



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: Visible Fictions

Venue: North Edinburgh Arts Centre

Title of Event: Jason and the Argonauts

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: Friday 4th May 2007

Overall Rating : EXCELLENT

This was an excellent production full of wit and imagination and performed with great zest by the 2 actors. Indeed, the physicality, charm and wit of the performers went a great way to fully engaging the young audience for whom it was intended. The production succeeded in its own stated aims of presenting Jason and the Argonauts as a swashbuckling adventure story and explored its stated themes well and in a highly entertaining way. Clarity of direction ensured that, the story, which at times can be quite a complex quest narrative, remained lucid. While maintaining a hold of its Greek mythological origins and displaying appropriate gravitas, the production did not take itself too seriously, reminding the young audience that this was also an adventure story and a piece of lets pretend/playground play acting, which they could relate to. The peppering of the show with anachronistic contemporary cultural references also helped create a valuable bridge to the audience. Particularly successful is the company's ability to juggle these stylistic elements; allowing the audience to witness the mechanics of performance (no 4th wall here) without sacrificing believability or integrity.

Name: Stewart Ennis

Date: 06/05/2007

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.	Excellent 5.	This production -as is often the case with this company- was performed with enormous wit, verve and imagination. It used the elements of traditional storytelling, puppetry (contemporary; Action man dolls etc), animated objects, highly physical performances, together with the device of 2 actors playing multiple characters, all to excellent effect. And it succeeded well in stepping "outside the box" to engage directly with the (9 years old +) audience, while maintaining the integrity and lucidity of the story.
All	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.-	Good 4.	This is part of Scottish Arts Council supported tour organized by the company and taking in various venues in Scotland and England and the Republic of Ireland. The show previously toured in autumn 2006. It will later be part of the International Children's Festival in Edinburgh, where it has already sold out. This North Edinburgh Arts was a mid week morning show geared to an audience of mainly school children.
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 5.	In the programme, Director Douglas Irvine, describes his love of "adventure", his fondness of the "Ray Harryhausen film with its magic, monsters and swashbuckling escapades." and his desire to "thrill" his young audience. This story of bravery and heroism succeeds in these aims very well indeed, and it is to his credit that he manages to pay homage both to Harryhausen's sense of adventure and his trademark special effects, mainly through the power of good physical performance and strong storytelling.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	Excellent 5.	Tim Settle and Simon Donaldson both gave excellent, disciplined and highly physical performances that were well focused, engaging and witty. Their comic repartee with each other and with the audience worked well and helped keep the young audience fully engaged throughout. They coped well with the instant multiple character changes without having to resort to costume, while all the time maintaining narrative coherency.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	Good 4.	The fight sequences (using broom handles as swords) were well choreographed by Raymond Short and completely in keeping with the style of the production. The other choreographed movement sequences, which often incorporated the set, also worked well, maintaining the "action adventure story"/ "let's pretend" style and driving the story along.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Good. 4.	The script by Robert Forrest tackles the themes of heroism and bravery coherently well enough in what can be at times a complex quest narrative, particularly when written to be performed by only 2 actors. Forrest essentially maintains the flavour of mythical Greek world, and is not afraid of appropriate gravitas, but he also builds bridges to the young audience by peppering the script with the occasional popular cultural reference (e.g. <i>Ant 'n' Dec</i> and <i>Spider Man</i>) and some nice out of character/direct to audience dialogue (some of which has an –appropriate- ad lib feel to it!). None of this however, undermines the integrity of the story.

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
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Excellent 5.	Douglas Irvine has directed a strong physical piece of theatre, rich in visual imagination and driven along the two excellent performers. The tone of their performance was just right. The <i>let's pretend</i> style and out of character interaction with the young audience worked well, while the integrity of the original classic myth was always maintained. The story, complex at times was lucidly performed with style and pace appropriate to the adventure story it wants to be. On the Visible Fictions web site it is stated that " <i>Jason & The Argonauts makes an inspiring starting point for exploring themes of transition, self awareness, independence and interdependence.</i> " The show tackled these themes successfully.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	Good 4.	Daniel Padden's recorded original score is very effective and supports the actors and the style of the production very well; it works particularly well with the swashbuckling adventure sequences.
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 4.	Robin People's multifunctional <i>wooden wagon</i> set design is used throughout to great effect while leaving a good sense of space on which the actors can play. The lighting design by Paul Ancell is minimal, making much use of onstage side lights, and again is very effective, and again adds to the sense of open space. The costume by Liz Boulton was generic worker style; work boots, braces and vest etc rather than a Greek costume piece. This worked in the shows favour, adding to its <i>playground/ let's pretend</i> style and helped in successfully engaging the young audience. The production worked very well in this venue but the set feels very adaptable as is necessary for a touring production.
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).	Excellent 4.	Technically the production was very good. Lighting and sound cues were seamless and the minimal scene changes were smooth and unobtrusive.
All	Audience Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction	XXX	This was a mid week morning show, drawing a mainly, schools audience. The theatre was more than half full. This production was aimed at children 9 years and above and most of the children in attendance seemed to fit in the 9-10 age group. They were fully engaged throughout for the entire 70 minutes. The production is extremely well suited to its target age group and the running time seemed about right.
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.	Good 4.	Useful preparatory and follow up educational resources are available to teachers for this production and these are available on the Visible Fictions web site. An audience feedback questionnaire was available to audience members. Appropriately, this was aimed at younger audiences.
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	North Edinburgh Arts Centre appeared to have provided all that was necessary to make this production successful.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Well written, good quality and child friendly programmes were distributed free of charge.
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.	Posters and flyers were visible at the venue. The company website is full of useful information such as tour dates and reviews of the show. There are also -as stated above- useful preparatory and follow up downloads for teachers. The company's web site is well designed and easy to negotiate.
Ease of booking and payment	Tickets were easily booked by telephone and paid for on the morning of the show.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	North Edinburgh Centre has excellent directions on their website and was equally informative on the telephone, offer selection of bus routes from Edinburgh city centre. Venue is on a main bus route with bus stop next to venue.
External signage and signposting	Signs to the venue, from bus stop were visible and easy to understand.
Internal directional signage	Signs to auditorium, toilets and café were all visible.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	This appeared to be adequate.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	This was a mid week morning show aimed at schools. It started at 10.30am ran for 70 minutes and was appropriate to this audience which consisted mainly of organized schools groups.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Box office staff were all very friendly and informative and a good arts centre café was open for pre and post show refreshments.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Arts Council logo visible on all printed material and on website.

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.