



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.

**Artist/Company:** Traverse Theatre

**Venue:** Traverse 1

**Title of Event:** Damascus

**Type of Event:** Performance

**Date of Visit:** 18 Aug 07

**Overall Rating:** Good

*Damascus* contains some excellent dialectic writing concerning issues of democracy, human rights and fundamentalism. Overall, though, both the text and production were uneven. I feel that we could have expected more from a writer, director and company of this pedigree.

Name: David Leddy Date: 20 Aug 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.	Good	The overall concept for this piece is an interesting one, with some scenes working excellently. However, particular characters and plotlines remain underdeveloped.
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.	Good	The themes and overall concept for the piece are a strong and highly relevant.
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 below for guidance	Competent	As with his previous work, Greig's focus here is on exploring intimate human interaction against a backdrop of larger socio-political issues, particularly relating to human rights and fundamentalism. There are, however, no explicit aims discussed in the programme or other material that I have seen.
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	Dolya Gavanski Paul Higgins Khalid Laith Nathalie Armin Alex Elliot Overall, the quality of performances was competent. Nathalie Armin gave a detailed and thoughtful performance which helped to compensate for the less complex performances from the other actors, particularly Dolya Gavanski and Khalid Laith.
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.	Competent	David Greig <i>Damascus</i> contains some excellent writing and scenes of highly effective dialectic that discusses issues of morality, democracy and rights. Elsewhere, though, characters were blandly underwritten and plotting was weak (particularly in relation to Zakaria and his relationship with Paul). Even taking into account Greig's desire to

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
			manipulate the conventions of the well-made play, I felt that the work was uneven. Similarly, the piece was longer than the quality of the material warranted and I feel that judicious editing would have allowed us to focus on the excellent discursive arguments in the relationships between Paul, Muna and Wasim.
Theatre, Dance	Direction -Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Competent	Philip Howard David Overend (asst) As one would expect, the quality of directing here was of a good standard. However, I feel that there was much more room for the director(s) to build more detailed, complex characterisations and relationships arising from the raw material of Greig's text. In particular, I found the handling of Zakaria and the dramatic tensions (or not) leading to his eventual suicide to be handled clumsily.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	Competent	Composer / arranger -Jon Beales Pianist -Dolya Gavanski Sound Designer - Graham Sutherland Music was used in the piece and underpinned much of the action. This was ably handled, though did not greatly enhance the overall theatrical effect of the work.
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	Designer -Anthony MacIlwaine Lighting Designer – Chahine Yavroyan All aspects of the design were executed to a good standard, but were creatively somewhat prosaic.
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement Performing Arts -technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).	Excellent	As one would expect from this company, the standard of presentation were very high.
All	Audience Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction		Sold out audience in Traverse 1. The audience reacted very warmly to the work, particularly to the comic elements of the piece. It seemed appropriate to the audience.
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.		I did not see any additional interpretative activity, though there may have been a post-show discussion earlier in the run.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	Outcomes of education activity –	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?*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Suitability of the venue for the event	Highly suitable
Information/ interpretive material at venue -programmes, displays etc.	Script / programme.
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.	Publicity was of a good quality. I saw posters, Traverse brochure and the Traverse website. I would have liked more detailed information about the play to have been available on the website.
Ease of booking and payment	Very easy and efficient. I was slightly concerned, though, at the £16 ticket price for a publicly funded show. Personally, this stopped me from booking for other Traverse shows.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Easy to find, on main transport routes.
External signage and signposting	Good.
Internal directional signage	Good.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Lifts available.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The time of the show (14.45) was appropriate for a Fringe show. The length (2h35, including interval) was rather long and I felt that extraneous material could have been removed from the text with more vigorous dramaturgical work.
Customer service -quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Very good.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>	SAC acknowledged on all material that I saw.

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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.