

THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL

Assessment Report

Organisation/venue: 7:84 at the Traverse
Title of event: Cavedwellers by Nicola McCartney
Type of event: performance
Date of visit: 19/02/2002

1. Artistic assessment

Please evaluate the **artistic quality** of the event - its vision and imagination; ability to communicate; and quality of production.

A strong vision behind the play which held it together. The production really came alive in the second half, where the characters' histories intercut with Josef's (the character playing in current time) created real dramatic tension. The recurring themes and common links between characters (identity, loss, aspiration, brutality endured and perpetrated) were used intelligently and avoided "lecturing" the audience (which is a danger with any plays dealing with political issues.)

1.2 You are also asked to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the event with specific reference to the following:

Script (particularly in relation to new work, or second productions)

Difficulties in getting across the three characters all talking in different languages - to express their problems in communicating led to stilted, unnatural dialogues which stunted the flow and drive of the play. However, this improved.

Very interesting structure at times (two scenes being played simultaneously; two actors playing the same part and saying the same lines deliberately slightly out of sync with each other) – the rhythms of the language at these points was mesmerising.

Interesting use of themes recurring throughout the play – names, the importance of names when you have nothing else, yet repeatedly nobody will say their own name. The production plays with identity – personal and national. The audience assumes that the main protagonist, unnamed until the end of the play, will turn out to be one person but it is revealed he is another (one was expecting him to be an older version of the boy in the first half – but began to think he had to be Josef in the second – the lack of surprise in this didn't matter to me)

Direction

Directed by Gordon Laird. Some wonderful use of space – which was very important in this production – one actor was onstage throughout the whole play in

a very limited space, usually sitting. Subtle direction ensured that this worked effectively. The simultaneously occurring scenes (see above) was skilfully directed – this could easily have been confusing and messy, but Laird’s direction ensured that these scenes were the most theatrically interesting in the piece.

Standard of Performers

Liam Brennan was exceptionally good. Almost a problem, certainly in the first half, as he outshone the rest of the cast, making one far more interested in his story and their stories were almost an irritating distraction. The three others were adequate but somehow failed to make the emotional impact that they should have.

Design

Large angular columns painted to represent a cave in act one, used to represent a maze of cave tunnels in act two. Stylistically appropriately simple and reasonably effective. There was a cage centre stage wrapped in clear plastic, in which the boy swam. This was very effective. The real water (a pipe downstage) seemed pointless and distracting from the overall starkness and simplicity of the set. Sound was right for the production. Lighting design adequate, and more effective in the second act.

Technical Standards

Adequate.

Overall Production

Thought-provoking. The issues behind the play stay with one, the most enduring impression being of the expression of anger from Josef (Liam Brennan) that refugees don’t want pity or charity but ordinary dull things like a home, a job and also the right to want material things. An attack on the patronising assumptions made both by the conservative and also liberal/left wing elements of Western society – which was neither trite nor moralistic. Most importantly, it worked as a piece of theatre. The weakness was in the lack of empathy and interest one felt for the boy, young woman and old woman (as opposed to Josef) – their stories had dramatic potential which was not fully exploited.

Appropriateness of production for the audience

Seemed appropriate.

Approximate size of audience and reaction to the programme of work

Traverse 2. About 70%? Good/thoughtful/slightly bemused reaction – this was not a piece of theatre that would (or should) draw rapturous applause – given the issues it dealt with.

2. Management of event

2.1 Please evaluate the way the event was presented/organised by the organisation and by the venue. Please answer, where relevant, with reference to the checklist below adding any other comments/observations you may have.

2.2 Suitability of the venue for the event:

Suitable

2.3 Information/interpretative material provided at the venue (e.g. programmes, displays etc.)

range, quantity and clarity.

Flyers and company information available at box office, bar, racks display

2.4 Publicity/pre publicity for the event (leaflets, posters, etc.):

range, content and when and where available.

Fliers, quite a striking image

2.5 Accessibility of the venue:

Ease of payment	Fine
Location	Fine
Direction	?
Access for disabled people	Lift
Timing of event.	Fine

Customer service:

Quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)

As ever, friendly and efficient.

3. Background to your visit

3.1 Have you seen the work of this artist/company before? Yes

3.2 Is this your first visit to this venue? No