



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 and the T'ang Quartet	
Venue:	RSAMD, Glasgow	
Title of Event:	Optical Identity	
Type of Event: (e.g. performance, exhibition, informal showing, work-in-progress, workshop, screening, lecture etc)	Theatrically staged concert of contemporary music	
Date of Visit:	Friday 9 November 2007	
Overall Rating:	4	
<p>(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.)</p>		
<p>This was an ambitious attempt aimed at presenting contemporary classical music in a more accessible way to audiences and by and large it succeeded. In particular the sheer physicality involved in playing an instrument was highlighted to interesting effect although sometimes this, and other visual information, flourished at the expense of the musical element.</p>		
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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	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.	5	The overall concept of this programme in terms of all its component parts was extremely imaginative and executed to a high standard. Every element had been carefully thought about in relation to the music from costumes, props, staging, lighting and video through to how the performers were choreographed on stage. There were works by four contemporary composers presented in the programme: Kevin Volans, Rolf Wallin, Franghiz Ali-Zadeh and Joby Talbot. These each had a different programme of lighting and in several instances an accompanying video. The stage setting and choreography was also different for each one and the players themselves moved four large sculptural seat/props around the stage, objects which complimented the specially designed costumes.
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.	4	The idea was initiated by Theatre Cryptic's director Cathie Boyd. It arose from a NESTA scholarship that allowed Boyd to visit Singapore to research the visual aspects of music. In particular how music involves all the senses was something she was keen to explore in order to enhance the purely musical experience of a 'normal' concert. She met the T'ang Quartet in Singapore which led to this collaborative co-production. The premiere of Optical Identity took place at the Singapore Arts Festival which initially commissioned the work.
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	4	Overall, Optical Identity delivered on most of the stated aims of: 'creating a multi-sensory world that enhances the music and the musical experience for audiences - a world where the listener can escape from narrative-driven everyday scenarios and embark on a private emotional journey.' This was indeed a multi-sensory production with music and visual images and to some extent choreography that created something quite different from the usual concert experience. Whether or not this always enhanced the music is a debatable and quite personal point of view. Also, music as an artform is rarely 'narrative driven' so it was not entirely clear what the listener is supposed to be escaping from in this performance. As for an emotional journey, sometimes the bombardment of visual images in terms of video, lighting and staging, was too intense leaving this particular viewer/listener emotionally un-engaged. For example, Franghiz Ali-Zadeh's hypnotic, meditative work <i>Mugam Sayagi</i> was set against a large video backdrop of close up black and white

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
			<p>images of the quartet's bodies. Some of these were more interesting than others. As visual images in their own right they were quite breathtaking in that they literally stripped bare the performing process to reveal how muscles move and function as a musician plays an instrument. However, these thought-provoking images were often a distraction from what the music was trying to communicate. The first time I saw this performance was in Edinburgh during the festival when the video projection failed to work. I felt far more emotionally involved and moved by the music than I did here when there were so many competing things for my attention: the music, the lighting, the video, the movement of the quartet around the stage.</p> <p>The choice of music, although diverse, could have been more edgy. Although pleasant enough Kevin Volans' <i>String Quartet No.1 White Man Sleeps</i> and Rolf Wallin's electronic-heavy <i>Phonotope 1</i> sounded very dated. Joby Talbot's <i>Manual Overdrive</i> and <i>Mugam Sayagi</i> by Franghiz Ali-Zadeh were by far the most successful pieces musically, with Talbot's work providing the most satisfying balance between music and visuals of the evening.</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>	4	<p>The T'ang Quartet are to be applauded for not only their musicality but also the way in which they took on the demanding physical aspects of this performance. Each piece was carefully and tightly choreographed and most of the programme required the quartet to stand or move in a specific way, even the cellist strapped the instrument to his body so he could move freely about the stage. In a curious way this took the performers away from the music, allowing it to speak in a different way than if it was performed by four people sitting in the usual quartet formation. It was also clear that the performers themselves, liberated from the traditional setting and also from staring at music on a stand, were able to bring other elements to their performance. This included a greater awareness of each other as you could see the four players interacting in a more intimate way. However, sometimes presenting the quartet as moving pieces of art was to the detriment of effectively communicating the musical meaning.</p>
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.		

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.		
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>	5	The technical quality of this production was excellent in terms of lighting and video projection. Staging was quite simple with just a few props in the form of four large sculpted seats that were used to frame the quartet and four smaller geometrically-shaped stools.
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>		For a Friday night in Glasgow the audience was quite healthy at around 150 or so people, mostly downstairs in the stalls with a few people in the upstairs seats. There appeared to be a slightly mixed reaction to the concert with some people not quite expecting what was presented so not sure what to make of it.
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>	N/A	There were no additional activities apart from the concert but Theatre Cryptic did produce a short DVD about the making of the Optical Identity project which was showing on screens in the foyer of the RSAMD on the night of the concert and was also viewable on the Theatre Cryptic website.
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 RSAMD's smallish theatre was an ideal size for a performance of this nature, so a relatively small audience made the theatre feel full. Although the stage was adequate to accommodate the production, having seen it on the larger stage at the Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh, it worked much better, particularly the visual elements, given more space.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	
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.	I was not aware of any pre-publicity leaflets or posters. The Theatre Cryptic website is quite comprehensive with short video clips of two of the pieces and a short film about the project. The music on this page of the site, however, did not relate to the project which might have been slightly confusing (ie trumpet music).
Ease of booking and payment	The RSAMD website offered booking on-line but were charging an additional £1.20 per ticket for this service! It was cheaper easier to buy a ticket at the location on the night as it was not sold out.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Only 5 minutes walk from Queen Street Station in central Glasgow, the RSAMD is easy to find and is also close to the bus station and local underground stations.
External signage and signposting	The RSAMD is signposted on the outside of the building and is a familiar landmark in Glasgow.
Internal directional signage	There are signs indicating different parts of the building inside which were relatively easy to find although the toilet facilities could have been more clearly sign-posted.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	There is disabled access on the ground floor of the building, lifts and designated spaces for wheelchair users inside the auditorium.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	This concert started at 8pm and finished around 9.30pm and ran without an interval which was appropriate for the programme and audience attention span.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Staff at the venue were friendly and helpful.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	The Scottish Arts Council logo was included on the programme, I didn't see any other publicity material.

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.

Response due 22 January 2008