



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 Theatre, Edinburgh
Title of Event: Class Act
Type of Event: Education Project
Date of Visit: Wednesday 11 February 2009
Overall Rating: Excellent

Class Act is a large scale education project which gives high school pupils the opportunity to work with professional writers, actors and directors to write, produce and present their own short plays on the Traverse Theatre's main stage. The script development process the young writers go through is exactly the same as a playwright working for the Traverse would experience and the project is a valuable creative learning opportunity for the young people taking part. The Traverse has run Class Act since 1990 and their continued commitment to the project and to giving young people a real life experience of being a professional writer is important.

Name: **Laura Tyrrell**

Date: 27 February 2009

Specialist Advisor

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	<p>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.</p>	Excellent	<p>The Traverse Theatre has run Class Act, their annual schools playwriting project, since 1990 and over the last 18 years they have worked with high school pupils from Edinburgh, West Lothian, Fife, the Borders and this year, for the first time, Glasgow. This new development, in partnership with the Tron Theatre, has the joint aim of encouraging schools to develop a continuing relationship with their local theatre after the project has ended.</p> <p>Class Act gives high school pupils the opportunity to work with professional playwrights to write their own short plays. The plays are then produced and performed as "staged readings" by a team of professional directors and actors on the Traverse (Tron) main stage. Over the years the Traverse has partnered schools with some of the best Scottish (or Scottish based) contemporary playwrights around such as Douglas Maxwell, Nicola McCartney, Alan Wilkins, David Greig, Stephen Greenhorn, Gregory Burke, Isabel Wright and Davey Anderson. Similarly, directors have included Jemima Levick, Nicholas Bone, Matthew Lenton and Lorne Campbell.</p> <p>Class Act is a large scale education project with 3 or 4 distinct stages which unfold over a period of several months. It is therefore a major undertaking for the schools – pupils and teachers – who take part and the success of the project is due in no small part to the commitment of the schools in progressing the project between the artists' visits. After several months of writing workshops in schools with the playwrights the pupils take part in a series of script development workshops with a director and a team of actors. After a further period of script development, the director and actors return to the school for more rehearsals. Finally, the finished plays are performed at a public performance on the Traverse's main stage which gives young people a rare opportunity to have their work performed in Scotland's leading new writing theatre.</p>
All (if relevant)	<p>Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.</p> <p>If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall</p>	Excellent	<p>Class Act is one element in the theatre's learning and participation strand which also includes a teachers' forum, bespoke curricular projects, talks, writing workshops and post-show discussions for school and colleges. Historically the company referred to Class Act as its "flagship education programme" but in 2007 they started referring to it as their "annual schools playwriting project". Hopefully this does not infer a downgrading of the</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	programme.		<p>importance the company places on the project.</p> <p>Class Act is run in partnership with the Education function of several Local Authorities and since 2000 Edinburgh, West Lothian, Borders, Fife and Glasgow Councils have all supported the project financially and administratively.</p>
All	<p>Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.</p> <p>Education events – see ¹below for guidance</p>	Excellent	<p>“The Traverse mission is “to nurture, develop and produce the work of contemporary playwrights from Scotland to the highest possible standards” and Class Act meets this aim well as the script development process the young writers go through over a period of several months is exactly the same as a playwright working for the Traverse would experience.</p>
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>	<p>Excellent</p> <p>Competent</p>	<p>The Traverse engages a team of professional writers, directors and actors to work on Class Act ever year. For 2009 the writers were Rob Evans, Selma Dimitrijevic, Jules Horne, Douglas Maxwell, Nicola McCartney, Morna Pearson and Alan Wilkins. The calibre of actors is also extremely high and this year John Kazek, Tommy Mullins, Mary Gapinsky, Callum Cuthbertson and Finn den Hertog were all involved.</p> <p>The actors' achievement in bringing several very different and often quite surreal short plays to the stage in such a short space of time is remarkable. A not insignificant part of the enjoyment of Class Act for the audience is in admiring the skill of the professional actors in lifting the written word off the page and bringing the young people's work to life. However, I felt that this year, for the first time, the actors appeared under rehearsed and struggled at times with their scripts. The Class Act staged readings are always presented with the script in hand but this year it felt as if the actors were merely reading from the page and several plays were marred by fumbles or longueurs. It's not clear why this might be other than to guess that the expansion of the project and the addition of the extra night in Glasgow gave the actors too much to do in too little time.</p>

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
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.	N/A	I attended on Wednesday 11 February and saw the work of pupils from Broxburn and Bathgate Academies in West Lothian who worked with writers Rob Evans and Morna Pearson. The pupils worked alone, in pairs or small groups of up to 4 people to write their scripts. The plays ranged in both style and subject matter from a humorous meditation on getting old from the perspective of a CCTV camera to a finely observed monologue by young man caught up in knife crime to a surreal TV nature programme told from the perspective of the animals.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	N/A	
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	N/A	
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.	N/A	
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>	Competent	On the night I attended 14 short plays were presented as staged readings. As the plays were presented back to back the staging was necessarily simple with minimal use of props, costume, sound and lighting. Each new play and playwright was introduced by a slide projected at the side of the stage.
All	<p>Audience</p> <p>Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants;</p>		The audience was made up primarily of the families of the young people taking part in the education project.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	<p>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>		
All	<p>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.</p>	N/A	<p>In previous years the project has included Class Art but this element of the project has been discontinued. Class Art gave pupils studying Art & Design the opportunity to work with the Traverse's Marketing Department to design the Class Act poster and book cover for the anthology. Pupils took part in practical workshops looking at the processes involved in producing work to a specific design brief: marketing a theatre show. The workshops explored coming up with design ideas, using different mediums and developing ideas to completion. The opportunity for school pupils to work with marketing professionals provided a valuable learning experience and it's a shame that this part of the project has been discontinued.</p>
All	<p>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)?</p>		See above

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	Fine.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	A small printed programme was available free of charge with information on the young writers, their teachers and schools as well as the professional writers, directors and actors.
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.	Class Act is always featured in the Traverse's season brochure and presented as part of its Winter/Spring season.
Ease of booking and payment	Fine
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Centrally located in Edinburgh.
External signage and signposting	Fine.
Internal directional signage	Fine.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Fully accessible.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Started on time and ran a little longer than expected.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Excellent.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	SAC acknowledged on Traverse website, in the brochure and on the printed anthology of plays.

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.