



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 in association with the RSC

Venue: Traverse 1

Title of Event: FALL

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

Date of Visit: 14/08/2008

Overall Rating: Good

(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.)

This is a borderline 4/Good assessment. The production was of a very high calibre with strong performances from all the actors. It was directed with clarity and confidence by Dominic Hill and, as a debut production, showed a mature understanding of working in the deceptively difficult Traverse 1 space. The design, tho not to my taste – too drab and colourless by far – allowed for fluid transitions between locations.

My reservation, surprisingly since I have admired Zinnie Harris' work in the past enormously, is with the script. I have no argument with the thesis of the play (tho I do feel the last scene displays an unearned optimism and sentimentality whilst the rest of the drama takes as a given the universal brutalising effect of war) but I found myself moved by the performances rather than the action of the play. I was somewhat thrown because I felt the play set out to ask one question: who exactly was Katie's husband (and implicitly why was he like that?) only then to shift the focus to: can and should we forgive in all circumstances? These are interesting questions - made all the more pertinent given the discovery of Karadzic days before the play opened – but I couldn't but think that dramaturgically, the play had set two hares running. This left the first half with a slow and disorientating start, made all the more complex by Pierre first asking Janine to adjudicate on the executions only then to have to ask Katie when Janine absconded. The play lacks then the clarity of, say, THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE which deals with a complex dilemma simply.

I am perhaps being harsh. On re-reading the text, I could see what Harris was attempting: for example, Janine is important – albeit dramatically a cipher – as a symbol of the West. I confess to enjoying the written text but it did not play as well as it should. I stress this is not a fault of the production, unless one includes pre-production dramaturgy. The play needed to be challenged more than it was.

Name: _____ Jack Bradley _____

Date: 29 /8 /08 _____

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.	4 - good	I have been coming to the Traverse for 20 years and this play clearly stands four square alongside many of its predecessors in terms of the quality of presentation, its readiness to engage with ideas, seeing theatre as a public forum and, as a debut production, shows Dominic Hill to be able to handle the Main Stage. This is a more than competent show. I also know the work of Zinnie Harris (and have commented above on the trilogy) and, despite my reservations, I admire her ambition and boldness of intent.
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.	4 - Good	The play is the third part of a trilogy with the previous 2 plays presented by the RSC in Stratford. New Artistic Director for the Traverse, Dominic Hill, talked about this inaugural season being a "Manifesto" season, and with plays such as Pornography, dealing with 7/7 and Deep Cut, dealing with bullying in the Armed Forces, there is a clear public agenda here. Like the aforementioned, this is a Public Play, dealing with a large and contemporary issue.
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	4 - good	The stated aim in the publicity and blurb is to ask a very difficult question: how best to find justice in a post-conflict world. Is revenge inevitable? How do we move on? Is forgiveness possible? The play does pose exactly these questions. Unremittingly. So, in those terms it is very successful in delivering those important questions and dilemmas.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	5 - Excellent	The ensemble of actors are thoroughly committed to their material. This is strong meat, with Cliff Burnett playing a tortured prisoner held for war crimes, Brian Ferguson, his equally brutal guard, both singularly unsympathetic portrayals. In contrast Darrell D'Silva and Kevin McMonagle, both veterans of Harris' work, portray men less resolute in their aims. Geraldine Alexander begins the whole evening with an extended piece of story-telling that is both simple and affecting. Hill has modulated their performances to give us the necessary light and shade in such an austere tale.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	3 - competent	The play does not require elaborate movement. It is an episodic, multi-located story with shifts achieved by scene changes (simple sliding screens). No scene has ever more than 3 characters present and the action of the play is largely conveyed in dialogue rather than action so straightforward "blocking" is the extent of the choreography required.

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	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	4 - good	<p>I'm somewhat torn in my response to this play. I cannot fault its seriousness of intent and fully acknowledge the poetic quality of the simple and unadorned language (the opening monologue by Katie is a very good example of how unaffected storytelling can pack an unexpected punch). Moreover, the play does, in the second half, develop an accumulative power as the narrative gains pace. However, in performance the play often left me cold. The portrayal of the guard brutalised by war felt like a cliché; the western activist/journalist seemed to be emblematic (powerless western at large in a chaotic world); the Realpolitick was a casual given and the final scene was unearned sentimentality. Moreover, within scenes, in endeavouring to portray bruised humanity, the rhythms of the dialogue have been flattened. Liddel in his loveless grief and the Prime Minister drowning in moral complexity, both come over as emasculated. Only the ruthless have energy in the play.</p> <p>On a basic level, the play required cutting, esp. in the first half, which lacked momentum. The plotting had an air of easy convenience about it: Janine reneges on a promise to Pierre, so they ask Katie to fulfil the task instead. The suggestion that the Mob would buy for blood and turn on the Government is never really explored or justified. But it serves the plot.</p>
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	4- Good	<p>Dramaturgically, I think Dominic Hill needed to exert some more pressure upon the playwright. Some of the scenes – particularly in the first half have a leisurely, prolix quality. Too often the scenes have a uniformity of momentum, designed I'm sure to convey, variously, the tentativeness of the fearful and uncertain, but it saps the play of dramatic energy.</p> <p>That said, he has conjured diverse and intelligent performances from his acting company and fills the stage well (it is, after all, a middle-scale play with epic pretensions). His was a very lucid and thoughtful production that bodes well for the Traverse's future.</p>
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	3 - competent	<p>The soundscape was neither intrusive nor especially remarkable. I'm sure Dan Jones will not thank me for saying so, but it did not draw attention to itself. It could, in fairness, then be said to have been an integral part of the blend.</p>
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.	4 - Good	<p>The set is a characteristically dark, almost monochrome Tom Piper set. This lowering quality seems very appropriate for a tale set in an unnamed but, one assumes, Balkan state. The colour has run out of the country with any residual humanity. The grimy, semi-translucent screens that separate and then reveal the different acting areas, project a strong sense of dilapidation and war-damage. The lighting is equally low-voltage, giving the combined impression of a dour and miserable world where hope is at best a hostage.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
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>	5 - Excellent	The production was faultlessly cued and presented, as one would expect half-way through the festival. The demands of the turn-rounds are that the technical demands are not overly elaborate.
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>		This is an ideal subject – and treatment – for the Edinburgh Fringe. The Traverse has a reputation for serious drama, often thanks to the indigenous writers, on public issues. FALL fulfils those expectations and so prove a thought-provoking piece for audiences and critics alike. That it should coincide with the capture of Karadzic only served to demonstrate its timeliness and the urgency of the issues in the play!
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>	3 - competent	Given this was part of the Edinburgh Fringe, it does not seem to be a priority to provide Interpretative activities for individual shows. There are however, for those attending the whole festival, an opportunity to attend several talks at the Traverse which involve the writers presented by the Traverse during the Festival period.
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>		

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	As stated elsewhere, the Traverse has an honourable tradition for presenting such new contemporary work, so the play attracted a large, committed audience. The play was suited to the space in terms of scale and content.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	The programme was in the form of a published text/programme. The reviews for the shows are widely displayed which help you decide what to see.
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.	The season brochure is very helpful, as is the complex programme laid out in the back of that publication. The web-site is user-friendly, though in both cases, the pre-publicity copy is of the "teaser" type designed to allure rather than inform.
Ease of booking and payment	Very easy. I did it by phone well in advance but it could be done online.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	The Traverse is a major venue just off the Lothian Road, albeit this year, obscured by the building works to the Usher Hall!
External signage and signposting	The building is the only non-office or residential property in the street, so is hard to miss.
Internal directional signage	The signage was very clear throughout.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	It is a modern building and is fully accessible and adapted. The website indicates very clearly the facilities and how to book/use them.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The play happens at different times of the day during the festival which maximises the opportunities to see it for local people which is to be commended.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	The B.O. staff were exceedingly friendly and helpful: they assisted me in house-seats for other shows as well.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	The logo etc was clearly displayed on publicity material.

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.