

ARTISTIC EVALUATION



Scottish Arts Council

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: TMSA

Venue: Various pubs and venues in Keith, Morayshire

Title of Event: Keith Folk Festival

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: 10 June 2007

Overall Rating: 3

I attended the final day of the three day festival and it may be that other performances and venues over the weekend were more exciting than the ones I managed to get to. It may also be that lack of obvious information about where the various sessions and events were being held made it difficult to get a clear idea of the scale and full musical value. The sessions I did find were packed with people, all seemed to be having a great time irrespective of the performance quality. The pubs and venues seemed content to let things happen spontaneously which fits the traditional music concept.

Overall it appears that Keith Folk Festival has been run on the same unpretentious basis for many years and while some audiences these days generally expect slicker presentation it continues to be well attended so it may be that it delivers what its audience expect and demand.

Name: Graham Stephen

Date 12/06/2007

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 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.	3	Good solid fare of traditional song and music mostly from the North East of Scotland.
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.	3	A reasonable selection of established performers, locals and youngsters mostly performing well known material.
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	3	No programmes to be found to judge against but as above, good solid fare.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	3	Very varied – from seasoned performers to local hopefuls using the opportunity to perform, some for the first time.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc		
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.		
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.		

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.		
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.		
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>	3	Presentation values would not appear to be a priority and there was lots of unaccompanied singing – audience seem to have low expectations – especially the outdoor ceilidh crowd who seem content to sit in a drizzle as performers sang from an unadorned open trailer with a few microphones, on a sunny day atmosphere would be much better.
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>	3	Very hard to judge. Audience and participants in various sessions seemed happy if a bit cramped – outdoors they stayed to listen in fairly dreary weather.
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.	0	None seen.
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)?	0	None seen.

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	Local knowledge essential to get best from the event.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Various posters in shops gave a list of performers but no details of events, times and venues.
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.	Website had reasonable info but on the day there was nothing but word of mouth to guide us around The event is a long established annual festival – most of the audience were local or enthusiasts who had been previously.
Ease of booking and payment	The ticket office on the poster was closed on Sunday although entry at the door was available for paid events.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Easy to find Keith – difficult to find venues – and impossible to get into some which were tiny and overcrowded.
External signage and signposting	Three small signs on posts at entrance to Keith – a few posters in shop windows.
Internal directional signage	None.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Mostly accessible.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Timings were vague and flexible.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Couldn't find anyone who seemed to be in charge or helping.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	None seen – may have been in programme if I had found one.

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.

We thank the assessor for his comments. It is particularly useful to have an "outsider's" experience of a festival which, as he says in his report, most of the audience have attended before. However the Festival Committee (all of whom are volunteers) will take on board for next year's festival the organisational elements which are within their control.

Much of the information which he would have found useful was available in the programme and from the Festival Office which, manned by volunteers, was open throughout Friday and Saturday. By Sunday, when he attended, the festival programmes were all distributed and the office closed as there was only one paying event scheduled for which tickets were available at the door.

To address this in future, the Committee plans to have a venue map and other information displayed in the window of the Office. Festival helpers were available on the Sunday (wearing badges) but the Committee will see if they need to be made more obvious.

At Keith, it is worth noting that the 'guest artists' are refunded their expenses but do not receive payment for their performances. Many of the "events" are "sessions" i.e. informal, self-organised gatherings with no scheduled start and finish times and the performers being festival goers.

Also some start times are delayed to accommodate finishing times of other events e.g. on Sunday the Open Air Concert waits for the Bairns' Concert to finish. (If necessary, the Open Air Concert can be moved to a hotel, but this impacts on numbers.) Also there was an issue with the performance trailer due to inclement weather which added to some delays.

At TMSA festivals, the intrinsic aims of the session format are:-

- To give everybody of all ages the opportunity to join in with tunes and songs (where appropriate)
- To give everybody from established artist to total newcomer the opportunity to perform
- To enable the passing on of songs and tunes and styles in the traditional way (informal education)
- To enable participants, many of whom will not live locally, to socialise and make new friends

As a result of this inclusiveness the quality of the performance / presentation is bound to be variable; but it is important not to compare a session to a concert performance. Sessions frequently take place in venues that would never be considered for a concert; but, as Graham Stephen realised, the informality and spontaneity of the session is what most people attending the festivals enjoy and expect. Crowded venues and people prepared to sit out in a drizzle bear testimony to the festival goers' preference for unpretentious presentation and organisation.

As well as sessions, the competitions are a popular part of the Keith Festival – though they are held on the Saturday and the assessor would have missed them. The TMSA views these as part of the continuum of education activities of the organisation – as conducted with the right atmosphere and feedback, they can be a valuable aid to people learning more about their technique and presentation.

Scottish Arts Council acknowledgement was also in our posters and literature which unfortunately had run out by Sunday or were locked up in the office!