



### 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.**

<b>Artist/Company:</b>	<b>Visible Fictions</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Eastwood Park Theatre</b>
<b>Title of Event :</b>	<b>The Curse of the Demeter</b>
<b>Type of Event:</b>	<i>Children's Play</i>
<b>Date of Visit:</b>	<b>18 October 2009</b>
<b>Overall Rating:</b>	<b>Good</b>
<i>(Please rate the event overall, taking into account your ratings for each section. Please state the key reasons for your overall ratings – ie 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.)</i>	
<p>This was the work of an experienced production company, but the genre of Gothic Horror was more demonstrated rather than deeply embraced. Conviction in performance was the main attribute on display.</p>	
<b>Name:</b>	<b>Ace McCarron</b> <b>Specialist Advisor</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>4/11/09</b>

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>	Satisfactory	<p>The story of 'The Curse of the Demeter' is taken from Bram Stoker's 'Dracula', and recounts the tale of a sinister sea journey, where the crew disappear one by one. The relevant chapter is published on the company's website.</p> <p>The tone of the performance was uniformly serious, which suggests an attempt to render a gothic horror story in an authentic way. Aimed at a secondary school audience, there were understandable limits on how the horror might be portrayed. We repeatedly saw the faces of the victims relayed on a prominent widescreen monitor, located on one side of the set. Most of these murders took place upstage of the set, and whilst cleverly arranged, the effect was diminished by repetition, and the necessarily imprecise nature of the hand-held camerawork. I imagined that even the younger members of the audience wanted to see more. Certain key aspects of the story were reported rather than staged, leaving the feeling that while thought had gone into the general evocation of the ship, and the business of the play, moments of acute drama slipped by.</p> <p>Overall, I felt that the production attempted to duplicate the private experience of reading the novel, or watching a filmed version in a sitting room, and did not embrace the opportunities for unleashing, manipulating and modulating an audible response from the audience, which only the live situation, and a display of deft showmanship, can afford.</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</li> </ul>		n/a

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	programme.		
All	<p>Success of event against stated aims of project and/or performance</p> <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> <p>Education events – see <sup>1</sup>below for definition</p>	Satisfactory	<p>The play was commissioned from Robert Forrest, who has written for the company before. A chapter from the source novel is appended on the company's website, which consists of the captain's log before he died, and not the whole story as portrayed here. It is published as a taster, to encourage attendance, but the programme does not direct us to it, which might have been useful for those intrigued by the literary aspects of the piece. The theme of gothic horror was invoked, but somewhat drily. The company's stated aims are to 'inspire, challenge, engage and entertain', and this show was a little timid in these respects.</p>
All	<p>Performers/tutors</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>	Very Good	<p>Given the large number of characters to be portrayed, and the distaste for any whiff of caricature, the acting task, for the two actors, was estimable. Jonathan Holt and Gavin Kean worked hard and diligently to articulate the story, in the face of dramaturgical and, in this case, I feel, spatial difficulties. In particular, the conception of the performance was not being designed to encourage an audible response, they pressed forward with the confidence that the show was doing its job.</p>
Dance, Theatre	<p>Choreography/Use of choreography</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>	Satisfactory	<p>As noted elsewhere, I felt the movement work was under-developed with respect to characterisation, and the actors seemed perfectly capable of further exploration of this aspect. The layout of the set tended to inhibit the release of great energy, which might have afforded more modulation in the playing, and stronger moments of drama.</p>
Theatre	<p>Script</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>	Satisfactory	<p>Conceived as a two-hander, the story was largely assembled out of duologues, but also depended on the actors reverting to narrator roles, frequently taking alternate lines. This necessity stretched the range of diversity in characterisation a little too far, and diluted personality. To have found a way to place the text entirely in the mouths of the characters would have been more successful. The language of the play seemed to be mostly pulled from the novel, and while this gave the story a strong atmosphere, I questioned whether, at the average age of the audience, I would have understood something which had been described</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>as 'entirely other'. Some of the language, and situations, particularly the religious disputes amongst the crew, might have been a bit puzzling for some, but this can also arouse a healthy curiosity.</p>
<p>Theatre, Dance</p>	<p>Direction</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>	<p>Satisfactory</p>	<p>The demands of the script seemed to be: to generate, for the actors, a number of distinct characters, mostly Russian, one Romanian, one a spectre revealed as a vampire; to figure out ways to invoke genuine horror, up to a point; and then to make certain moments indelible and unique within the framework of the piece.</p> <p>Restricted by a debatable decision to avoid any comic possibilities, the invention of the actors was diminished. The open-plan set, did not afford the association of character with place or their station on the ship, as, for instance had there been a ship's wheel. A stronger sense of drill and procedure would have helped. The maximization of character was required to make all the violent deaths individually tragic. The horror of the murders, as noted, seemed to diminish as the play progressed, and lacked the sense of development which would have built suspense and presented the audience with successive challenges. As to the extent of this horror, I suspect it was safely, and perhaps too safely, within the capacity of endurance of those able to follow the language and plot.</p> <p>The culminating image of the piece, of the dead captain, lashed to the wheel, sailing his ship into harbour, was entirely unstaged, which betrayed a serious lack of imagination. Similarly, there was no attempt to present on stage the cargo of Transylvanian soil, which is found to be the source from which the mysterious and deadly vampire emanated.</p> <p>Dissemination of the plot was well-organised and clear, and the use of the audience as the ship's company for an address from the captain was clever. There were occasional lapses in pace during the transitions between scenes.</p> <p>I appreciate Douglas Irvine's ambition to do this story seriously, despite compromise to its entertainment value, and the extent to which this was policed in this production was praiseworthy. The open-handed use of domestic video technology within this scheme, seemed commendably undistracting, despite my reservations about its effect.</p> <p>I imagine this show being more successful in studio venues, and while here, the cast were making huge efforts to make contact with the audience, I feel something was being lost. This venue was, however, not untypical for the tour which had been booked.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
Dance, Theatre	<b>Use of music</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the music/ sound used enhance the production?</li> <li>• Is it live or recorded?</li> </ul>	Good	<p>Recorded violin music and atmospheres were used extensively in this production. The appearance of the vampire was frequently accompanied by electronic static noises, which though anachronous, sent out all the right messages, though, the first time they were used, one suspected an equipment failure. The soundtrack / soundscape assisted throughout, though the violin recordings might have warranted a few more takes.</p>
Dance, Theatre	<b>Design</b> <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>	Good	<p>The decreed design task seemed to be to provide an open structure with lots of options for blocking the duologues. In this, it succeeded, with its plain wood walkway, ramp, and a slightly under-used pendant lamp mounted on a mast. It was attractive and well-built, but as noted, did not demonstrate the capacity to feature key moments. The costumes were fine, and evoked the period, and the character's rank in an unfussy way. The lighting could have brought a more sinister atmosphere to moments of high drama. In this venue the front-of-house lighting was very flat, and may not have reflected the design so well. All technical aspects of the performance were handled well, including those duties entrusted to the cast.</p>
All	<b>Quality of Public Engagement</b> <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</li> </ul>	Satisfactory	<p>The auditorium was about half-full. The warmth of the applause at the end indicated that, though silent, the audience had been paying consistent attention, but had not been inspired enough to cheer.</p> <p>The audience seemed to be an equal mixture of families and participants in Visible Fiction's outreach programme.</p> <p>Some of the children brought by their parents appeared to be younger than the target age range for the show, though I don't feel that this was problematic.</p> <p>Four films were screened afterwards, which were the results of Visible Fiction's workshops related to the theme of horror. Gruesome images abounded, and the response of the audience was instant and emphatic.</p> <p>This, and the material included in the programme, which offered information about vampires and how to dispose of them, seemed at odds with the serious intent of the main production, and the fact that the nature and powers of the vampire are the solution to the great mystery of the story.</p> <p>A specific link to the material on the website would have been valuable.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	<p>centred?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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> <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>Two pre-recorded announcements were clumsily broadcast before the performance. These were to indicate the fire exits, and to entreat audience members, twice, to switch off their mobile phones. This seemed unnecessary and was highly disruptive to a show which attempted to create an atmosphere from the minute you walked into the auditorium. The tone of it was such that when the cast walked on, you felt that they had been given special permission from the fire officer to do so, but that they had to be careful.</p> <p>In forty years of international theatregoing, I have never witnessed such a pointless intrusion into the atmosphere of a night out. If their front-of house staff are not equipped to deal with an evacuation, this is a serious matter.</p> <p>Eastwood Council does not think it necessary to include the theatre on the map situated at the entrance to the council campus, but though puzzled, I pressed on and found it.</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>Yes, all ok.</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>Only saw web information, and leaflets at the venue, but I don't receive the Scottish media. SAC was acknowledged.</p>
<p>Ease of booking and payment</p>	<p>Very good, and helpful.</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																
<b>Timing of the event</b> <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>	Both were appropriate.																
<b>Signage and signposting</b> <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>	On having my ticket torn, I found myself in front of three doors. One was clearly a fire door, one was unmarked and one said 'Balcony', which I chose. I was wrong, it should have been the unmarked door. I had to wait to get out of the small balcony area, as others were piling in, having made the same mistake.																
<b>Access and provision for disabled people</b> <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> <p>Please add in any additional comments below the table</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many BSL/captioned/audio described performances are there at the venue?</li> </ul>	<table border="1" data-bbox="571 568 1251 1093"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Yes/ No</th> <th></th> <th>Yes/ No</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>BSL interpretation</td> <td>No</td> <td>Audio description of performances</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Captioning</td> <td>No</td> <td>Lift/ramp</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Accessible toilets</td> <td>Yes</td> <td>Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English</td> <td>No</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Yes/ No		Yes/ No	BSL interpretation	No	Audio description of performances	No	Captioning	No	Lift/ramp	Yes	Accessible toilets	Yes	Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English	No
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<b>Customer service</b> <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>	Front-of-house staff seemed young and unpoliced. Other staff were fine.																

**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.