



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:

Venue: Linlithgow Bridge School

Title of Event: Small Steps and Giant Leaps

Type of Event: performance

Date of Visit: 17/04/07

Overall Rating: GOOD

This was a highly ambitious multi-faceted undertaking, although done in one of Wee Stories deceptively simple stagings with 'naïve' props, as it's mission was to bring an understanding of how mankind came to understand Earth's place in the greater Universe. Although there was a massive amount of information and entertainment in it, it still felt in need of some disciplined editing as it was certainly too long. For the most part interesting and entertaining, it did lose its way a little towards the end, but was brilliantly sustained by the team of two actors who never flagged.

Huge amounts of work and research had clearly gone into it but on the performance I saw, it just wasn't quite together. The audience clearly enjoyed it, however, until it began to go over time when a certain restlessness was perceived. The vision and ambition were there, and the performers were of their usual high standard, it just missed being excellent.

Name: SYLVIA DOW Date: **21.06.07**

Specialist Advisor **V** 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	The work of Wee Stories is never less than ambitious and visionary, with a great deal of pre-work and continual development taking place. I have never found their work disappointing. This was no exception in terms of ideas – if there was a problem it was that they were rather overflowing with ideas, although as always they had devised many interesting ways of getting information over in a thoroughly entertaining way. This was a project which was curriculum aimed although there were philosophical matters at the heart of it too, to do with who we are and why we are.
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.	n/a	The performance was devised and produced by Wee Stories for schools touring.
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	good	The stated aim was to perform ' a journey through why we know what we know and how mankind got their head round it' and there were other aims connected with illuminating the curriculum's 'responsible citizens' strand. It succeeded in this to a large degree but there was just a bit too much material to get over in the allotted time which should have been confined, in my view, to one hour. The Wee Stories Education policy states that they believe all their work to be intrinsically educational, and this one was more overtly so than others.
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	Andy and Ian, the two performers – and indeed writers and directors - of the piece, worked in their usual skilled way with remarkable powers of memory for the facts and figures of the subject, improvisation, articulation, and flow of language. There were torrents of words used to get the information and ideas over, but the two performers were rarely less than compelling and engaging, and communication lines with the audience were strong with a little lapse towards the end as they realised they had over-run and there was still more to communicate. There was tremendous energy in the performance

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
			and a real passion for the subject matter, which came over very well. First class as always.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	n/a	
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	good	Clearly there was no script as such but there was, I would conjecture, a written performance plan, which was adhered to and round which the actors improvised. Judging by Wee Stories previous school work this would have been developed through working with children in workshop situations etc. It was really entertaining as well as informative – I learned a lot – but as stated elsewhere needed a firmer control over the sheer volume of material. And there was one clear flaw in that throughout the puzzle of why we do not fall off the spinning Earth was referred to as a historic mystery, but in the end the subject of gravity was never touched upon and we left with the mystery unsolved.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	good	A slightly firmer directorial hand was required. It looked as if it had been directed by the two performers as they developed the piece and that was to the performance's benefit in many ways, but they need to bring a bit more discipline to the end result. Having said that all the storytelling methods they used were well rehearsed and timed to perfection, and the characters they build up for themselves, - one the faux-naif, the other the person who knows it all - the way they interact with each other and with the audience, are all the products of productive rehearsal time and excellent self-direction.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	competent	Although it was staged, quite deliberately, in a very 'rough and ready, 'home-made' set I felt the use of music could have been better and technically more sophisticated.
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	Perfect for touring schools, the design was simple almost clumsy looking but used to tremendous effect with loads of very humorous child like props
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc). Crafts/Visual Arts - Use of	good	Technical presentation was kept to a minimum – although there were some simple technical effects onstage. This was entirely in keeping with the spirit of the piece.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	<p>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>		
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>		<p>Absolutely appropriate for the audience of Primary 6-7 pupils and their teachers, and response was very good with just a little flagging of attention towards the end. About 50-60 pupils were there. I spoke to one of the teachers afterwards and she was full of praise for both the curricular usefulness and the general fun of the performance but felt it was a tad lengthy and a bit over ambitious in terms of scope.</p>
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>	excellent	<p>The school had previously had Wee Stories doing some work on stars and planets and there was an excellent education pack to back up the performance. Clearly written in and easy to read informal style it had a wealth of back up information and suggestions for further activities along with an interesting timeline chart.</p>
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>	excellent	<p>See above re education pack and workshop. It's impossible to say without later follow up what the children would retain out of this, but I retained quite a lot of information. I feel that it would also raise a lot of ideas and topics for debate within the classroom. It was certainly clearly linked to the curriculum and could only, in my view, illuminate the subject for pupils.</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
Suitability of the venue for the event	It was a school hall much like any other – it would have very poor sight lines if full but the audience was confined to 2 classes so everyone was able to see.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	n/a – education performance
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.	Wee stories has an excellent website where a wealth of easy accessible information can be found about all their performances tours etc. including what to expect if the company visits your school.
Ease of booking and payment	n/a
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	A school, well signposted, off the main road in Linlithgow, west Lothian.
External signage and signposting	As normal with any school.
Internal directional signage	n/a
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Yes as required by all schools.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	It started 7 minutes late and over-ran by 25 minutes – this would have been a problem in secondary school but primary school can adjust without difficulty.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	n/a
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Yes on website, and education pack

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.