



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: | Theatre Cryptic with Aldeburgh Music, Ensemble MAE and Almeida Theatre | |
| Venue: | Tramway Theatre, Glasgow | |
| Title of Event: | An Ocean of Rain | |
| Type of Event: (e.g. performance, exhibition, informal showing, work-in-progress, workshop, screening, lecture etc) | Multi-media chamber opera | |
| Date of Visit: | 10 October 2008 | |
| Overall Rating: | 3 | |
| <i>(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.)</i> | | |
| Whilst this performance had high production values, the narrative content was not sufficiently developed and the score was patchy in terms of quality and effectiveness, often undermining rather than enhancing or illuminating what was happening on stage. | | |
| Name: Susan Nickalls | Date: 13/10/2008 | |
| Specialist Advisor | Scottish Arts Council Officer | <i>Please circle the relevant title</i> |

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> | 3 | <p>The underlying ideas that provided the impetus for this chamber opera were quite interesting – ie: a vulnerable woman on the margins of society in a fragile community facing personal ghosts past and present. However the characters didn't come across as people you could empathise with or whose fate you might be interested in. They were extremely one-dimensional in a one-dimensional story although it clearly had aspirations to operate on a number of levels which didn't really come off. The various strands of the story weren't totally coherent, and whilst enigmatic can be good, in this situation it was just frustrating and alienating. The characters were nowhere near fully developed enough, and they didn't interact with each other in any meaningful way apart from the lesbian lovers and even that relationship was rather strange and unconvincing. Overall the whole telling of the story was so detached it elicited no emotional investment or engagement from this particular member of the audience.</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> | 2 | <p>The idea for the story initially came from the librettist Daniel Danis who had spent some time in an orphanage in Haiti as a teenager and was developed with Theatre Cryptic director Cathie Boyd at Cove Park. His personal experiences make very little impact on the story as you never had the sense of which it might be like to be in an orphanage which appeared to be more a metaphor or concept than a physical place. Likewise Haiti, there was not any sense of what the country might be like to live in for a woman such as Kiev in dramatic terms. In many ways the story could have been set anywhere as the setting and location never asserted themselves in any meaningful way in the production. Instead what dominated the production were the women who visited or lived in Haiti and because they were little more than cardboard cut-out characters their contribution was overshadowed by a clumsy patchwork of quite interesting ideas and concepts that never quite gelled. Finally, as a piece of theatre there was precious little drama apart from the tsunami at the end which was very low key and not built up and resolved as much as it could have been to make an effective impact on the story.</p> |
| All | <p>Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.</p> | 2 | <p>From what was stated in the publicity material, I had high hopes of having some sort of moving experience, or gaining an insight into what they said they were exploring in this production: 'questions of life, love, death and fate.' However, I was not</p> |

| Artform | Criteria | Rating | Comments and key reasons for rating |
|----------------|---|--------|--|
| | Education events – see ¹ below for guidance | | moved in any way during the course of the production, I didn't like any of the characters nor did anything occur to give rise to any thought-provoking issues about these topics afterwards. I didn't get any sense of what it might be like to be in Haiti, it could have been anywhere, and the references to voodoo or the superstitions of the islanders, was quite oblique although this is something Cathie Boyd in particular talks about in the programme notes. There seemed to be a huge gap between the intentions and the reality, which was a fragmented and incoherent story about five rather selfish women who all had their own agendas. |
| 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> | 5 | Although the musicians were all first rate performers and it was an interesting line-up of instruments, the score was very bitty and at times so loud and clunky you couldn't hear what was being said or sung on stage. The one actress and the singers were all fabulous, particularly Anna Dennis who was given some ridiculously high notes which she had to sing from sitting or lying down positions. It sounded as if the composer has had no, or very limited, experience of writing for the voice as this score was extremely disappointing in terms of the actual music content and the way the words were set to the music. The music very often prevented the words from being heard with the emphasis predominantly on the instrumental rather than the vocal lines. Writing an opera is extremely difficult, particularly achieving a happy marriage between text and music and this never even approached what I would call a basic level of competency on the music side. Some of the text was very wordy, and having to set words like 'disinfectant' doesn't help. |
| 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> | 4 | <p>Technically this was a good solid production, the lighting and set were simple but effective – apart from towards the end when a light from the stage shone right into the eyes of the audience for at least five minutes which was extremely irritating and made it impossible to see what was happening on stage. The visual material on the screen was excellent as were the pre-recorded sound effects and music. However, the live music was very erratic and did not always work well with the libretto or the vocal lines. The seven musicians on stage took up most of the space creating an imbalance, purely from a visual point of view, between the singer/actors and musicians who really occupied centre stage. Overall the direction was reasonably competent although it veered towards the theatrical rather than the operatic. And the two are quite distinct. There were sections where two singers were conversing with each other yet didn't face each other and were some distance apart from each other which again, prevented any sense of drama or interaction on an emotional level between these women.</p> |
| 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> | | <p>There were barely a hundred people at this particular performance, perhaps around 80 although a handful of people left during the performance: several ten minutes or so into the performance and others around 15 minutes before the end. Those that remained delivered polite applause but there was no sense of it being an overwhelming success with the audience.</p> |
| 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> | | <p>There was a synopsis given to everyone which was very helpful otherwise it might have been difficult to navigate one's way through this confusing tale.</p> |
| 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> | | |

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 | The Tramway is a fantastic venue for music and theatre providing an appropriately raw and gritty backdrop for the production. It also has a reputation for more experimental and avante garde theatre, so again this production would fit in with other types of shows at the venue. |
| Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc. | There were programmes on sale plus leaflets on the production readily available. |
| 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. | Leaflets for the production seemed to be plentiful at the venue, I'm not sure about anywhere else in Glasgow as I don't live there. The production was also highlighted in the Tramway's Autumn/Winter 2008 brochure. There was information on the production both on the Theatre Cryptic and Tramway websites, plus an Ocean of Rain website but this only had details of the Amsterdam and Rotterdam performances. |
| Ease of booking and payment | Although the Tramway has a good website, there is no facility on-line for booking tickets which in this hi-tech age where almost everyone has website booking is something that should be addressed. However, ringing to book tickets was straightforward and efficient. |
| Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route? | The venue is reasonably easy to find and for people driving is not far off an exit from the main M8 Glasgow motorway, although it is some way out of the city centre. There are a few local buses that pass nearby the Tramway. |
| External signage and signposting | All the external signposting for the venue is adequate, I'm not sure if there is a signpost to the Tramway from the main road, there used to be but the night I attended was bleak with torrential rain so it was difficult to see if this is still there. |
| Internal directional signage | This was clear and adequate. |
| Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see? | Access to the building is fine and there are disabled toilets but with raked seating in the auditorium, people in wheelchairs would have to be positioned at ground level. |
| Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience? | The production was just over one hour and fifteen minutes and ran without an interval. For those not engaged by the production this was more than long enough, but obviously for those that left earlier, clearly it was too long. |
| Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering) | All the staff encountered at the Tramway were friendly and helpful. |

| Criteria | Comment |
|---|---|
| Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ² | The Scottish Arts Council logo is on all printed publicity material but not on any of the websites. |

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.

Publicity/pre publicity

The full tour dates are detailed on the tour section of the Ocean of Rain micro website. The initial entry page of the website highlighted the next performance dates which in this case would have been the Dutch performances which took place after Glasgow.

Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding

The SAC logo is carried at the end of the Making of Documentary which is on the ocean of rain micro site and was screened prior to each performance at the tour venues.

The SAC is listed on www.cryptic.org.uk as a main funder under funders and supporters. An easy link is provided at the bottom of the ocean of rain micro site to the www.cryptic.org.uk

