



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: The Traverse Theatre Company

Venue: The Traverse Theatre

Title of Event: 'Strangers, Babies' by Linda McLean

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: 15th March 2007

Overall Rating: COMPETENT

This production, though dealing with difficult and uncomfortable material seemed reluctant to delve too deeply and ask difficult questions of both its audience and cast. What was presented to the audience was a well crafted but 'soft focus' inquiry into child murder and it's aftermath on the young perpetrators. While the general production values were high, and the acting good the total did not, for me live up to the sum of its parts.

Name: **Steve Slater**

Date: **29 / 04 / 07**

Specialist Advisor X

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.	Competent	On Paper, the outline for Linda McLean's play looks strong. However the transition to the stage seems to have diluted the production, giving a surprisingly 'comfortable' and safe adaptation that failed to live up to its aspirations.
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.	Competent	Again the individual elements were strong, but somehow failed to ignite on stage. The production formed part of a strong programme of work at the Travers, again managing to combine talented writing with strong cast and production values. Although in this case, for me the piece failed to engage successfully, this approach to new work is still valuable and is the corner stone of the Travers's long held position in Scottish Theatre.
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	Competent	There were few stated aims attached to the production, other than that it would be at times chilling and frequently hilarious – neither of which I found to be true for myself. There were few surprises within the work, and much of the plays success was due to the acting and the central role-played by Gillian Kearney.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	Good	All the actors performed well, and it was this interplay between Gillian Kearney's character 'May' and the five male actors that kept the play from running aground.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	N/A	There was no real evidence of choreography displayed within the production.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Good	Linda McLean's script seemed interesting. However the production failed to bring any real sense of darkness that I'm sure lurks at it's heart to the surface, and consequently the play became something that played out like a toothless shark unable to get it's teeth into the subject matter.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Competent	Philip Howard's direction, while interesting in terms of cast and use of the physical space, seemed unsure as to where to place the emphasis at the core of this play. The Chilling and The humorous elements seeming to war with each other – rather than compliment and propel both the audience and

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
			<p>cast into ever deeper zones of uncertainty and hopelessness.</p> <p>The central question – can we move on from actions in our lives that cast long and life effecting shadows on our lives – was for me never really answered</p>
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	Competent	Pippa Murphy's music supplied a spare and stripped down back drop in support of the set and actions on stage.
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.	Good	I quite liked the utilitarian nature of the sparse stage set and its frequent subtle changes between scenes. With a strong production the imagination can take these small brush strokes and build upon them.
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	This was another strong and professional production from The Traverse Theatre Company on home turf. The production quality was good with no discernable lapses in quality. Lighting, sound and stage all coming together to give a very professional night out at the theatre.
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>	Good	This was a fairly typical audience for the main stage at the Traverse – most of the audience looking as though they were regulars to the theatre and were probably not first time attendees. On the evening I attended there were over 200 people in the audience and the reaction was favourable – in no small part due to the central performance by Gillian Kearney who is obviously well known to the general public through her roles on TV.
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.	Good	The performance I attended was audio described with a touch tour and signed during the performance. There were also writers' workshops and a stagetext captioned performance advertised on the leaflet to accompany the show.
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	N/A	I am unable to comment as I do not know what education activity took place.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	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	This was a Travers Theatre Company premier and as such was totally appropriate for the theatres main stage.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Good information was available at the theatre in the form of the Traverse Brochure, leaflets and a published script from the company, which detailed the project very well.
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.	Good quality publicity material was evident prior to the show, as well as good previews in the media and web site for finding information on the project.
Ease of booking and payment	Booking was made by phone after visiting the Traverse web site. I experienced no problems with the transaction.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	The Travers is a well-established Edinburgh Venue and is accessible by public transport and on foot.
External signage and signposting	Traverse theatre is well established and is well signed from outside the building.
Internal directional signage	Again, this is not a problem – with signage directing you down to the theatre very well.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	There are spaces for wheelchair users provided in the theatre and provision to access them.
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 the production was appropriate.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Customer service was good. No problems were encountered
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	SAC funding was acknowledged on all publicity material – including the script.

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.