



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

Venue: The Traverse Theatre

Title of Event: The Pearlfisher

Type of Event: (e.g. performance, exhibition, informal showing, work-in-progress, workshop, screening, lecture etc) Theatre Performance

Date of Visit: 1 November 2007

Overall Rating: (Please rate the event overall, taking into account your ratings for each section. Please state the key reasons for your overall ratings – i.e. the particular strengths and weaknesses. If the management of the event affects the overall enjoyment of the event, please comment, but the overall rating should be based on the artistic merit of the event.)

Good

I found the play and the production really enchanting, thoroughly enjoyable and enriching. It was not what I expected as a great deal had been made in advance of the play exploring issues of being an outsider – a traveller – a settler. I didn't feel it tackled those issues at all nor that it provided a dramatic enough story to explore them. However it raised fascinating questions about an innate sense of shared culture and, although somewhat sentimental, it also presented a clear view of changing culture across nearly 60 years. A really strong production and an entertaining thought-provoking piece of theatre.

Name: *Stephen Stenning*

Date: *13 December 2007*

Specialist Advisor

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.	Excellent	This was a very high quality production of an interesting play. The production itself was imaginative and created a magical poetic world for the play, matching the beauty of the language.
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	Pearlfisher was the last Traverse production for outgoing director Philip Howard. It was a good choice, in that Iain MacLeod is an interesting writer who has written quality scripts for the Traverse. It also potentially was a play that could explore contemporary issues in a theatrical way.
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 was a suggestion in some of the advanced publicity of the Pearlfisher being a play that would explore attitudes to travellers as compared to migrant workers and other settlers. It did not really do that very thoroughly or effectively. Whilst I found the very poetic 'otherworldly' society of the play fascinating and appealing, it did not lend itself to exploration of contemporary issues. It was however, a high quality and inventive piece of contemporary theatre from an innovative Scottish writer.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	Excellent	The cast were strong and did a very good job, particularly as it was a demanding play given the reliance on accent work. Anne Lacey gave a commanding performance as Etta and Jess and the younger members of cast gave very accomplished performances.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	N/A	Not applicable. A choreographer was not used on the piece.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Good	I found it a really powerful and beautiful piece of writing. The world the characters inhabit was appealing and seductive but never truly real. It felt like it ought to have been a really momentous and dramatic story but it never really was. In a way the most dramatic elements of the story appeared to have happened during the time that elapsed between the first and second acts. It was however an enjoyable enchanting piece to watch.

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
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Excellent	It was really cleverly and imaginatively directed. The ensemble style that was used with the actors sitting off stage is more often associated with a sparse set and epic theme but it worked well. The challenges presented by the importance of location and surrounding to the play was dealt with head on and the location was brought in to the theatre.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	Good	Traditional musician Gavin Marwick's score as a key and very visible element of the production worked very well to create the atmosphere of the early scenes in the first half.
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	Traverse one is a difficult venue given the steep raked seats and very open stage for a very realistic rural scene including highland stream/river. Lisa Sangster's set was ambitious and really contributed the atmosphere of the piece. The design of the piece was strong and there was a great deal of attention to detail.
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc). Crafts/Visual Arts - Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang Education events - relevance/ appropriateness of presentation and teaching methodology (one to one, group, child centred); details of participant group and activity, including genre.	Good	Generally very good and the production with all cues seemingly very slick. The set created some challenges and the gauze that was used at the top of the show did not seem to do its job very well and the mechanism for raising it somewhat cumbersome.
All	Audience Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction Crafts/Visual Arts – time spent, interest, activity, and visitors' books comments, number of visitors/ participants at the time of visit Education/learning – pre-event involvement, participants/ schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc		The auditorium was full and the audience very appreciative. The audience included an impressive range of age groups with a good many students and young people. The play seemed to connect well with the audience with a great deal of discussion about the piece in the interval. It was obvious that the audience were really engaged by it and had a very strong reaction to it.
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	A group from Telford College were having a post show discussion with the cast and it was obvious that a good deal of work had been done to connect with students. There was also a group from Queen Margaret's present who had studied the play and received a pre-production class or workshop.
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)?	Good	The published playtext helps to provide a way in to contemporary theatre writing for an audience. I was very taken by the number of people studying their text in the interval.

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	It felt like the right venue for it because it is a piece of new writing more than for the style of the piece.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	The playtext programme, although an expensive way to receive programme information, does add to the experience. The Traverse work hard to ensure that you could get necessary information without having to buy the text if you don't want to.
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. The website in particular provides very full information about the production but the brochure also provided good pre-publicity.
Ease of booking and payment	I booked on line and it was very easy.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	It is relatively easy to get to as it is very central and near to car parks and not far from either Haymarket or Waverley with good bus links up the Lothian Road.
External signage and signposting	There are not many signs to it and currently difficult to spot from the Lothian Road because of the construction work.
Internal directional signage	Not very clear – small discreet signs.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	The lift is well sign posted as are the disabled toilets.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	It was at the right time.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Box office staff were helpful and efficient. FOH were friendly.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	SAC were clearly acknowledged in various ways around the building.

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.