



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: Brenda Murphy in association with Macrobert**

**Venue: Macrobert, Stirling**

**Title of Event: Nightingale**

**Type of Event:** (e.g. performance, exhibition, informal showing, work-in-progress, workshop, screening, lecture etc) performance

**Date of Visit: 31/08/07**

**Overall Rating: Competent**

*(Please rate the event overall, taking into account your ratings for each section. Please state the key reasons for your overall ratings – i.e. 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.)*

Although this production had some potentially strong elements, I felt that the characters and their motivations, as well as the storyline, were not always clear and, overall, I struggled to make sense of the story that was presented.

The adaptable and inventive set did help to bring a magical quality to the production.

Name: Rebecca Robinson Date: 31 / 08 / 07

Specialist Advisor    x    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.	Competent	According to the limited information available (e.g. no programme), 'Nightingale', aimed at age 4 +, was inspired by the classic Hans Christian Anderson story of the same name. However, I felt that in this production the original story and its themes (e.g. the desire to capture and contain the beauty of nature and music) seemed to have got lost in the devising process and the production appeared to me, at times, too much like a linked series of improvised scenes. I felt that the characters and their motivations, as well as the storyline, were not always clear – particularly for the intended age group who may not be familiar with the original story. The adaptable and inventive set did help to bring a magical quality to the production.
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated e.g. 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.	Good	'Nightingale' - advertised as produced by 'Brenda Murphy in association with Macrobert' - complements the Macrobert's full programme of theatre for families. The Sept – Dec 07 brochure contains 10 performances aimed at children from 2 years + and offers a wide variety of styles (including puppetry, comedy, foreign language and dance). However, the marketing of this production – with its limited run and lack of publicity material as well as the timing (aimed at 4+ however with 1 out of the 3 shows performed during school hours) - did not seem conducive to audience development.
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 <sup>1</sup> below for guidance	poor	As mentioned above, there was little information about the production available, apart from an entry in the Macrobert's brochure. This entry suggested that the production was inspired by the Hans Christian Anderson story – however, as mentioned, I felt that the play lost the essence of the original.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.  Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	Competent	(Not attributed). The production was performed by two actors and two musicians (one onstage pianist and an offstage percussionist). Although the performers were able, I felt that the production did not allow them the opportunity to explore their full potential.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	N/a	

<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
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	poor	The sparse script only seemed to serve as a vehicle to emphasise the irritability of the ‘Princess’ as she shouted at the pianist to play better, or for the Nightingale to sing a different song, etc. I felt that this negative use of words was perhaps inappropriate for a production aimed at such a young audience.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	poor	(Director: Brenda Murphy) Although this production had some potentially very strong elements (e.g. the set, live music, able cast), I felt that they were not used to their best advantage. I found the characters and the story often unclear (for e.g. apart from her name, it wasn’t clear that/ if ‘Nightingale’ was a bird or what she was doing when she was ‘playing’ with the set; I couldn’t understand why the ‘Princess’ kept getting annoyed or why she wanted the pianist to return, etc). Overall, I struggled and failed to make sense of the story that was presented.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	poor	(Not attributed). I felt that this production had enormous musical potential - both due to theme of Hans Christian Anderson’s story (about the beauty of - and desire to capture - the nightingale’s voice) and also because the production featured two live musicians. However, the use of popular, showbiz numbers (e.g. ‘Send in the Clowns’, ‘Put on a Happy Face’, etc) I felt, worked against any sense of the magical and transcendental quality of the music, which is at the heart of the original story. I also felt that the live music was used in a very pedestrian way - with the piano and percussion instruments mainly acting as sound effects or musical accompaniments to the ‘numbers’ that the nightingale sang.
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	(Not attributed) The excellent set design brought the main element of magic to the production. The clever integration of instruments (bells, cymbals, etc) and the use of different levels (a step ladder and a stylised tree) provided an adaptable and colourful set that worked well in this space and which would work equally well for a touring schedule. The costumes were competent – I found the unflattering ‘nightingale’ costume unnecessarily ambiguous (was it meant to look like a bird? Or a child?) And felt that the slippery-soled shoes hindered the actors performance. The gentle lighting complemented the set.
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement  Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (e.g. lighting and sound cues, etc).  Crafts/Visual Arts - Use of equipment, space and overall	good	(Not attributed) The production was presented professionally from a technical point of view.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	<p>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><b>Audience</b></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>There were approximately 30-audience members - comprised mainly of adults with approx 5 children (under 5s). There was muted applause at the end.</p>
All	<p><b>Additional Interpretative activity</b> – what activities were available to enhance the experience of the event e.g. workshops, artist’s talks, discussion groups? Please indicate age-groups targeted.</p>	N/a	
All	<p><b>Outcomes of education activity</b> – 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?*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Suitability of the venue for the event	The Macrobert seemed a very appropriate venue for this production – the design of the piece worked well in the studio space and the Macrobert has excellent child-friendly facilities.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	I could not find any information about the production at the venue (e.g. programmes, leaflets posters). The only information available was a brief synopsis of the play in the Macrobert 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.	The production was listed on several online sources including The List, UK Theatreweb and VisitScotland. As mentioned, the production also had an entry in the Macrobert's season brochure. The brochure entry - though brief on information – was accompanied by an appealing hand drawn picture.
Ease of booking and payment	No problem
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	The Macrobert is within the campus of Stirling University - just beyond the village of Bridge of Allan. Local buses visit the campus and Stirling railway station is approximately 10 minutes drive away.
External signage and signposting	No problem
Internal directional signage	No problem
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	The main entrance has electric doors and there is a ramp to the upper level.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The show that I attended was at 1.30pm on a Friday afternoon – as the performance was aimed at 4 years and up I thought this was not a particularly suitable time as many children would still be at school or nursery. The other 2 performances were on the Saturday (morning and afternoon performances) – which seemed more appropriate, however, with only three performances it seemed a somewhat truncated run. The performance ran for approximately 40 minutes, which also seemed quite short.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Box office, front of house and catering staff were all very friendly and efficient.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>	As mentioned above, the only publicity material that I could find for this production was in the Macrobert's brochure. There was a general acknowledgment of SAC funding on the back of the brochure but no reference to SAC funding on the specific entry for this production.

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<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.

### **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.