



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:	Birds of Paradise and Tron Theatre
Venue:	Spectrum Centre, Inverness
Title of Event:	Beneath You ... spider girls are everywhere
Type of Event:	Performance at Dràma Na h-Alba Festival
Date of Visit:	Monday 22 October 2007
Overall Rating:	Good

This was an interesting and enjoyable production with a strong team, who seemed to be fully behind the production. They seemed committed to creating a shared experience for and with us. All the elements were brought in to create a diverse theatrical production with strong movement, music and song.

Birds of Paradise have a history of commissioning new works for theatre with a commitment to ensuring it is an inclusive company. The writers are predominantly Scottish writers. 'Beneath You' is another new play commissioned by Birds of Paradise. It is written by Kathy McKean with dramaturgy by Nicola McCartney – a strong Scottish based theatre team. To my mind this script could have gone a bit further in developing the storylines of the characters to allow us further points of connection with them, but perhaps the desire was to leave the individual stories to our own imaginations so that we could fill in the blanks through our own experiences and understanding.

Name: Alexandria Patience Date: 6 November 2007

Specialist Advisor Scottish Arts Council Officer *Please tick 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	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.	Good	Exciting idea to base the script on the story of the Spider Girls of Chile and to broaden the appeal of this with the inclusion of the skills within the cast. They built a show which balances the story, song, music, movement and passion. There was a tightness within the production which signalled to me the commitment of the company to the material being performed.
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.	Excellent	This was an excellent selection for the programme of Dràma Na h-Alba. Birds of Paradise and Tron Theatre were included within the programme along with approximately 30 other productions from all over Scotland, some key English, Welsh, Irish, Canadian, American, Swedish companies or participants.(ie: The National Theatre of Scotland, Tara Arts, Profiteatern, Västerbotten-Steatern and, the organisers of the DNA festival, Theatre Hebrides.)
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	Good	This show gives a very clean light appearance when watching the picture of the set, lighting and the shapes created on stage - but it has very dark themes running underneath. We gain an understanding of some of these underlying stories but it feels as if much more could be revealed. But then, perhaps the intension is to create that sense of the hidden stories in the lives of these girls which we will never gain access. And to remind us of the girls like them who we could find all over Scotland
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	Good	Some very strong performances with drive and energy. These actors all have very different backgrounds in theatre but, on the whole, come together as a cohesive group to create a very unified ensemble.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	Good	Max Foster is the choreographer of the piece. The different characters create differing movement sections. Good use of space and set.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Competent	This is a new script by a strong team, Kathy McKean as writer and with the dramaturgy by Nicola McCartney. It takes its storyline from a real story news item heard on the radio by Morven Gregor, of the Spider Girls of Chile gang. The story was captivating and the threads of the story gave us ideas of these girls lives, the risks they were

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
			willing to take and the power they were hungry to claim, but it did seem that Kathy McKean's script circled around the story when I would have been fascinated to have been led deeper into these character's lives. It felt as if perhaps the real story was holding the play back a little from creating possible lives and possible stories for these characters.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Good	A good team game was built here, with shared focus within the ensemble. The pacing was good with changes of focus and moments lifted by the use of movement and sound. Casting fitted well to create a very interesting grouping for a co-dependant but finally self-destructive gang.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	Good	Good recorded music with driving sounds/songs to keep the energy changing and fluctuating from scene to scene. Music and songs were a fun and lively component of the production.
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	James Gardner is the Lighting Designer/Technician and Claire Halleran the Designer – worked well with adequate space allowed for movement on and climbing up and along the various levels. The set gave a sense of height and skyline with, in some way, a feeling of possible danger within an environment that was actually very safe when viewed area by area. Lighting and costume worked well.
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	Technically good in every way.
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,</p>		Appropriate selection of work for the Dràma Na h-Alba festival. It was a small audience at the performance I attended, which was the second performance within the festival – approx 15 attended on that Monday evening. Always hard to sense reaction when the house is so small but it seemed to me to be supportive and attentive.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	participants/ schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc		
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	Not aware of the educational/interpretive programme – although Birds of Paradise do normally make a concerted effort to ensure workshop/inclusive activities are available for the community.
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	This seemed a very nice venue – this was my first visit to this venue and I was very impressed with it.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	A free full colour and well designed triple-fold programme on card stock with biographical information on the artists in the company, company info and the upcoming 2008 programme with Changing Roles event for writers and directors working with new writing for theatre and issues of inclusion and the upcoming 2008 production, "Offshore" by Alan Wilkins. An Audience Survey of response to the show was included within the programme. It was unfortunate but I didn't know about or notice the Spider Girls exhibition at the venue – I read about it in the programme once I had left the venue.
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.	Good coverage of the festival with banners in the city by the river and festival programmes in various locations around the Highlands and further a-field. 'Beneath You' has a fairly extensive run and the flyers were available in lots of different locations I visited. Good image and strong design for flyers and posters. Dràma Na h-Alba festival had a web site with easily viewed pages.
Ease of booking and payment	Easy
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	The Spectrum Centre is in the square of the bus station/library so very easily found once you know it's there. A map was included in the Dràma Na h-Alba programme.
External signage and signposting	This was my first visit to the Spectrum Centre and it was not obvious that a theatre was a part of the building from the outside.
Internal directional signage	Fine
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Yes
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Appropriate timing
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Good

Criteria	Comment
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Yes

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.