



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: Akram Khan & National Ballet of China

Venue: Tramway

Title of Event : Bahok

Type of Event: performance

Date of Visit: Friday 23 May 2008

Overall Rating: 5 - Excellent

This is a hugely engaging and inventive piece of contemporary dance: as exciting for its dynamic, virtuosic choreography as for its theatrical power. Mixing cultures and dance styles to reflect our globalised world it paints a poignantly picture of a nameless 'departure lounge' or waiting room where eight characters' worlds collide or pass each other by. Easily up to the choreographer's usual standard 'Bahok' stands out for its sensitive integration of Khan's Kathak-contemporary company and the National Ballet of China dancers he has joined forces with. It is testimony to what can be achieved when time and funds are put into collaborative ventures.

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Date: 13.06.08

Specialist Advisor

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	Bahok is a powerful piece of contemporary dance that is visionary in both content and artistic process. Based in an imagined 'waiting room' – it could be international hub airport or train station – this collaboration between Akram Khan's company and National Ballet of China portrays eight characters with differing cultures and languages but a common humanity. As the spotlight shifts from one to another, from solo to duet and trio, we watch them try to communicate; to be heard. Sometimes it's funny; sometimes intriguing; sometimes sad. Some scenes fictional; some semi-autobiographical. Akram Khan cleverly weaves both the experiences and the differing dance styles of his international cast to create a vivid portrayal of both the new globalism and the way most our lives rub up against those of strangers on a daily basis (whether it be bus, tube or crowded street). Akram Khan's innovative contemporary-Kathak hybrid may seem an odd partner to the more formal Chinese state ballet but he makes a virtue of their differences. Always pushing things forward, this is well up to Khan's usual standard: even without his own electric presence on stage.
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.	5	Bahok originated with the dancer/choreographer Akram Khan and is a co-production with various international theatres including Sadlers Wells where Khan is an associate artist. It is a collaboration between Khan's small independent dance company and the National Ballet of China and is unusual for the fact that the three NBC dancers involved spent a full year working with AKC. It's quality the total integration of the ballet dancers into Khan's company clearly demonstrate what can be done when funds allow a collaboration to develop over months rather than weeks.
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	5	Khan's aim (as detailed in the print programme) with Bahok was to explore ideas of home and identity using the dancers' diverse cultural and movement backgrounds. We are told the word Bahok means 'carrier'. In his eyes we are all 'bahok': carrying with us 'our genetic and cultural inheritances, our experiences, our dreams and aspirations'. Here the dancers are the 'carriers'. They meet in 'one of the world's globalised transit zones' where they 'try to communicate, to exchange their stories, their memories of home'. These are very precise aims for a non-narrative dance show

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
			but Khan makes them beautifully explicit here. Whether delivering lines, dancing or jostling for position around the giant departure board it is abundantly clear these are disconnected individuals in some kind of limbo; each with their own stories to tell.
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>	5	The performers – both from Khan’s company and NBC are of an exceptionally high standard. Khan’s own dancers have integrated his Kathak-contemporary idiom into a fluid, acrobatic style that is both dynamic and expressive. The Chinese dancers have the powerful technicality expected from classical schooling. But the time spent with Khan’s company has seen them absorb an unexpected fluidity and flexibility of style. The show requires strong acting skills and onstage charisma which the dancers all have. That these are their own stories feeding into the piece could have been self-indulgent but only seems to make them more connected with the action.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	5	Khan’s choreography is original to the point of being instantly recognisable. Here though he expands his own Kathak-contemporary vocabulary to allow the dancers’ own strengths and styles shine through. There is clever use of up and downstage space to create the sense of a large departure lounge or concourse. The eight dancers are used well, bringing their personalities as well as their movement history to the choreography. The result is a dynamic, fast-moving work that is modern but still refers back to the strong storytelling and gestural aspects of ancient Kathak. At 75 minutes without interval the length is just right.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	N/A	N/A
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	5	The piece is cast with thought and care for the subject matter. Interestingly, though not presented as dance-theatre or physical theatre it is as well directed and developed in terms of character as it is in terms of choreography.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	5	The especially composed score is by Khan’s longtime collaborator Nitin Sawhney. It is rich and atmospheric, almost filmic in quality (the multi-talented Sawhney has written many film scores. Drawing on many different influences from traditional Indian drum cycles to electronica it expertly captures the multi-culturism of the piece and the tapestry of stories its characters tell.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
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.	4	Design is simple, effective and adaptable enough for the range of medium-scale venues on the touring schedule. Central is a large departure board where messages ranging from ‘flight delayed’ to the more poetic ‘water, air, etc.’ Rows of chairs facing front complete the departure lounge. Performers wear casual, everyday dress, in keeping with the semi-autobiographical nature of the piece.
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>	4	Technically slick with atmospheric, moody lighting and good sound quality throughout.
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>		Playing for three nights this drew a bigger more varied audience than usual to Tramway. Judging by the apparently full house and standing ovations on the night I attended the show was received very well! If anything this production is accessible and broad-ranging enough to transcend the usual Tramway audience and may have done well in one of Scotland’s bigger venues. However, Khan’s company has played Tramway before and has a following there. There is also a lovely historical connection in that Khan had his first taste of live theatre performing in Peter Brook’s legendary Mahabharata in the first days of Tramway.
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	Having scanned the print programme, fliers, press articles and company and venue website I was not aware of additional activities pegged to the Tramway, Glasgow leg of tour. This is not to say none were available.
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)?		

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	As indicated before [Audience section] this show worked well in Tramway. But it is possible it could have reached an even bigger audience if located elsewhere.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Programmes were readily available from ushers near the main door. Full-colour fliers and posters were well displayed throughout. Press cuttings were displayed near the entrance to the auditorium, rather than by the front door as 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.	Excellent full-colour posters featuring strong photography were seen in a variety of locations prior to the show. I didn't pick up any leaflets but the Tramway website had a reasonable outline of the show accompanied by a raft of positive press quotes from previous dates on the touring schedule. Combined these created a buzz about the show and a feeling it was one to see. The Akram Khan company website is of a very high standard with plenty of easy-to-navigate information and some beautiful film footage of Khan dancing.
Ease of booking and payment	I booked over the phone which took several attempts. Online booking would be helpful as the box office was closed when I tried to book during the evening and there was only one person manning two phone lines when I tried again the next morning. This meant leaving a voicemail for Tramway to call back or trying again later.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Travelling from Edinburgh to Glasgow is made easy by the frequency of trains. However onward travel from Queen Street is less straightforward. The overground train is from Central Station not Queen Street, the nearest underground station is a good walk away and you wouldn't tackle the buses unless you knew the routes well. Again as a lone female travelling late on a Friday night I found the taxi situation frustrating. Prior to the show I asked box office staff if they could book a taxi for onward journey to the train station but was told taxi companies would not take bookings from Tramway. This meant walking up the main road towards town until a taxi could be hailed.
External signage and signposting	External signage for Tramway is well below standard. The main sign above the door is only visible as you draw up outside and the only other signage is a small lopsided sign hanging off a lamppost outside. I couldn't see any signs indicating where to turn off into Albert Drive.
Internal directional signage	Internal signage is much better with auditoria, bar/café, toilets all well-marked.

Criteria	Comment
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Access to Tramway is through automatic doors leading straight into the main building, toilets and café. The Making of Doubt was on the ground floor in Tramway 1 so no access problem there. The website explains that Tramway has been a fully accessible space since work completed in 2000 and that there is an infra red system for audio description and sound amplification if required.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The start time of Bahok was 8pm on Thursday, Friday and Saturday night. This is the 'traditional' start time for both Tramway and smaller arts venues and one audiences are used to. The length (75 minutes without interval) was ideal for the medium-scale venue.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	All staff were reasonably friendly and efficient. Bar prices are a bit high though!
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	There was acknowledgement of SAC funding on Tramway-produced items (eg the website). But in this case the main full-colour print programme was not produced by Tramway and carried acknowledgement of the show/tour's funding bodies instead.

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.