



Scottish **Arts** Council

## 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.

|                        |                           |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Artist/Company:</b> | Theatre Workshop          |
| <b>Venue:</b>          | Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh |
| <b>Title of Event:</b> | Marat / Sade              |
| <b>Type of Event:</b>  | Performance               |
| <b>Date of Visit:</b>  | Saturday 15 November      |
| <b>Overall Rating:</b> | Poor                      |

A bold and ambitious staging of a complex play which was undermined by a muddled interpretation. The story was smothered with so many elements that the production failed to clearly communicate with and engage the audience.

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Date: 7 December 2008

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               | 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      | This was a bold and ambitious staging of a complex play. The play itself is regarded as a classic and one that has the capacity to be both flamboyantly theatrical and profoundly thought-provoking. However Theatre Workshop's interpretation was over-burdened with too many elements which resulted in a production which failed to communicate any cogent message.  |
| All (if relevant) | Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection<br>Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.<br><br>If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme. | Good      | Marat/Sade is Theatre Workshop's latest large scale touring production and continues the company's focus on inclusive practice and which includes both professional and community actors. Marat/Sade continues the company's aim to produce socially engaged theatre which offers "social, political and cultural insights which can empower individuals to change themselves and the world around them". The question here is whether this production successfully delivered these aims. |
| All               | Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.<br><br>Education events – see <sup>1</sup> below for guidance   | Poor      | "Theatre Workshop aims to produce professional, well-crafted productions that are moving, challenging, beautiful, accessible and honest" and Marat/Sade was described as an attempt to "draw people back into serious political debate". Unfortunately this production was so confused it was neither accessible nor engaging and did not successfully communicate the themes in the play.  |
| All               | Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.<br><br>Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.   | Poor      | The thrust of the political and philosophical discourse lay with the central characters Marat and Sade (played by Andrew McLay and Nabil Shaban) but they, along with the rest of the professional and community cast, struggled both to communicate the complexities of the script and with the challenges of portraying characters that are playing characters.   |
| Dance, Theatre    | Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc  | Competent | Jane Howie, Choreographer. Minimal choreography.  |

<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   |
|----------------|---|-----------|---|
| Theatre        | Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.  | Good      | From Peter Weiss's original script – the adaptation was not credited.   |
| Theatre, Dance | Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.  | Poor      | Director, Robert Rae. Marat/Sade is a play which is both structurally complex (a play within a play) and crammed full of ideas and requires a more clear-sighted treatment than the one given to it by Theatre Workshop; this production combined both mainstream and disabled actors, a large professional and community cast, promenade staging, live music and visual projections. The director's decision to smother the story with so many additional elements did not aid clarity of storytelling.  |
| Dance, Theatre | Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.  | Good      | Musical director, Mikey Cameron. 5 singers and a band provided original live music which acted as a useful counterpoint to the drama and helped to create the feeling of a theatrical spectacle.  |
| 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 | Set Designer, Gordon Davidson. The monumental set appeared to be an ambitious undertaking for a company to tour and this may have been the reason for the cancelled performance – see Quality of Presentation/Engagement.<br><br>Costume Designer, Kenny Miller. The costumes were all beautifully realised.  |
| 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> | Good      | I attended the Saturday matinee performance which was professionally presented. However, I had originally booked tickets for the Thursday evening performance but received an email informing me that the show was taken off sale due to concerns that “the show may not be fully ready technically.”   |
| 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,</p>                                      |           | <p>The “promenade” style production caused some problems for the audience initially - there was confusion about where people could stand/sit. There were a limited number of seats as the company wanted to encourage “audiences to get closer to the action – to be immersed in the world of the play”. This meant that for the first act most of the audience stood within the set but after the interval all of the audience found a seat on the raised stage.</p> <p>It was difficult to gauge the size of the audience but there were perhaps 50 people at the performance I</p> |

| Artform | Criteria   | Rating | Comments and key reasons for rating |
|---------|--|--------|-------------------------------------|
|         | understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc  |        | attended.                           |
| 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    |                                     |
| 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 Assembly Rooms on George Street in Edinburgh was an appropriate space. The ballroom was large enough to accommodate the set and access was good.  |
| Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.   | The company produced a comprehensive programme for the show which included, as well as the usual biogs, a Q & A with the director, an article about the play by John Calder (Peter Weiss's former publisher) and an essay on 1968 by Claire Warden. |
| 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. | There was information about the show on the company's website but I was not aware of any leaflets or posters.   |
| Ease of booking and payment   | Tickets booked on-line through the Usher Hall website.  |
| Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?   | Centrally located in Edinburgh.   |
| External signage and signposting  | Not aware of any external sign posting.   |
| Internal directional signage  | Fine.   |
| Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?  | Disabled access throughout.   |
| Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?  | The show (including interval) ran to 2 hours 30 minutes and felt long.  |
| Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)   | All fine.   |
| Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>   | SAC acknowledged on the programme.  |

<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.