

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: Music at the Brewhouse

Venue: Tramway

Title of Event: HELTER SKELTER

Type of Event: performance

Date of Visit: Friday 6th July 2007

Overall Rating: Competent

The biggest difficulty with HELTER SKELTER was its lack of direction that overrode most of its strengths.

Name: Chloë Dear – Specialist Advisor **Date:** 28 September 2007

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.	Competent	<p>The ideas behind the production were potentially exciting. Using the setting of freak shows, fairground and circuses as the starting point for strange and surreal tales has been done before but is still a rich source of imagery and storytelling.</p> <p>HELTER SKELTER did not quite meet the potential of the ideas expressed in its pre-publicity and was rather a tame tale. There was so much more that could have been done given the subject matter and the assembled cast.</p> <p>This is the first time I have seen work by this company although I know the work of some of those involved.</p>
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.	Good	<p>This was a Tramway Commission with support from Dancebase and the Hidden Gardens (I am not sure to what degree). Financial support also came from the PRS Foundation. It was a stand-alone performance.</p> <p>It is interesting to see work of this vision / blend of art forms in Scotland.</p>
All	Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.	Competent	<p>The flyer promised "a macabre and surreal fairy tale for adults... a dream world reeking of the freak shows, fairgrounds and circuses of long ago". The performance did not quite match this reality as it failed to create this world sufficiently strongly.</p>
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.	Good	<p>Overall the performers were of a high standard although not all had strong acting ability and were obviously in the cast because of other strengths, eg physical circus skill.</p> <p>The performers were largely engaging and had the ability to pull you in to what they were doing. However, their characters were sometimes hard to differentiate and their relationships to each other in the context of the story were not always clear,</p> <p>One of the performers misjudged the capacity of a young child in the audience to get involved and rather scared him. The parent seemed ok about this but it showed poor judgement by the performer.</p>
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	Good	<p>There was not much "dance" choreography despite the physical nature of the piece. The aerial work at the end was beautifully done and in marked contrast to much of the rest of the production which consisted of much more chaotic movement.</p> <p>Of note was the duo between one of the female</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			performers and the trombone player, John Kenny – this was amusing and well done.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Poor	<p>The script was not one of the strong points, In fact, it was difficult to follow the story and work out exactly what was going on although this is more a matter of direction than the script itself – see below. The non-text based nature of the production was not a problem although much of the story was sung (it was not always possible to work out what the words were).</p> <p>The basic difficulty was that the story was not very strong or interesting.</p>
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Poor	<p>It was obvious that there had been problems with the direction. The name of the director (Ben Harrison) on the flyer did not appear on the programme but others had taken over the direction in his stead. However, this substitution did not compensate for the loss of a skilled director.</p> <p>There was a lack of cohesion and a need for the production to be pulled into focus – at times it was rather chaotic and there were scenes that had no real meaning (although were nice in themselves).</p> <p>There was a real need to find the throughline of the story and to make it stronger, although the story itself perhaps did not have enough depth.</p> <p>Some of the key moments in the story (ie ones that illuminated the narrative) were not sufficiently highlighted which meant that the narrative was hard to follow.</p> <p>The cast was a mix of odd-balls, obviously chosen to be representative of characters one might find within a freak show / circus. A number of them are well known in the circus / street arts / physical theatre world and were well equipped to handle the subject matter.</p> <p>The promenade aspect of the production may not have helped. Yes, it did suit the production not to have a seated audience but the environment of the Hidden Gardens did not quite provide the environment to suspend belief and for the audience to become truly immersed in the world of fairgrounds etc. It needed more darkness to provided a sinister-ness that was lacking – I don't mean this just in terms of physical lighting.</p> <p>Also, shifting around, especially the transition from outside to inside meant that the audience lost its focus at times. However, taking everyone indoors for the final scene, although it seemed disjointed at the time, pulled the focus back in successfully.</p>

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.	Good	<p>The music was a powerful element to the production, provided by a live band of 10 musicians including conductor. It was very appropriate to have a band of this size especially as bands are a traditional feature of circuses.</p> <p>I would have liked to have seen more physical involvement from the musicians rather than keeping them so separate in their rotunda / cage and therefore somewhat removed from the action. The musicians could have been used as more of a chorus.</p> <p>Much of the story was told through sung narration. At times it was hard to work out what was being sung but on the whole, this worked as a format for story telling.</p>
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	<p>The design overall did not really conjure up the other-worldliness of the fairground although the rotunda structure for the band was a strong element and provided a platform for key parts of the show.</p> <p>Some of the costumes were poor / tacky and not holding up well to the amount of abuse they were being given.</p> <p>I understand the problems of working with radio mics but perhaps more could have been done to conceal these from the audience.</p> <p>Lighting outside in daylight is a waste of time – I was aware of some lighting effects being used but they hardly stood out.</p> <p>Inside, the lighting was well done and atmospheric.</p>
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement	Good	Technically the production was strong despite the challenges of working outside.
All	Audience Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction		<p>Although the stated audience age was 16+, the content of the production was not as risqué (some nudity / near nudity) as I thought it would be, given the 16+ recommendation. Certainly I should not have hesitated in bringing my own son as there was little to worry about. In fact, the show could have done with being more risqué – it was far too tame!</p> <p>The event was sold-out and the audience response was strong – being largely promenade, it was possible to see their responses and it was obvious that much of the audience was enjoying the experience.</p>
All	Additional Interpretative activity	n/a	

2. Management of Event

Criteria	Comment
Suitability of the venue for the event	The venue was fine especially as it offered a range of environments for the production (although transferring the production from outside in the gardens to inside the venue caused a loss of focus).
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	The programme was very simple. I would have liked more information especially about the company as I had not come across its work before.
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.	<p>Very eye-catching and high quality flyers – these were widely distributed.</p> <p>Information on the flyer about the venue and dates of performances was clear. However, the street address of the venue was left off the flyer and this would require those unfamiliar with Tramway to spend some time working out where to go.</p> <p>The statement that this was suitable for ages 16+ was perhaps a little misleading since bar some nudity there was not anything particularly shocking for younger teenagers.</p> <p>Could not find a website for the organisation Music at the Brewhouse and the only web references were listings in The List.</p>
Ease of booking and payment	Straight-forward by phone. I had tried to book by internet via the Tramway website and this proved impossible.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Tramway is a well-known venue and relatively easy to find once you know the way.
External signage and signposting	Fine
Internal directional signage	Fine
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Access for those with mobility difficulties seemed straight-forward although moving around the garden would have been tricky in places. No provision for those with poor hearing.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	<p>Not sure where to put this, but the very early cancellation (6pm) of the first performance made it very difficult for me to get to see the show. I was then left with only one other option and luckily this performance was not cancelled.</p> <p>We have had an exceptionally bad summer in terms of weather but as someone involved in outdoor performance, the rule has to be to cancel as late as possible, even if this is very inconvenient for those travelling some distance like myself on this occasion. It is just one of the risks companies run when working outside. However, the weather can often surprise us and provide a window of opportunity on even the most grim of days especially on the changeable west coast.</p> <p>Shows outdoors should be made as weather-proof as possible particularly if you are playing in Scotland. There are many techniques for this and I saw nothing particular within the show that seemed so weather-sensitive to warrant pulling just because a grey cloud wafted into view. Performers can pull back a little if there is risk</p>

Criteria	Comment
	<p>of slipping and equipment can be protected.</p> <p>Audiences are, on the whole, robust and will dress accordingly. It has to be very bad for audiences to not come (I speak from long experience!).</p> <p>9pm is quite late for a theatre performance but not late enough for one that is outside in the Scottish summer, especially one trying to create an otherworldliness. As a result, many of the lighting effects in the Gardens were lost and it was hard to create an other-worldliness with so much intrusion of the real world.</p>
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Fine
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ¹	None, at least not on the flyer or on the programme; the latter featured no logos of funders whatsoever but did acknowledge a number of companies and organisations assisting them.

¹ 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.