



### ARTISTIC EVALUATION

This evaluation is intended to represent an objective aesthetic judgement. **Specialist advisors and officers should avoid making judgements based on their own personal tastes and preferences wherever possible.**

|                           |   |                      |
|---------------------------|---|----------------------|
| <b>Artist/Company:</b>    | <b>Traverse Theatre Company / Edinburgh International Festival</b>  |                      |
| <b>Venue:</b>             | <b>Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh</b>  |                      |
| <b>Title of Event:</b>    | <b>The Last Witch</b>   |                      |
| <b>Type of Event:</b>     | <b>Performance</b>  |                      |
| <b>Date of Visit:</b>     | <b>23/8/09</b>  |                      |
| <b>Overall Rating:</b>    | <b>Excellent</b>  |                      |
|                           | <i>(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.)</i>                              |                      |
|                           | The premiere of <i>The Last Witch</i> felt like an outstanding event. Rona Munro wrote a rich, detailed play, which was constructed expertly and contained a meaty plot. Dominic Hill's accomplished production displayed a high level of professionalism and sophistication in almost every area. The cast was impressive, and ensured that the evening proved as entertaining as it was powerful. |                      |
| <b>Name:</b>              | <b>Adrian Osmond</b>  | <b>Date:</b> 18/9/09 |
| <b>Specialist Advisor</b> |   |                      |

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 on 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 future 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:**

- Very poor**- standard falls well below what is acceptable.
- Poor** - not well conceived and executed
- Satisfactory**
- Good** - well conceived and executed
- Very Good** – well conceived and executed to a very good standard
- Excellent** – Inspiring and executed to an exceptionally 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of ideas</li> <li>• if you have seen other work of this artist(s)/ company before, please comment on any relevant comparisons</li> </ul>  | Excellent | <p>Many new plays can be of passing interest and significance, with their creators working diligently on a small canvas. <i>The Last Witch</i> pushed boldly past such limitations. Writing, acting, direction and design coalesced to create a rich, rewarding theatrical experience.</p> <p>While the action took place in a small northern Scottish community in 1727, its outlook never felt overly parochial. At the curtain call the cast size seemed surprisingly small, and the running time relatively short, given the scope of the evening.</p> <p><i>The Last Witch</i> may not have broken new theatrical ground – it remained resolutely within the Lyceum’s proscenium arch, and focused firmly on storytelling and characterisation. But, by doing so, it proved a timely reminder of the power that a well-crafted play and production can possess.</p> |
| All (if relevant) | Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does it fit within the artistic vision of the organisation?</li> <li>• If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme.</li> </ul>  | Excellent | <p>According to the programme, “the play’s subject matter was chosen by the Festival as a kind of counterpoint to this year’s overarching theme of Enlightenment, and it is based on a true story”. Its inclusion alongside productions like Pucarete’s re-imagining of <i>Faust</i> seemed appropriate. Its Scottish setting made it a fitting choice too.</p> <p>The themes, scope, and the style of presentation seemed wholly suitable for the EIF. The Traverse seemed the ideal partner for this co-production, given their commitment to new writing and their previous association with Rona Munro. Presumably co-producing enabled both organisations to create this work on a (suitable) scale that might not have been possible otherwise.</p>  |
| All               | Success of event against stated aims of project and/or performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does it relate to information contained in the programme, the website or other printed material?</li> <li>• How well did it communicate the artistic themes?</li> <li>• How did the event originate eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, from the artist or from commission?</li> </ul> <p>Education events – see <sup>1</sup>below for definition</p> | Excellent | <p>The programme states that the event originated when Rona Munro was commissioned in her capacity as Edinburgh International Festival Creative Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh.</p> <p>The print rightly focused on outlining the plot and the historical background to the play. The description was accurate, and the main publicity image was reflected in the production’s imagery as well (with frequent use of crows and the moon).</p>   |

<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

| Artform        | Criteria   | Rating    | Comments and key reasons for rating   |
|----------------|--|-----------|---|
| All            | <b>Performers/tutors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the expertise of the performers? Where performers are amateur, please reflect this in your comments.</li> <li>• How successfully did the performer(s) communicate with and engage the audience?</li> <li>• In your view, was an artist as a tutor key to the success of the workshop?</li> </ul> | Excellent | <p>The entire cast of seven delivered superb, mature, and wholly believable performances. All seemed suited well to their roles. Howden was outstanding, displaying fierce, fiery passion and arrogance, but (despite the nature of the role) she did not over-dominate the proceedings, which enabled a strong sense of ensemble to be maintained. Clarity of the spoken text was fine from the back of the stalls.</p>  |
| Dance, Theatre | <b>Choreography/Use of choreography</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the work original?</li> <li>• How was the space used?</li> <li>• How many dancers were there and how were they used?</li> <li>• How long was the piece?</li> </ul>  | Very Good | <p>Kally Lloyd-Jones's movement fused well with the rest of the action and the overall style of presentation. It did not draw attention to itself, but engendered from the life of the characters.</p>  |
| Theatre        | <b>Script</b><br>Please comment on this for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new work</li> <li>• second productions</li> <li>• classics where the original has been substantially changed</li> </ul>  | Excellent | <p><i>The Last Witch</i> was based on the story of Janet Horne, the last person in Scotland to be burnt for alleged witchcraft. But Munro worked from such scant historical material (even Horne's name might not be accurate) that she was able to infuse the tale with her own imagination.</p> <p>Munro made some brave decisions. She created a central character that elicited little sympathy at the outset, nor wished for it. And having established the unlikelihood of Horne being a witch, Munro then challenged general scepticism by introducing a male figure that might be the devil.</p> <p>Munro wove dense, poetic language through the play's rich tapestry; this heightened the play's intensity, which Munro balanced carefully against a liberal use of wit. In fact, Horne's redeeming feature was the entertainment she provided.</p> <p>There's no denying that the women were depicted with more sensitivity than the men, and this climaxed in an emotional exchange between Horne and her neighbour during the burning. But while the men may have been branded as foolish, ignorant or cruel, in the main they proved to be rewarding roles that served real purpose, and were not devoid of depth and complexity.</p> |
| Theatre, Dance | <b>Direction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the work well interpreted?</li> <li>• Was it well cast?</li> <li>• Was it well presented?</li> </ul>   | Excellent | <p>Director Dominic Hill was set some major challenges by Munro's script, not least ensuring that the heady language didn't weigh the production down. Hill rose to the occasion with a deft touch, and he remained firmly in command of the material. He cast the play brilliantly and assembled a strong creative team. He drove the production forward with a clear sense of purpose, and kept the style of presentation relatively sparse so that the complexities of the characters and</p>  |

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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>scenarios could shine through.</p> <p>There were a few aspects to the production that could be questioned. A harpsichordist was onstage throughout the first half. The keyboard was positioned well and proved to be a wise choice of instrumentation; but if there was a significant meaning to the performer's silent presence in full refinery, it eluded me. Likewise, the flashes of light from fluorescent strips were a potent idea, but seemed overused and occasionally detracted from the power of the production more than added to it. But these are minor quibbles, which are perhaps only worth mentioning because they highlight how well the rest of the production was conceived.</p>  |
| Dance, Theatre | <p>Use of music</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the music/ sound used enhance the production?</li> <li>• Is it live or recorded?</li> </ul>   | Excellent | <p>John Harris created a striking soundscape of pre-recorded material, which added a compelling and significant sense of menace and mystery to the production. As detailed above, this was combined with a live harpsichord, played onstage by Simon Smith with remarkable finesse. The harpsichord seemed a smart choice of instrument, avoiding clichés and embracing a musical language that is rarely heard in theatres.</p>   |
| Dance, Theatre | <p>Design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How were the costumes, set and lighting?</li> <li>• How did it work in the venue?</li> <li>• Was it technically proficient? (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).</li> </ul>   | Very Good | <p>Naomi Wilkinson's set design utilised imposing structures, but the essence of it was simple, with props and dressing kept sensibly to a minimum. Historical detail was reserved mainly for the costumes. The set's shapes ensured a dynamic performance space, but they did not seem to possess any further significance or purpose.</p> <p>Chris Davey's lighting was essential in conjuring up the play's diverse locations in the set's central area, and in creating the appropriate atmospheres. Andrzej Goulding's video projections intensified the experience at certain moments, but seemed unnecessary and distracting at other times.</p>  |
| All            | <p>Quality of Public Engagement</p> <p>Performing Arts/Education -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the production/event targeted at a particular audience?</li> <li>• Was the production /event appropriate for the audience/participants?</li> <li>• Were you/ engaged/inspired?</li> <li>• Did the audience/ participants appear to be engaged/inspired?</li> <li>• What was their response?</li> <li>• Approximately how many people were there?</li> <li>• Did there appear to be a broad mix of people – age, cultural diversity or disabled?</li> <li>• Are BSL/captioned/audio described performances</li> </ul> | Very Good | <p>The production did not seem to be targeted at a particular audience. The large size of the audience made it hard to assess its makeup, but there did not seem to be many young people there; most were 30 upwards, with no significant sense of cultural diversity. The production seemed entirely appropriate for the audience that attended.</p> <p>It is difficult to generalise the audience's experience of this production. The first half may have seemed slightly too long for some, but Munro and Hill chose to break the action at the right point. The second half appeared to grip the audience from start to finish, and the cast received strong and sustained applause. I was engaged throughout, and thought it to be one of the most impressive and accomplished evenings of theatre I had experienced in some time.</p> |

| Artform | Criteria   | Rating | Comments and key reasons for rating  |
|---------|--|--------|--|
|         | <p>offered as part of the run/tour/? If so how many?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What activities or supporting materials were available to enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups programmes, on line info?</li> <li>• Were these targeted at specific age groups?</li> </ul> <p>Education/learning events:<br/>In addition, please provide comments on the following (if appropriate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How was it taught/led eg one to one, group, child centred?</li> <li>• What was the composition of the participant group – age range, gender mix?</li> <li>• Is it strategically linked to the curriculum or national policy areas e.g. Early Years, Community Learning &amp; Development</li> <li>• What learning/skills development took place?</li> <li>• What was the quality of the art produced by the participants?</li> <li>• Did the workshop tutor have a teaching plan for the session and/or project?</li> <li>• How were participants recruited?</li> <li>• Did participants' views and choices help inform the structure and content of the project?</li> </ul> <p>Crafts/Visual Arts<br/>Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang?</p> |        | <p>The run of 8 performances contained one BSL-interpreted performance, and one audio-described performance with touch tour.</p> <p>A programme costing £3 was available at the venue. Full details are outlined below.</p> <p>There were two related events on the EIF website - a discussion with Munro and Hill as part of the EIF's "Conversations with Artists" series, and a panel discussion entitled "On the Dark Side: Witchcraft and the Theatre". In addition, a slip of paper was given out announcing another event with Hill and Munro at the Traverse.</p> <p>A small, related installation by Laura Graham entitled "Soul Murder" was on display in the Lyceum foyer during the run.</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  |
|---|--|
| <p>Location and suitability of the venue for the event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it easy to find?</li> <li>• Is it on a main transport route?</li> <li>• Are the spaces clean?</li> <li>• What were the sight lines like?</li> <li>• How big was it?</li> </ul> | <p>The Lyceum Theatre was easy to find, and was within walking distance of central bus and train stations. It seemed the right choice of venue for the production.</p> <p>The large, grand building was clean and well-presented. The auditorium sat 650 approximately. Sight lines were fine from near the back of the stalls, and everything could be heard clearly.</p> |
| <p>Information/ interpretive material at venue—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there programmes, posters and displays about the event?</li> </ul>   | <p>Preview articles from the Guardian and Sunday Herald were on display around the foyer, facing outward so that they could be read by passers-by.</p>   |

| Criteria  | Comment  |  |        |  |        |                    |   |                                   |   |            |   |           |   |                    |   |  |   |
|---|--|--|--------|--|--------|--------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|------------|---|-----------|---|--------------------|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there information on the venue's website?</li> </ul>  | <p>A programme costing £3 was available inside the venue before the performance. This contained full credits, biographies, rehearsal photographs, and two substantial articles.</p>  |  |        |  |        |                    |   |                                   |   |            |   |           |   |                    |   |  |   |
| <p><b>Publicity/ pre-publicity –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What leaflets, posters, websites, did you see the event listed in?</li> <li>What publicity materials are produced?</li> <li>Is it easy to understand?</li> <li>Where can you get the information?</li> <li>Is there Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>?</li> </ul> <p>Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event and comment on the company/organisation's website.</p> | <p>Comprehensive information was available in both the Traverse and EIF brochures and on both their websites, with print rightly focusing mainly on the plot and its historical background. It was laid out well and was easy to understand.</p> <p>SAC funding was acknowledged on all publicity materials.</p>   |  |        |  |        |                    |   |                                   |   |            |   |           |   |                    |   |  |   |
| <p><b>Ease of booking and payment</b></p>   | <p>I was asked to attend the performance once the run was sold out. Ticket was arranged and paid for by the SAC via Traverse management.</p>   |  |        |  |        |                    |   |                                   |   |            |   |           |   |                    |   |  |   |
| <p><b>Timing of the event</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?</li> <li>Was the length appropriate?</li> </ul>   | <p>The start time (7.30) and length (2 hours 15 minutes with one interval) seemed wholly appropriate.</p>  |  |        |  |        |                    |   |                                   |   |            |   |           |   |                    |   |  |   |
| <p><b>Signage and signposting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the entrance clearly marked?</li> <li>Is there clear internal directional signage?</li> <li>Is there Braille signage or signage for audio loops?</li> </ul>   | <p>External and internal signage was good, though directions to toilets (including accessible ones) might have been clearer.</p>   |  |        |  |        |                    |   |                                   |   |            |   |           |   |                    |   |  |   |
| <p><b>Access and provision for disabled people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please insert yes/no in the boxes to reflect what you notice about the venue/event</li> </ul> <p>Please add in any additional comments below the table</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many BSL/captioned/audio described performances are there at the venue?</li> </ul>  | <table border="1" data-bbox="571 1272 1257 1798"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Yes/No</th> <th></th> <th>Yes/No</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>BSL interpretation</td> <td>Y</td> <td>Audio description of performances</td> <td>Y</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Captioning</td> <td>N</td> <td>Lift/ramp</td> <td>Y</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Accessible toilets</td> <td>Y</td> <td>Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English</td> <td>Y</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>One BSL-interpreted performance, and one audio-described performance with touch tour.</p> <p>According to the EIF brochure, discounted tickets</p> |  | Yes/No |  | Yes/No | BSL interpretation | Y | Audio description of performances | Y | Captioning | N | Lift/ramp | Y | Accessible toilets | Y | Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English | Y |
|   | Yes/No   |  | Yes/No |  |        |                    |   |                                   |   |            |   |           |   |                    |   |  |   |
| BSL interpretation  | Y  | Audio description of performances  | Y      |  |        |                    |   |                                   |   |            |   |           |   |                    |   |  |   |
| Captioning  | N  | Lift/ramp  | Y      |  |        |                    |   |                                   |   |            |   |           |   |                    |   |  |   |
| Accessible toilets  | Y  | Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English | Y      |  |        |                    |   |                                   |   |            |   |           |   |                    |   |  |   |

<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.

| Criteria  | Comment   |
|---|---|
|   | were also available for some disabled patrons.  |
| <b>Customer service</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How was the quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)</li><li>• If possible, comment on how responsive they were to the needs of disabled customers?</li></ul> | Staff were friendly and efficient in all areas. |

### 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.