



## 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: VOX MOTUS**

**Venue: TRAVERSE**

**Title of Event: SLICK**

**Type of Event: THEATRE**

**Date of Visit: 21/08/2008**

**Overall Rating: GOOD**

This is a good rude, hilarious and highly innovative production which takes as its starting point the discovery of crude oil down a toilet and the attempt by a young teenager to skate board over at least one of life's hurdles. Weighty concerns were touched upon but never closely examined even though the piece could easily accommodate such weight. Still, the ride was, for the most part exhilarating. It should be pointed out that there were many young/teenage members of the audience and they received this show with enormous enthusiasm. If this was their first experience of theatre, then Vox Motus have provided them with an excellent introduction

Name: **Stewart Ennis** Date: 31/08/2008 **Specialist Advisor**

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	As ever with Vox Motus, various boundaries were pushed, in this case those of style, technique ...and good taste. The puppet/human hybrid was pulled off extremely well and the comic strip world inhabited by these mini grotesques felt quite complete. The slo-mo movement sequences and referencing of popular movie cutting and framing techniques were instantly recognizable and beautifully executed. Sight lines were bit of a problem for those audience members not sitting 'dead on' and on these occasions the legerdemain was lost and the tricks exposed. These are minor points, which can be ironed out, and which were apparently not an issue at the Tron theatre. For the main part, the show was filled with perfectly realised and often extremely funny, visual delights. The story which involves the discovery of crude oil down a toilet and one boy's attempt to get over one of life's hurdles, on a skateboard is well capable of carrying more weight; but the journey they take you on is exhilarating.
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.	Excellent	This artist led show, was created in collaboration with the Tron theatre for the Edinburgh Fringe festival at the Traverse theatre. It is part of a strong and long creative partnership with the Tron which has been a testing ground for the companies work in the past.
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 <sup>1</sup> below for guidance	Excellent	It seems that the company has largely achieved what it set out to do in the creation of this innovative and strongly visual piece of theatre. The human/ puppet hybrid worked perfectly in the scaled down comic book set, and its drawing on a wide range of popular cultural references, and peppering it with boundary pushing scatological humour was well appreciated, particularly by the young/teenage audience. The lack of depth in script may represent a missed opportunity in a story that could easily have accommodated it; but that aside, this is a highly skilled company that seem to thrive on new challenges in style and technique. And their original idea of an "absurd world with fantastic visuals inhabited by desperate characters" has certainly been well realised.

<sup>1</sup> 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
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>	Excellent	<p>All performers showed a high degree of skill, sliding effortlessly between broad and often hilarious cartoon characterisations, puppetry... and set changing. Jordan Young and Mark Prendergast were particularly impressive and engaging, possessing an energy that did much to sustain the shows momentum.</p>
Dance, Theatre	<p>Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc</p>	Excellent	<p>The clever movement sequences, of which there were many, were one the real joys of the piece, successfully employing all manner of filmic techniques, some referencing well known films, others invented. It was clear that the –mainly young- audience very much bought into this, appreciating the parodies, the references and the dexterity of their execution. Again, it has to be pointed out that not being a “front on” audience member, resulted in occasional sight line issues and the odd unfortunate glimpse up the magicians well packed sleeve.</p>
Theatre	<p>Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.</p>	Good	<p>The script generally worked well and went hand in glove with visual style of the piece. Its extremely broad gross out humour and characterizations were occasionally reminiscent of the ‘Viz’ comic book. It seemed that at times, some jokes, though hilarious- such as Mrs Dreich’s gynaecological issues- needed to go even further to work, rather than be repeated at the same level. Likewise, there were opportunities to introduce more depth into the piece (Malcolm’s poignant and hilarious consideration of the potential delights of being in “care” and the ‘arms for oil’ moment did hit the mark satirically.) Still, the story as was, with the discovery of crude oil down the toilet, and an uncared for boy’s attempt to achieve small but enormously important goals- such of clearing a road barrier on a skateboard- was enormous fun</p>
Theatre, Dance	<p>Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.</p>	Excellent	<p>The direction was extremely tight throughout and all performers seemed well cast in their roles. The pace seldom slackened and the director’s understanding of the genres being parodied seemed assured. Only very occasionally did a repetitive verbal riff result in a slight loss of pace. That said, the rooftop thriller style climax, complete with a Mexican stand off between Malcolm and his morally reprehensible parents and disgusting neighbours was beautifully judged. And the closing of the piece with Malcolm achieving his personal goal of skateboarding over the road barrier had everyone in the audience on his side</p>
Dance, Theatre	<p>Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.</p>	Excellent	<p>The music worked extremely well throughout, resembling –deliberately- a movie soundtrack, punctuating and driving the piece forward. This was appropriate to a piece that parodied movie style framing devices and helped ensure the piece remained –more or less- taut throughout.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
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	The design concept was absolutely crucial to the success of the piece and for the most part, the company pulled this off extremely well. The interchangeable set was a clever piece of design and worked smoothly and efficiently; though some turning over and shifting of playing surfaces occasionally felt like one set change too many. There was a slight sight line problem in this space. Though there was never an attempt to hide the mechanics of the show, audiences at the far left or right were often, perhaps, <i>too</i> aware of the “puppeteer” at work, It would be wrong to say that this was a major distraction but it did draw our attention to the ‘illusion’ in a way that I do not believe would be the artist’s intention. It seems that the piece is designed for theatres which allow a greater distance from the audience and which allow the audience to see the piece straight on. But this is a minor quibble. It is easy to see the enormous amount of work that has gone into devising and designing this piece and on the whole it works well; the human/puppet hybrids are a delight and the living grotesque comic book world was beautifully realised. (as said above) .
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement  Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).	Excellent	Technically the show was spot on, with animation, lighting and sound working seamlessly together. Sightlines were an issue on occasion but ultimately did not detract from a show that was, from a presentational point of view, extremely accomplished.
All	Audience  Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction		The audience were enthusiastic throughout. Though this show has a broad appeal, it will be of particular interest to a young/teenage audience, perhaps even those who are new to theatre; in which case this Vox Motus show is an excellent introduction.
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.	n/a	
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	Traverse 2 seemed slightly small and resulted in some sight line issues.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Programmes and Traverse brochures etc were informative.
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.	Leaflets, brochures were informative, as were venue and company websites which were easy to negotiate.
Ease of booking and payment	There were no problems with telephone booking.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Well sign posted and on public bus links.
External signage and signposting	Appropriate.
Internal directional signage	Appropriate.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	From what I could see, this was appropriate.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The timing of the event varies throughout the festival and this was not an issue.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Friendly and helpful.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>	SAC acknowledged where appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> 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.