



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: Vanishing Point

Venue: Lemon Tree, Aberdeen

Title of Event: Interiors

Type of Event: Theatre

Date of Visit: 17th April 2009

Overall Rating: Excellent

This was a beautifully conceived and executed piece of theatre. It was variously -and often simultaneously- thought provoking, deeply moving and absurdly funny. The interior characterizations and exterior insights also, were warm, sad, embarrassing but at all times quite human, and totally recognizable. An ambitious work, well realised.

Name: **Stewart Ennis** Date: 19th April 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 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.

- 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
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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	In form and content the show worked beautifully and its execution, as is usually the case with Vanishing Point, was immaculate. The ambition and imagination at work was first rate; full of absurdly comical, physical, visual and verbal quirks and peopled by fully rounded characters who we really did believe had a life. But the narrated insights and observed behaviours were also sad, embarrassing and deeply moving, at times invoking the spirit of filmmakers Louis Bunuel and Mike Leigh. The excellent and effective design, including a literal glass 4 th wall, allowed the audience to look in on the dinner party with recognition, empathy and voyeuristic delight; while the ghostly outsider sat among us, occasionally directing our gaze or provoking responses. We could not hear the dinner guests, but it visually the interactions were always clear; we have all been there. A nod in the direction of Maeterlinck's original, certainly, but Vanishing Point's point of departure made the show entirely their own.
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 was a co-production with the Napoli Teatro Festival Italia, (where the show will also play) the Lyric Hammersmith, the Traverse Theatre and the Tron Theatre and a work as ambitious as this could perhaps only have been realised with the support of the aforementioned.
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	Excellent	The programme details the story behind Maurice Maeterlinck's original play titled 'Interior' and it is clear that while Vanishing Point have radically departed from this, the point of departure is still appropriately recognizable. The atmosphere created in the piece is both gentle and humane, and fraught with tension and danger. The dangers are numerous, from imagined polar bears and the bitter cold, to other more deeply personal fears. From the moment the dinner party guests come in out of the mysterious icy wasteland wrapped up and carrying guns, an mood is created in which anything can happen. We are invited to witness and share their wishes and wants, sometimes in silence, sometimes prompted and prodded by a ghostly outsider who knows the characters present unspoken thoughts as well as their pasts and futures. From their petty squabbling, funny and sometimes painful and embarrassing neediness, to their lurching inappropriate passions and the resulting pack schadenfreud, we never lose touch with their humanity. Sex, love, loneliness morality and mortality were all at play but not as 'issues' to be dealt with. The play did not attempt come up with any answers but rather the tone and pace of the piece seemed to allow and provoke questioning and the creation by the audiences, of alternative

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
			narratives.
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 the individual performances were of a high order and very finely drawn. As an ensemble piece too the performers made up a thrilling whole. Unprompted by 'heard' dialogue, our gaze, emphasized by the wide angled filmic framing device of the windowed room, constantly shifted from one character to another and not for a moment did any of them appear disengaged. The prompting, provocative 'outsider' sitting among the audience was also performed at just the right level, being one of us, but at the same time, 'other'.</p>
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	Excellent	The dance sequence to the music 'Video Killed The Radio Star' was joyful, hilarious and slightly –but appropriately-embarrassing.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Excellent	The show itself was devised by the company with dramaturgy by Pamela Carter. The script, consisted of ongoing direct narration, spoken by a ghostly outsider, who sometimes sat among us. The language was open and free flowing, never self consciously poetic, but never in the realms of informal chat either. It was at all times concerned with encouraging us to look deeper and differently, at the characters and their behaviours, and in this it worked very well.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Excellent	Mathew Lenton's direction kept the highs, lows, and hiatuses at just the right pace and levels. Casting too seemed note perfect with characters and relationships slowly being built up before our eyes. It was perhaps this above all which made the piece so special and so moving. Lenton seemed quite willing to let –even encourage- our gaze to wander, to decide which relationship we would watch unfold, which character's journey and behaviour we would follow and observe. The ghostly outsider' was there occasionally with dark witty prompts, but this piece was more about provoking the creation of the audiences own narratives than providing any definitive narrative –or answers- of its own.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	Excellent	Ali McRae's haunting soundtrack added enormously to the atmosphere of otherworldliness, sometimes melancholy, sometimes mysterious, which always encouraged the audience to proffer their own readings of the dinner party guests behaviours. Well-known recorded pop music was also used realistically and to excellent comic and emotional effect, adding yet more layers to the characters.
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.	Excellent	The 'interior' dining/living room design by Kai Fisher was quite inspired; almost a character in its own right. It was reassuringly warm and familiar on the inside, while the mysterious and malign wintry exterior was filled with flickering shadows and

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			unseen dangers. The glass windowed front, which provided the rather wide angled filmic frame of the piece, emphasised our voyeurism, enticing us to watch rather than listen to the behaviours of the characters; blocking out the sound of voices. Or perhaps the actors were silently –brilliantly- ‘mouthing’ the words?
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).	Excellent	All sound and lighting cues were smooth and unobtrusive throughout.
All	Audience Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction		The audience were engaged throughout, responding audibly to the humour of the piece and very enthusiastic in their show of appreciation at the end.
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	The show and venue were very well suited.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Programme was full of useful information and well produced as was the Lemon tree brochure.
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.	Website of Vanishing Point and Lemon Tree were useful and easy to negotiate. Lemon Tree brochure and Vanishing point flyers were informative.
Ease of booking and payment	No problems.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	On bus and train routes.
External signage and signposting	Quite visible.
Internal directional signage	No problems.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Quite adequate from what I could see.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Quite appropriate for adult show.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Lemon Tree friendly and helpful.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	The SAC were acknowledged where appropriate.

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.