



Scottish Arts Council

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: Wee Stories Theatre
Venue: The Traverse Theatre
Title of Event: Jock & the Beanstalk
Type of Event: Performance
Date of Visit: Friday 14 December 2007
Overall Rating: Excellent

Jock and the Beanstalk is Wee Stories' re-imagining of the traditional and well-loved panto favourite, Jack and the Beanstalk, and was presented as the Traverse Theatre's Christmas show for a family audience. Using plenty of toilet-related humour and hilarious sight gags the Company created a highly imaginative production which was ingeniously staged and full of visual invention.

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Date: 11 January 2008

Specialist Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

Please circle 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	Jack and the Beanstalk has been in theatre repertoire since the early 18 th century and has been performed on stage numerous times, particularly in pantomime. Wee Stories presented a new version of the traditional story of Jack and the Beanstalk which combined (scatological) humour with inventive staging to create a new take on the traditional panto favourite. Jock and the Beanstalk sits happily within the Wee Stories' oeuvre and is a classic example of the company's ability to produce enquiring theatre: theatre which takes the familiar as its starting point to explore the unfamiliar, which questions received truths and reminds us that we don't have to be children to ask "why?"
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	Wee Stories' Jock and the Beanstalk was presented as the Traverse Theatre's Christmas show for children, young people and families. The Traverse has presented a Christmas show by Scottish companies which specialise in producing work for children and young people since 2003. Wee Stories production of Jock and the Beanstalk was a welcome opportunity to experience good fun, imaginative theatre at a time of year when choice is normally restricted to the usual crop of clichéd pantomime offerings.
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 Traverse's programme described the show as "The previously untold tale of Jock and the Beanstalk" told in "unique storytelling theatre style" and Wee Stories' production delivered on both counts. The company has a history of re-telling well known stories, adding an extra dimension to the familiar by acknowledging, exploring and inventing a back story and presenting an alternative perspective.
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	Three performers - Andy Cannon, Iain Johnstone and Fiona Steele – played all the characters in the show with Andy and Fiona taking on multiple parts – including a fabulously realised cow. The rapport between Andy and Iain, built on many years of working together on stage, was clearly evident but Fiona Steele fitted in seamlessly as the mother and a host of other characters. Iain Johnstone played Jock - not as a callow youth but as feckless man more interested in finding his next meal than in doing an honest day's work. But despite this he

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
			managed to retain our sympathies. Andy Cannon played the narrator, the swindlers and the Giant creating convincing characters out of them all although I would have preferred to see him in a more central role as he is a mesmeric performer with a rare ability to hold an audience.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	Good	Finely choreographed movement was integral to the storytelling and used particularly well in creating the cow, for the fight scenes and in moving the set, all of which the actors handled well.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Good	Written by Andy Cannon and Iain Johnstone – this new version relocated the story to rural Scotland, introduced new characters and attempted to shed some light on how Jock becomes parted from his property. Much of the humour was derived from physical comedy and sight gags rather than the script, particularly in the series of ever more farcical encounters between Jock and the swindlers. However this section was over long and the episodic structure and constant repetition meant that the pace dipped slightly.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Good	<p>Directed by Andy Cannon and Iain Johnstone. Above all this was a highly imaginative production, full of visual invention, which captured the magic of theatre perfectly. The brilliant use of set and props in the giant's castle which allowed Jock and the giant to occupy the same physical space was inspired, as was the instantaneous creation of the cow from little more than a pair of Wellington boots.</p> <p>The only "essential" Wee Stories element missing from this production was the audience participation in this show - of which Andy Cannon is the undisputed master. Wee Stories productions are characterised by excellent storytelling which directly involves the audience – both figuratively and literally. I felt that the lack of audience participation detracted somewhat from the company's ability to directly engage with the audience.</p>
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	Good	Music was not particularly evident in the production but sound effects were well used particularly in the Giant's castle scene.
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	Set realised by Caroline Fearon. There were many ingenious design solutions used in this production which brought an added dimension to Wee Stories trademark storytelling style of theatre. The set included a flexible, mobile structure which the actors moved around the stage and manipulated into a variety of structures including Jock's cottage. The use of the dividing screen in the Giant's castle and the small-scale model of Jock's cottage were particularly satisfying and really succeeded in

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			conjuring up theatrical magic.
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>	Excellent	All technical aspects of the production were handled with precision.
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, participants/ schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc</p>		An unexpectedly small audience for a Friday night – approximately 30% capacity in Traverse 1. The audience was mainly made up of small family groups who were quietly engaged. The production may have benefited from being shown in a smaller space with the audience closer to the stage.
All	<p>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.</p>	N/A	
All	<p>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)?</p>	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	Excellent.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Programmes were given out to the audience.
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.	All printed material produced in advance was clear and informative although the graphic design was rudimentary. Information was also easily found on both the Traverse's and Wee Stories' website.
Ease of booking and payment	Booked and paid for tickets by phone in advance – all fine.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Located in the centre of Edinburgh, the Traverse is easy to access by public transport.
External signage and signposting	Lots of on street signage, some due to the major refurbishment of the Usher Hall next door.
Internal directional signage	All good.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Lifts, disabled toilets and electronic doors – the building is fully accessible.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Started and finished at the advertised times.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Excellent as always.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	SAC funding acknowledged on both Traverse and Wee Stories print, web, etc.

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.