



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION

Artist/Company: Steve Holland
Venue: Theatre Workshop
Title of Event: Voice Stealer 2 – Curse of the Umbrellotron
Type of Event: Performance
Date of Visit: Friday 17 August 2007
Overall Rating: Poor

Voice Stealer 2 was an ambitious and admirable attempt to address the issues of disability, isolation and low self confidence through theatre. Unfortunately the production suffered badly from a shaky performance which displayed neither confidence with the script nor with the physical aspects of the staging and had neither the artistic vision nor technical expertise required to create a piece of professional, entertaining theatre. Presented by the Theatre Workshop as part of their Degenerate 4 festival Voice Stealer 2 did not aspire to the Festival's aim to "bring together leading disabled artists from all over the world whose work and vision challenges outdated stereotypes".

Name: Laura Tyrrell

Date: 17 August 2007

Specialist Advisor **Scottish Arts Council Officer**

Please circle the relevant title

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>	Poor	<p>Voice Stealer 2 - Curse of the Umbrellotron was written and performed by Steve Holland. The show told the story of a young boy called Alex who has a speech impediment. Alex stays in his room and plays make believe stories with his toys – one of whom is the evil Voice Stealer.</p> <p>Voice Stealer 2 is essentially a story about disability and isolation. Speech impediments such as stammering can make young people feel different from others which can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, in turn resulting in low self-esteem and self-confidence. Alex's stammering is personified as an imaginary character – the Voice Stealer – who steals his voice and makes his life miserable. Using theatre to introduce audiences to difficult subjects in a playful and non-threatening way is, undoubtedly, a good idea and underpins the rationale behind theatre in education. The embodiment of the disability (stammering) as a “baddie” which the young boy can outwit and ultimately conquer has obvious therapeutic value. Unfortunately this production lacked the artistic vision and technical expertise required to create a piece of professional, entertaining theatre. While the idea behind this show cannot be faulted the vision and execution were not of a suitable standard for public presentation.</p>
All (if relevant)	<p>Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection</p> <p>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>	Poor	<p>Voice Stealer 2 appeared as part of Theatre Workshop's biennial international disability arts festival Degenerate 4. This is the 2nd in the Voice Stealer series which originally toured to Edinburgh for the Degenerate 3 festival in 2005. Theatre Workshop describes Degenerate 4 as “Scotland's leading disability multi-arts festival” which “brings together leading disabled artists from all over the world whose work and vision challenges outdated stereotypes”. Theatre Workshop is recognised as an important organisation which offers opportunities to disabled artists and attracts new audiences to the arts. However, Voice Stealer 2 was a poorly conceived and badly executed show. By presenting this production as an example of leading disability arts Theatre Workshop are doing disabled artists and audiences a disservice.</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>	Competent	<p>It's difficult to judge whether the event met its stated aims as very little information was given in advance about the performance itself. The same short descriptive paragraph was used on the Theatre Workshop's website and on the publicity flier for the show but there was no programme. The</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	Education events – see ¹ below for guidance		description of the show gave an oblique idea of what to expect. We knew, for example that the text would rhyme. The information on the flier explained that Steve Holland plays all the different characters and is “ably assisted by 3 wonderful puppets” and the performance was described as “suitable for incorrigible fidgets, especially boys, aged 6-11” but other than that it’s difficult to comment.
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>	Poor	Steve Holland was described on the publicity flier as “a Cornwall based writer and actor” but he didn’t come across as a natural performer. The show suffered badly from a shaky performance which displayed neither confidence with the script nor with the physical aspects of the staging. It was at times quite uncomfortable to watch. However, what he lacked in stage presence he made up for in enthusiasm for the story he was telling.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc		N/A
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Good	Voice Stealer is told in verse. While some of the lines have a lyrical quality and display a gentle, whimsical humour – “If Umbrellotron fires at us, words will just fizzle, we’ll be stammerers, without poetry in endless light drizzle” – a 75 minute story with multiple characters told entirely in verse is difficult to pull off and didn’t always work. The story remained clear and cogent throughout but occasionally the script strained under the necessity to rhyme.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Poor	<p>Despite being the penultimate performance in a run of 10, this performance was faltering and looked under rehearsed. Steve Holland stumbled uncomfortably through the show looking at times as if he was doing it for the first time. The script was hesitantly delivered, the props fumbled and many of the sound and lighting cues missed.</p> <p>The show was advertised as 1 hour 15 minutes but the actual run time was only 40 minutes.</p>

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.	Competent	The show used a variety of recorded tracks including some Disney film tunes. Sound was also provided by a range of electronic gadgets and children’s toys and while these were in keeping with the idea of playing make-believe stories in a child’s bedroom, they were too often a focus of the narrative rather than an interesting addition to it.
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.	Competent	Also in keeping with the ‘playing make-believe stories’ idea, the set and props were purposefully naïve and had an endearing “Heath Robinson” quality about them. Unfortunately the actor’s apparent unfamiliarity with much of the set resulted in some quite difficult to watch fumbling of props which stripped away much of the charm.
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>	Poor	All of the sound and lighting cues appeared to be operated by Steve Holland himself. While this was entirely in keeping with the feel of the show the technical presentation suffered badly as a result. Many of the technical cues were fumbled or missed altogether.
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>Apart from me there was only one other person in the audience - an adult. Obviously this must have made it difficult for the actor but he made the best of the situation and thanked us both for coming at the end of the show.</p> <p>This show took place on a Friday morning in the school summer holiday in the middle of the Fringe Festival and one would have expected to see a larger audience. I’m surprised that the show went ahead at all with such a small audience.</p>
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.		Not aware of any additional activities.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
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)?		N/A

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 show took place in the Theatre Workshop's studio theatre. The space was small but suitable for a production of this scale. However, there is no raised stage and the seating was not raked which could have caused sightline problems for a younger audience, although not in this instance. There was quite a bit of noise disturbance from the traffic on Hamilton Place.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	There was no interpretative material about the show itself but the Theatre Workshop's Fringe Festival 2007 brochure gave a lot of information about the Degenerate 4 festival.
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.	The same information was used on the Theatre Workshop's website, on their Fringe Festival 2007 brochure and on the publicity flier produced by the company but there was no programme.
Ease of booking and payment	Good - reserved a ticket by phone and collected and paid for it on the morning of the performance.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Theatre Workshop is situated in the heart of Stockbridge on a busy road with good bus links to the rest of the city. However, parking can be a problem for those who travel by car.
External signage and signposting	Fine.
Internal directional signage	Fine.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Fully accessible.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The show was advertised as 1 hour 15 minutes but actually ran to just 40 minutes. No explanation was given as to why it was 25 minutes short.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	The member of staff doing Front of House/Box Officer was brusque, rather than welcoming.

Criteria	Comment
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Scottish Arts Council logo on Theatre Workshop's website and Fringe Festival 2007 brochure.

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.