



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: Tron Theatre Company

Venue: Tron Theatre

Title of Event: Cooking with Elvis

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: 22nd July 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.)

Cooking with Elvis was a sensible piece of programming. Its farcical nature ensured a packed house during summertime, and the performance was given a rapturous reception on the night I attended. Moreover, it's probable that many people in the audience were not regular attendants of the Tron. The venue capitalised wisely on the reputation of the playwright, the familiar faces in the cast, and the name in the title. Both script and production seemed to be on safer ground with the comedic elements than the dramatic, with Gavin Mitchell giving an outstanding performance as Dad/Elvis. Design was impressive in its appearance and its apparent cost.

Name: Adrian Osmond

Date: 14th August 2009

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 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	<p>Vision and imagination of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of ideas • if you have seen other work of this artist(s)/ company before, please comment on any relevant comparisons 	Very Good	<p><i>Cooking with Elvis</i> was an entertaining night in the theatre and was presented to a high standard, with the set's two-tier house sitting well in the Tron's auditorium. The action appeared to have been transposed from Northern England to Scotland (a wise decision), and its original roots were not noticeable.</p> <p>The play demanded elements that added to the excitement of attending a "live event" for the audience, including a working kitchen with food cooked onstage, a real tortoise crawling around the rooms, and some nods towards Presley's later extravagances in performance.</p> <p>The company embraced the script's filthy elements with gusto, veering towards an almost cartoonish pace for some of the sexual scenes. This produced peals of laughter, but also resulted in it being harder for the audience to engage / believe in the truth of the story's bleaker moments.</p>
All (if relevant)	<p>Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does it fit within the artistic vision of the organisation? • If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme. 	Very Good	<p>Programming an in-house production in a summer slot (prior to the Edinburgh Fringe) was a smart move. The Tron's own company has played to packed houses in the summer before (I recall attending a sold-out preview of <i>The Wonderful World of Dissocia</i>), but perhaps not over a two-week run.</p> <p>For all its dark seams, <i>Cooking With Elvis</i> was relatively easy fare for the audience to digest (and was rightly promoted as such). While it could be argued that elements of this play might be better suited to other venues, it didn't seem out of place in the Tron (famed for its Christmas shows, after all). Moreover, the slick marketing (including a burger deal), cast and even the title must have ensured that the Tron reached a new and significant audience with this production.</p>
All	<p>Success of event against stated aims of project and/or performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does it relate to information contained in the programme, the website or other printed material? • How well did it communicate the artistic themes? • How did the event originate eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, from the artist or from commission? 	Very Good	<p>Print described both play and production accurately. The Tron advertised the show as a "fast, filthy and very funny play from the writer of <i>Billy Elliot</i>", explaining it "walks a fine line between bad taste and deep pathos and is a recipe for raucous laughter." For the most part, the information / advertising rightly emphasised the comedic credentials of the production, and delivered these to the audience.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	Education events – see ¹ below for definition		
All	Performers/tutors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the expertise of the performers? Where performers are amateur, please reflect this in your comments. • How successfully did the performer(s) communicate with and engage the audience? • In your view, was an artist as a tutor key to the success of the workshop? 	Very Good	<p>While the publicity material highlighted the cast's television credits, most of them were at home on the stage and highly skilled in this field. Indeed, the only real question raised by the casting was the frequent references to daughter Jill being overweight, which seemed unjust when levied against Jayd Johnson.</p> <p>As Dad, Gavin Mitchell alternated between being almost catatonic in a wheelchair and strutting his stuff as the resurrected King. His performance was fantastic and truly charismatic; he was adept at ad-libbing, seducing the audience with the sensation of a "live" event. At the curtain call the rest of the cast almost seemed to acknowledge him as the real star of the show.</p> <p>Martin Docherty and Deirdre Davis gave necessarily broad but winning performances. Jayd Johnson, in her professional theatre debut, was engaging but appeared to be losing her voice, and at times didn't embrace the depth of pain her character was feeling.</p>
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the work original? • How was the space used? • How many dancers were there and how were they used? • How long was the piece? 	n/a	
Theatre	Script Please comment on this for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new work • second productions • classics where the original has been substantially changed 	Good	<p>Lee Hall's play is funny and easy to enjoy, with its smart dialogue and series of short, punchy scenes. But its content and structure are not without flaws. Several of the most amusing strands seem to serve little dramatic purpose, being neither fully developed nor tied together (including the Elvis appearances). Elements of bedroom farce, kitchen sink realism and surrealism are all thrown into the mix, but they don't blend together entirely. Hall gives the audience some wonderfully filthy humour, but can't quite earn the more dramatic moments, such as the daughter slitting her wrists. The inclusion of cooking and the tortoise are justified through the final revelation that (like the tortoise) Stu has been killed and served up for dinner; but, while it may be a neat way to finish the story, its delivery doesn't ring true. However, it is easy for an audience to forgive these imperfections when</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
			Hall provides so much humour.
Theatre, Dance	Direction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the work well interpreted? • Was it well cast? • Was it well presented? 	Very Good	Director Andy Arnold delivered an entertaining production, assembling a cast that were at ease with the material and didn't hold back. He utilised the necessary variations in pace, ensured there was plenty of energy bouncing between stage and audience, and, above all, gave the cast enough freedom to ensure they could deliver what the audience wanted.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the music/ sound used enhance the production? • Is it live or recorded? 	Very Good	Inevitably, the music of Elvis Presley dominated proceedings, including some live (and impressive) vocals from Gavin Mitchell. This ensured good energy pre-show and during the performance.
Dance, Theatre	Design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How were the costumes, set and lighting? • How did it work in the venue? • Was it technically proficient? (eg lighting and sound cues, etc). 	Very Good	<p>At times (not least the ending) it seemed as if no expense had been spared on this production. Designer Neil Haynes created a colourful two-level house, complete with a working kitchen, numerous visible entrances and several concealed ones too. The variety of possibilities created some entertaining and witty moments. While areas of the set were underused (limiting and flattening the space elsewhere), this seemed due more to Hall's staging requirements than ill-judged design.</p> <p>Malcolm Rogan provided suitable and atmospheric lighting (with well-timed Elvis sections).</p> <p>All elements of the design were delivered with the Tron's usual high standards of professionalism.</p>
All	Quality of Public Engagement Performing Arts/Education - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the production/event targeted at a particular audience? • Was the production /event appropriate for the audience/participants? • Were you/ engaged/inspired? • Did the audience/ participants appear to be engaged/inspired? • What was their response? • Approximately how many people were there? • Did there appear to be a broad mix of people – age, cultural diversity or disabled? • Are BSL/captioned/audio described performances offered as part of the run/tour/? If so how many? • What activities or supporting materials were available to enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist's 	Very Good	<p>A packed audience (of 230?) seemed to enjoy themselves tremendously; the Elvis sections earned roars of laughter, and the sexual material was met with particular delight. They seemed less engaged by the darker themes of the script, and the final pay-off of Stu being turned into a stew seemed to pass people by on the night I attended (it got no reaction).</p> <p>The majority of the audience was upwards of thirty, but there were some younger people too. The Tron seemed to have found the right audience for the production, and the applause at the curtain call indicated that people left satisfied. In addition, I would imagine that some of these people had not ventured to see many productions by the Tron Theatre Company before.</p> <p>As outlined below, one performance was captioned, and one had BSL interpretation & audio description.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	<p>talks, discussion groups programmes, on line info?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were these targeted at specific age groups? <p>Education/learning events: In addition, please provide comments on the following (if appropriate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was it taught/led eg one to one, group, child centred? • What was the composition of the participant group – age range, gender mix? • Is it strategically linked to the curriculum or national policy areas e.g. Early Years, Community Learning & Development • What learning/skills development took place? • What was the quality of the art produced by the participants? • Did the workshop tutor have a teaching plan for the session and/or project? • How were participants recruited? • Did participants' views and choices help inform the structure and content of the project? <p>Crafts/Visual Arts Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang?</p>		<p>A free programme was provided upon entrance to the auditorium (details below).</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"> • Is it easy to find? • Is it on a main transport route? • Are the spaces clean? • What were the sight lines like? • How big was it? 	<p>The Tron was easy to reach via train, with the venue being about ten minute's walk from Glasgow Central along a simple route.</p> <p>The auditorium was welcoming and well-proportioned. Correct entrances for different seat locations were marked clearly. All seats (230) should have had an unobstructed view of the stage, including those in the slips.</p>
<p>Information/ interpretive material at venue–</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there programmes, posters and displays about the event? • Is there information on the venue's website? 	<p>There was a large board on the wall near the box office displaying photos and several preview articles.</p> <p>The venue's website contained the same text as the brochure / flyer. It detailed the cast and performances that were audio-described, signed and captioned. It also contained a warning of sexual content.</p>

Criteria	Comment																
	A programme was provided for free upon entrance to the auditorium. It was well-presented and contained production credits, biographies, and brief essays on "Elvis & Food" and "Elvis's Scottish Roots".																
Publicity/ pre-publicity – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What leaflets, posters, websites, did you see the event listed in? • What publicity materials are produced? • Is it easy to understand? • Where can you get the information? • Is there Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²? <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>The Tron produced a flyer and season brochure. Presentation was of a very high standard, with excellent images and layout.</p> <p>I saw several preview articles online, including one in The List and an interview with Lee Hall in The Herald.</p> <p>The website was easy to navigate, with key information about the production appearing on the home page.</p> <p>The SAC was acknowledged on all publicity materials (albeit with a very small logo on the flyer).</p>																
Ease of booking and payment	The ticket was booked over internet and was easy to purchase.																
Timing of the event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience? • Was the length appropriate? 	The timing seemed appropriate (starting at 7.30), with the performance running at just under two hours including one interval.																
Signage and signposting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the entrance clearly marked? • Is there clear internal directional signage? • Is there Braille signage or signage for audio loops? 	While the non-entrance on Trongate is slightly confusing, a sign marks the actual route clearly.																
Access and provision for disabled people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please insert yes/no in the boxes to reflect what you notice about the venue/event <p>Please add in any additional comments below the table</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many BSL/captioned/audio described performances are there at the venue? 	<table border="1"> <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>Y</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></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>One performance was captioned; one had BSL interpretation & audio description.</p>		Yes/No		Yes/No	BSL interpretation	Y	Audio description of performances	Y	Captioning	Y	Lift/ramp	Y	Accessible toilets	Y	Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English	
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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.

Criteria	Comment
<p data-bbox="151 152 384 185">Customer service</p> <ul data-bbox="151 185 544 421" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="151 185 544 297">• How was the quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)<li data-bbox="151 297 544 421">• If possible, comment on how responsive they were to the needs of disabled customers?	<p data-bbox="571 152 1018 185">All staff were friendly and efficient.</p>

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.