council logo on the company's website.