



### 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.**

**Artist/Company:** Vox Motus  
**Venue:** Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh  
**Title of Event:** Bright Black  
**Type of Event:** Performance  
**Date of Visit:** 19<sup>th</sup> September 2009

**Overall Rating:** Very 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.)*

Vox Motus created an impressive, imaginative production that contained some stunning ideas and powerful images. All the design elements were executed to a high standard, but not all aspects of the production were in tune with each other throughout. Heightened poetic language and stylised movement jarred when placed directly alongside everyday dialogue and body language. Similarly, the delight elicited by the brilliant theatrical magic detracted from the production's potential emotional impact.

**Name:** Adrian Osmond  
Specialist Advisor

**Date:** 16/10/09

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>Vox Motus displayed outstanding vision and imagination with <i>Bright Black</i>, utilising their considerable talents with intelligence and flair. Their clear determination to achieve complex theatrical effects reaped rewards: their technical probing produced some striking images that surely rank alongside (if not above) what the most celebrated theatre companies in Scotland could achieve.</p> <p>With <i>Bright Black</i>, the company moved into darker territory than <i>Slick</i> (or at least less comic), but maintained a strong sense of brand identity by continuing an adventurous and inquisitive approach to theatre's technical possibilities.</p> <p>With <i>Slick</i>, all elements of the production fused together to achieve the same aims. <i>Bright Black</i> felt significantly less successful in this regard. While <i>Bright Black</i> appeared to aspire towards eliciting a powerful emotional response from the audience, the cleverness of the design and the theatrical magic often detracted from this aim. Some aspects (such as the music) were judged perfectly, but other elements (such as movement and dialogue) sat less easily alongside each other. None of these elements were poorly executed by any means (the company assembled a talented team to match their own abilities) – they simply didn't always gel.</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>All aspects of the production seemed to fit perfectly within the company's vision. In addition, <i>Bright Black</i> appeared to capitalise neatly on the success of <i>Slick</i> without repeating the same stylistic template (with a significant shift in theme and tone).</p> <p>Furthermore, it is impressive that Vox Motus were able to tour a production that appeared to have such detailed technical demands.</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>	Very Good	<p>Thematically, the production stayed close to the intentions and themes outlined in flyers and in the Traverse brochure/website ("combining illusion, digital media and new writing"). But the plot's content strayed from what was advertised: the location was not "a mythical underworld" (or not explicitly, anyway) and the "young heroine" never did begin "a quest to find her dead lover and bring him back to the world of the living". A brief indication in the dialogue that this was possible never led anywhere.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	Education events – see <sup>1</sup> below for definition		<p>The stunning, eye-catching image did not seem to relate directly to any particular part of the production, though it seemed in keeping with the production's overall tone and attitude.</p> <p>While it is inevitable that changes in storyline can occur between print deadlines and final rehearsals, some audience members might have expected a production that was driven more heavily by plot. Nonetheless, the focus of the production remained fixed on love, loss and grief, and its themes and ideas were communicated with clarity.</p>
All	<p><b>Performers/tutors</b></p> <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>	Good	<p>Performances were somewhat mixed. As Cerberus, charismatic Martin McCormick acted with commitment and intensity; his performance was detailed and physically impressive. Jenny Hulse, playing Claire's friend Fay, gave a sympathetic and suitably unshowy performance in a fairly thankless (albeit necessary) role.</p> <p>Meline Danielewicz had to carry much of the production's emotional burden. There were strong elements to her performance, but she seemed unable to inhabit and immerse herself in the character throughout (and therefore draw the audience wholly into her experience as well). External physical displays of grief were handled well, but seemed somewhat disconnected from internal workings.</p>
Dance, Theatre	<p><b>Choreography/Use of choreography</b></p> <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>Natasha Gilmore's choreography was executed to a good standard by the performers, but the heightened physical language seemed in conflict with the everyday nature of the dialogue at certain moments. This even led to some confusion near the outset, as the main character initially only expressed herself through movement, making it seem as if she was incapable of speech. When she did begin talking, the spoken language seemed awkwardly mundane alongside the physical language she had entered with.</p>
Theatre	<p><b>Script</b></p> <p>Please comment on this for:</p> <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>	Good	<p>In tackling the theme of overwhelming grief, the script by Edmunds and Harrison rightly chose to combine some specifics with universal elements that could connect with a diverse audience.</p> <p>The sparse use of dialogue was judged well, with much of the plot, back-story and emotional life of the characters displayed through visual means rather than verbal.</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 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>The dense, poetic language for Cerberus and the “everyday” speech of the friends both seemed sensible choices, but ultimately the styles were so diverse that they couldn’t fully cohere. Neither characters nor story appeared wholly developed, with the writing never possessing the same degree of confidence attained by other aspects of the production.</p>
Theatre, Dance	<p><b>Direction</b></p> <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>	Very Good	<p>Directors Candice Edmunds and Jamie Harrison wrote and designed the production as well; because these elements were wholly (and rightly) bound together throughout the production, it is difficult to assess the contribution of the direction without acknowledgement of the design and script alongside this.</p> <p>The directors assembled an accomplished creative team and ensured a strong thematic focus throughout the production. They created a work that was hugely impressive technically; and for all the brilliant, virtuosic exploration of “black art”, it seemed clear that they wanted to involve the audience through this theatrical trickery, rather than simply show off (they avoided this trap with the simplicity of their approach, with none of the “magic” feeling heavy-handed). Bin bags dropped from the ceiling, each containing a specific memory – here script, design, and thematic content all combined successfully.</p> <p>But the playfulness of other moments and devices detracted from the potential emotional impact of the production – for instance, the enjoyment caused by seeing furniture pulled neatly out of the floor inevitably drew the audience out of the intensity of the situation, instead of contributing to it.</p>
Dance, Theatre	<p><b>Use of music</b></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>Michael John McCarthy created pre-recorded music for the production that was integral to its overall atmosphere and success. The music/sound blended well with the frequent “memory” sections of pre-recorded dialogue, evoking a blurring of the boundary between past and present. McCarthy’s sympathetic, imaginative contribution underlined the emotional weight of the work, without ever overpowering proceedings or drawing unnecessary attention to itself.</p>
Dance, Theatre	<p><b>Design</b></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>	Excellent	<p>As with <i>Slick</i>, Edmunds and Harrison created a clever and accomplished set design. In one sense it appeared to be pared back, providing the essence of a bare room and allowing the audience’s imaginations to fill in the blanks. Additional skeletal elements (door, window, etc) were introduced for specific moments. This enabled the overall presentation to be kept as simple and as direct as possible (in spite of the serious technical complexities underlying the</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			<p>production). No prop was introduced without due care and attention.</p> <p>Simon Wilkinson's lighting design was integral to much of the production's sleight-of-hand, yet rightly it never drew attention to itself – it was a mature, careful contribution.</p> <p>Graham Sutherland's sound design fused so well with the music that it would be difficult to identify which artist could be credited with particular elements. Likewise, Tim Reid's video design was surprisingly subtle, adding stunning moments such as projection onto falling sand that resonated perfectly with the production's themes and overall atmosphere.</p>
All	<p><b>Quality of Public Engagement</b></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 offered as part of the run/tour/? If so how many?</li> <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: 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> </ul>	Very Good	<p>While the production did not appear to be targeted overtly at a particular audience, elements of the marketing (particularly the striking publicity image) seemed designed to entice a young, fresh audience into the theatre. The average age of the audience at the Traverse seemed older than might have been anticipated, and there were probably 100-125 people in attendance.</p> <p>The audience appeared to be engaged throughout the production, and responded well at the curtain call. How much individuals were affected by <i>Bright Black</i> probably varied considerably, partly dependent on their personal circumstances. I spoke to someone afterwards (whom I had never met previously) who had been greatly affected by the performance, which he attributed in part to having lost his father recently.</p> <p>A free programme was distributed (further information below).</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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 Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang?</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 Traverse was easy to find and was within walking distance of Edinburgh's Haymarket train station. Bus routes were outlined on the Traverse's website.</p> <p>The spaces were clean and the theatre was laid out well. The Traverse 1 auditorium sat between 300 and 350. Sight lines should have been good throughout the auditorium.</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> <li>Is there information on the venue's website?</li> </ul>	<p>A page was devoted to the production on the Traverse's website, including a trailer film.</p> <p>A free programme was provided, which was an A4 sheet with full credits and tour dates. It included an invitation to find further information on their website.</p>
<p>Publicity/ pre-publicity –</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>Vox Motus produced a flyer that was presented beautifully with a clear, sparse layout. The information was easy to understand. The company also produced a trailer that was displayed on the Traverse and Vox Motus websites, on YouTube, and was distributed via facebook.</p> <p>Likewise, the Vox Motus website was laid out well and was easy to navigate, favouring direct simplicity over complex graphics.</p> <p>There was an impressive array of preview articles (I noticed features in The List, The Herald, and The Times).</p> <p>SAC funding was acknowledged on all materials.</p>

<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																
Ease of booking and payment	Ticket was booked easily over the phone via Traverse Box Office.																
Timing of the event <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>	The timing of the event seemed appropriate. The length (one hour) was fine; a longer running time might have enabled further exploration of the subject matter, but in practical terms, the length was wholly appropriate.																
Signage and signposting <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>	The entrance was clearly marked and all internal signage was clear.																
Access and provision for disabled people <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> Please add in any additional comments below the table <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many BSL/captioned/audio described performances are there at the venue?</li> </ul>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 50%;"></th> <th style="width: 10%; text-align: center;">Yes/No</th> <th style="width: 40%;"></th> <th style="width: 10%; text-align: center;">Yes/No</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>BSL interpretation</td> <td style="text-align: center;">N</td> <td>Audio description of performances</td> <td style="text-align: center;">N</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Captioning</td> <td style="text-align: center;">N</td> <td>Lift/ramp</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Y</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Accessible toilets</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Y</td> <td>Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Y</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Yes/No		Yes/No	BSL interpretation	N	Audio description of performances	N	Captioning	N	Lift/ramp	Y	Accessible toilets	Y	Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English	Y
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Accessible toilets	Y	Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English	Y														
Customer service <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. In addition, box office staff on the phone advised me to arrive early as seats were unreserved and it was expected to sell out (though, in the end, there were free seats).																

**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.