



## 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 Workshop

**Venue:** Theatre Workshop

**Title of Event:** Endgame

**Type of Event:** Theatre

**Date of Visit:** 6 November 2007

**Overall Rating** (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.)

*Overall Rating – Poor*

Theatre Workshop Edinburgh has had a commitment to working with disabled actors since 2000 and seeks “to produce theatre that is well crafted, moving, beautiful, accessible and honest.” Whilst this production was an appropriate choice in the context of the season’s work as well as showing a continued commitment to working with actors with disabilities, this production did not live up to expectations. It was not moving or accessible to the audience as Robert Rae’s direction fell short. In the programme the audience were invited to “watch listen and see where it connects with them today.” The production drew a large audience and the house was nearly full, bringing people from a wide age range and backgrounds. Unfortunately the audience was left bemused and confused. It didn’t connect with us.

Garry Robson worked hard and gave a sensitive and competent performance as Clov, whilst Dolina MacLennan as Nell and Raymond Short as Nagg were good. Unfortunately, Nabil Shaban whose previous work has been good, was declamatory in his delivery which detracted from the piece and meant that much of the humour was lost. It felt as though these were directorial decisions that only served to detract from Beckett’s classic text.

Although it was an interesting idea to work with Sharmanka in terms of design, the kinetic cage like sculpture which formed the focus of the set did not in any way enhance our appreciation or understanding of the play. Again, I was not sure what the cage like set was trying to say.

It’s certainly acceptable to experiment, particularly with the classics for which the company should be commended. However on this occasion it didn’t work. In his direction, Robert Rae tried too hard to convey his interpretation of the text as opposed to allowing the text to be revealed and in the end failed to deliver, leaving the audience baffled and sometimes bored.

Name: Sita Ramamurthy

Date: 12 November 2007

Specialist Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

*Please tick 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	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.	Poor	The vision for this piece was confused. Performances were mixed. Whilst Sharmanaka's set design of kinetic sculpture was fascinating, it didn't really contribute to the play. It felt like there were intellectual ideas which were loaded onto the play as opposed to revealing what lay within it.
All	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.	Good	Part of Theatre Workshop's varied Season and the programming decision sits well within their programme. With the company's focus on shifting awareness with regards to disability it was appropriate to choose this play and work with disabled actors.
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 <sup>1</sup> below for guidance	Poor	As a production that continued to promote work with actors with disabilities it was successful against the stated aims of the company. Unfortunately the production fell short.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.  Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	Competent	Raymond Short as Nagg and Dolina MacLennan as Nell gave competent performances as did Garry Robson as Clov. Nabil Shaban's strength was not brought out through the direction of this production. The advisor has seen Nabil's work before and found him to be a powerful actor but this production did not play to his strengths and resulted in a declamatory performance which did not explore the subtleties of Beckett's text

<sup>1</sup> 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	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.	N/A	Beckett's classic text
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Very Poor	Robert Rae's production was misguided. It tried too hard to make strange what is inherent in the text and in the process lost its focus and darkly comic aspects. In the programme, Robert Rae writes that his job is to make things "more rather than less comprehensible for an audience." Unfortunately he did not succeed in doing this.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	N/A	
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	Whilst Sharmanaka's set design of kinetic sculpture was fascinating, it didn't really contribute to the play and seemed like a conceptual idea which didn't enhance the experience of the production. It was unclear how or why the departure from Beckett's original supported our understanding of the play
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement  Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).  Crafts/Visual Arts - Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang  Education events - relevance/appropriateness of presentation and teaching methodology (one to one, group, child centred); details of participant group and activity, including genre.	Competent	The execution was adequate, though lighting at the top of the show and after the end was so poor, that more than one member of the audience tripped as they weren't able to see clearly in the half light.
All	Audience  Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction  Crafts/Visual Arts – time spent, interest, activity, and visitors' books comments, number of visitors/ participants at the time of visit  Education/learning – pre-event involvement, participants/schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc		Approximately 80% full with a mixed audience, varying in age and background. The audience reaction was luke warm at best. A number of negative comments from young people (teenagers) "what was that about?, you can't possibly have enjoyed that" were heard. Others, left the theatre talking about other things as though they ignored what they had just seen.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
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.	N/A	There was nothing else available on the day of performance
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 theatre venue was suitable for the event, though audience lighting could be improved.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Simple free programmes were available. Some interpretative information may have been helpful to understand the directorial choices.
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 and posters were excellent and did make people interested in the production. The image used in the print was arresting. The website gives information about the performances.
Ease of booking and payment	Very easy to book, and a friendly helpful service
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Centrally located the venue is easy to find
External signage and signposting	External Signage was adequate
Internal directional signage	Internal Signage was adequate
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	There was wheel chair access. Signed performances have been scheduled. Lighting entering the auditorium was poor which could be improved particularly for the visually impaired.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Standard start and finish times appropriate to the programme
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Box office and front of house staff were friendly and helpful. Women's toilets weren't clean.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>	SAC was acknowledged appropriately

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

**A response from Robert Rae;**

***"A memorable production of a remarkable play" Joyce Macmillan \*\*\*\****

**Four stars from Scotland's toughest and most knowledgeable critic Joyce Macmillan and an "in your face" attack upon the production and the Director from arts consultant/artist Ms. Ramamurthy. Within the context of the Quality Framework I am invited to explain, constructively, the discrepancy! I'll do my best.**

**First Beckett would be pleased - it's a testament to the play that after fifty years it still evokes such divergent views, he commented that if the play was performed as he intended the theatres would be empty. The central criticism of the Evaluation is as ironic as it is revealing. I stuck very faithfully to Beckett's own interpretation of his work as articulated in his published notebooks of three productions he was closely involved with. I religiously turned to them for guidance. Ms. Ramamurthy is wrong to say that I tried to place my interpretation on his script. It may be a weakness of the production but I consciously resisted any coherent or totalising discourse. Apart from the adaptations required because of the impairments of the actors - I was faithful to Beckett's own directions.**

**A serious knowledge of the script and an understanding of the craft of acting would lead most to appreciate the enormity of the task of portraying Hamm – along with Lear it is regarded as perhaps an actors greatest technical challenge. A hugely complex piece it stretches memory to the limit. It takes many performances with an audience to understand the interaction and to feel confident and relaxed enough to take ownership. Nabil's performance has developed – and the humour of the piece flows through him, he has risen to the challenge brilliantly – it simply takes time with an audience to flower. To suggest I "imposed a performance" upon Nabil is a rotten guess based upon an ignorance of both Nabil's and my own working practice.**

**Both Nabil Shaban and Garry Robson worked closely with Sharmanka in the development phase to produce sculptures that reflected their interpretations of their characters as well as meeting their physical needs. It is a testament to the narrowness of focus of the Evaluation that Sharmanka's input as artists is ignored – along with that of the sound designer, lighting designer and composer.**

**Ms. Ramamurthy's offers anecdotal evidence of over hearing audience members to support her view. We can supply documented and signed responses from audience members illustrating how much they enjoyed the production, and many commented upon its clarity and accessibility. I am sorry our production didn't work for her, but her evaluation makes wrong assumptions. It was a collectively created piece with experienced designers and actors fully involved in the creative process. So why the attempt to portray it as the very opposite? As an experienced arts consultant she is aware of the sensitivity of the moment in which she makes her attack – ahhh politics again and with such a wee p!!!!**

