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:	**The Traverse Theatre**
Venue:	**Traverse Theatre**
Title of Event:	**Nova Scotia**
Type of Event:	**performance**
Date of Visit:	**20/05/2008**

Overall Rating: **Poor** The original Slab Boys trilogy enjoyed success with audiences and it would have seemed reasonable to assume that a sequel to this would have great audience appeal. However the production had an undeveloped script that simply wasn't funny, two-dimensional characters and pedestrian direction that failed to deliver the farcical elements - which meant that it failed to engage or entertain.

Name: Jaine Lumsden Date:29/08/2008

Scottish Arts Council Officer

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	The original Slab Boys trilogy enjoyed success with audiences and it would have seemed reasonable to assume that a sequel to this would have great audience appeal. However the production had a poor script that simply wasn't funny, pedestrian direction that failed to deliver the farcical elements - which meant that it failed to engage or entertain. This does not compare favourably with other Traverse productions that I have seen.
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	Originated by Traverse, who commissioned playwright.
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	Poor	"Nova Scotia is the triumphant next instalment of one of the best loved stories in Scottish theatre. Fine out what happens when the Slab Boys hit the 21st century!" (flyer) While the piece did carry on the story of the Slab Boys, the production could not realistically be described as triumphant.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	Poor	The cast worked very hard to instil some life into the script, but struggled with two-dimensional parts, humour that didn't work and unengaging dialogue.
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.	Poor	By John Byrne. Although this was a sequel it did work as a stand-alone piece as it would not have been necessary to have seen the original trilogy to understand it, notwithstanding references to the previous storylines. However there was little to engage an audience's interest in the characters, their individual stories and issues or the complexities of their

[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
			relationships. They had no depth and it was difficult to engage with them. The play was obviously meant to be entertaining, with some farcical scenes. Crucially, the script simply wasn't funny. The first half of the play would have benefited from some cuts, as the script took too long to get to the actual heart of the story.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Poor	By Paddy Cunneen. The first half had a few moments of inspiration but in general the pace dragged. The farcical scenes were directed clumsily and because of this didn't really work. The casting was appropriate but because of the script and lack of inspired direction the performances were lacklustre. The non-naturalistic section where some cast members started singing around the aging rock star had the potential to be amusing, but sat strangely within the overall style of the piece which meant the effect was odd.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	Good	Sound designer Euan McLaren. The live singing worked well within the context of the piece (though see above.)
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	Set by Michael Taylor, which was over-designed and curiously old-fashioned in appearance. The costumes by John Byrne and Aileen Sherry were entirely appropriate for the characters. Lighting by Jeanine Davis worked with the set.
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.	Competent	Professionally presented
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/		Some laughter but a fairly muted response at the end.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc		
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.		Not as far as I am aware.
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)?		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?

Criteria	**Comment**
Suitability of the venue for the event	Suitable
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Programmes with script included. Posters
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.	Traverse brochure, website, posters - good design.
Ease of booking and payment	Fine
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	.Fine, on main transport routes.
External signage and signposting	Fine (if somewhat obscured by building works)
Internal directional signage	Fine, clear
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Fine (lift.)
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	This seemed to go on for a very long time.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Friendly and efficient
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding [2]	Acknowledged

[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.