



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 and Birmingham Repertory Theatre

Venue: The Traverse

Title of Event: Pornography

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

Date of Visit: 7th August 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.)

The play dealt with expansive themes through intimate stories and this was effectively reflected in the set and staging of this compelling production. Taken together, the narratives created a very immediate sense of the alienating effects of metropolitan life as well as the intensity of the week in London leading up to the 7/7 bombings.

I felt that the final 'scene' got lost, in the staging – perhaps making the play's connection to the 7/7 bombings in London more oblique than intended.

Name: Rebecca Robinson Date: 07 / 08 / 08

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	<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 play dealt with expansive themes through intimate stories and this was effectively reflected in the set and staging of this compelling production. Set during the intense week in London - when the buzz of the Live 8 concert and the successful Olympic bid culminated in the 7/7 bombings in July 2005 - the play explored the idea of social breakdown and its effect on individual narratives. Overall, this production highlighted both the interconnectedness and, at the same time, lack of connection/isolation between the external events and the character's internal lives.</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 programme.</p>	Excellent	<p><i>Pornography</i> was co-produced by the Traverse and Birmingham Rep for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The play was originally commissioned and produced by Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg in 2007 and this was the play's UK premiere.</p> <p><i>Pornography</i> was an excellent contribution to the Traverse's Edinburgh Festival Fringe programme, which featured an interesting and balanced mix of contemporary, national and international, work. The programme of 12 productions included literary/text based work as well as devised company-led productions, including Zinnie Harris's <i>Fall</i>, Enda Walsh's <i>The New Electric Ballroom</i>, Team / NTS's <i>Architecting</i>, Vox Motus's <i>Slick</i> and Sherman Cymru's <i>Deep Cut</i>.</p> <p>The programme received a positive response in the press for its focus on more serious work in amongst a Fringe programme generally weighted towards more light-hearted work</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>	Good	<p>In an interview, Stephens suggested that <i>Pornography</i> aimed to examine the forces within contemporary British society that had produced those who had executed the 7/7 bombings in London. The play's title <i>Pornography</i> aimed to highlight the sense of social alienation within British society that mirrors the objectification of the individual as personified in the production and consumption of pornography.</p> <p>I felt that Stephen's play successfully met these aims and provided a particular, if dark, perspective</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
			<p>on contemporary British culture.</p> <p>Although the 7/7 bombings were emphasised in the publicity blurb related to the production, I felt that the play in fact touched on this in quite an oblique way.</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>	Good	<p>Casting Director – Amy Ball</p> <p>The cast of eight each embodied their well-defined characters and created an engaging and intimate snap-shot into each of their lives. Although I felt that there was a variation in the style of acting between each of the performers, this did not detract from my overall engagement with the piece.</p>
Dance, Theatre	<p>Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc</p>	N/a	
Theatre	<p>Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.</p>	Excellent	<p>The play was written as a series of seven encounters with unnamed characters that could be “performed, by any number of actors ...in any order” (programme note). As mentioned above, the engaging characters – each one symbolising the seven-ages of man - were well-defined and created a mesmerising snapshot into the minutiae of these individual’s inner worlds and lives in the context of inexorable global events. Each character was, in some way, morally transgressive - for e.g. the office worker who divulges her firm’s secret report to a rival, the incestuous relationship between two siblings, an unbalanced schoolboy’s dark infatuation with his teacher, etc - and this upset easy identification and, thereby, added an extra layer to the sense of objectification which Stephens sought to explore. Taken together, the narratives created a very immediate sense of the alienating effects of metropolitan life as well as the intensity of the week in London leading up to the 7/7 bombings.</p>
Theatre, Dance	<p>Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.</p>	Excellent	<p>Sean Holmes – Director.</p> <p>The monologues/ dialogues were ordered and staged so that the character’s narratives were interwoven, with the actors often onstage together. Overall, the staging highlighted both the sense of the interconnectedness and isolation between the external events and the character’s internal lives. The sense of interconnectedness and also urban sprawl was also visually underlined by the ‘set’ and the use of the stage and auditorium. I felt that the potentially powerful final ‘scene’ – in which a short description representing each of the 52 people killed in the 7/7 London bombings was briefly flashed up on an overhead screen – got slightly lost partly because the screen was too high and small and</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			partly because the audience had already begun to leave the auditorium.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	Good	Sound designer - Emma Laxton. The subtle sound design effectively supported the production and added to the slightly discordant and urban atmosphere of the play.
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.	Excellent	Designer – Paul Willis. Lighting Designer – Chris Davey The set comprised the bare Traverse stage with no flats attempting to mask or hide the workings of the theatre and with the sound/ lighting operator clearly visible onstage. Three slightly raised platforms, a tangle of lighting and sound cables, a twisted flex with fluorescent bulbs combined to create a sense of slightly chaotic, metropolitan sprawl. The set created the sense of an open and expansive yet also complex and interwoven public space. The dim, quite stark lighting also added to the general atmosphere of urban greyness. The set appeared to be a fairly easy get-out - necessary for the quick turnaround of productions for the Edinburgh Fringe.
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>	Good	Stage Manager – Graham Michael The production was presented professionally from a technical point of view.
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>		The performance was sold out – approximately 300 people. The audience comprised a very mixed demographic. Audience members were attentive throughout and there was appreciative applause at the end. As mentioned, quite a few people had already begun to leave before the end, proper. I overheard a number of people saying that the production wasn’t what they had expected from reading previews and reviews – perhaps because, as mentioned above, the play touched on the 7/7 bombings in quite an oblique way.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
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	
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>	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	I thought that the Traverse was a very appropriate venue for the event.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	The production was well advertised in the venue with posters, reviews, flyers etc clearly visible in various locations throughout the venue. The only programme available at the venue appeared to be a £3.50 copy of the play script. The programme contained cast biographies and info about the two co-producing companies but little other information (e.g. writers or directors comments).
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 production was advertised on the company's website as well other online and print media. All information was relatively easy to access and understand although I found the Traverse website not particularly easy to navigate and rather over-crammed/ busy with information. The production was previewed in a number of reviewers 'pick of the fest' lists and generally received a positive press response.
Ease of booking and payment	No problem – I booked online through the ticket hub and tickets were sent to my home address.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	The Traverse is easy to access by bus and is walking distance from both Waverly and Haymarket train stations.
External signage and signposting	No problem – the theatre is clearly marked.
Internal directional signage	There are signs clearly indicating where the theatre is.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Special access and provision for disabled people was not immediately obvious.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The performance – lasting approximately 1 hour 30 mins – seemed appropriate.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Front of house staff were friendly and efficient.

Criteria	Comment
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	The SAC were acknowledged on all publicity material that I was aware of.

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.