



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: 7:84 Theatre Co at Cumbernauld Theatre

Title of Event: Private Agenda

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: 29 September 2004

Overall Rating (Please rate the production 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.)

Competent

This was more of a documentary than a drama. The ability of the cast and director saved it from being dull. That said, it lacked any real sense of conflict on either an intellectual or emotional level. You can only have conflict if there is more than one protagonist and this piece felt as if there was only one-albeit speaking through different voices.

The principle weakness of a one-dimensional piece of work like this appears to me to be that it is incapable of presenting the light and shade, the ambiguity that makes drama, and the human condition interesting. It felt over-simplified in terms of its human aspects (as opposed to the technicalities of PFI).

Name: David Taylor

Date: 6 October 2004

Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

Please tick the relevant title

This report has been commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council to evaluate the artistic quality of the production named below. 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 may be made available to Scottish Arts Council Officers, Council and Committee members, and specialist advisors as appropriate. It will 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 Council to report on the overall performance of its Core 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 attaining acceptable standards of conception or presentation.

Competent – routine rather than especially interesting.

Good – well conceived and executed

Excellent – conceived and executed to a high standard.

1. Artistic Assessment

Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event, taking account of the following:

1.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
1.1	Vision and imagination	Poor	While the choice of topic for this production was interesting and topical, I thought the approach was rather unimaginative. It was in no sense a play, rather a realisation through monologues of recorded statements.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Good	The text was all spoken clearly and it was generally clear who was speaking at any point. Some of the content to do with the finances of PFI was a little technical and hard to follow.

2. Strengths and Weaknesses

Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the event with reference to the following:

2.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
2.1	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions	Competent	<p>There was not a script as such, in the sense of a drama created by a writer. The text consisted of edited extracts from statements from people working in or associated with the public sector, and PFI. These all supported one point of view that was critical of PFI and there was no dialogue between alternative views. There was no narrative or dramatic tension within the text. It would have been interesting to hear more about the pressures and needs were that led to the introduction and adoption of the scheme. The hints of subtle corruption and veiled pressure on decision-makers was interesting –and ultimately the stuff of drama– but little was made of this (human) aspect of the scenario. The overall structure of the production was more like a radio documentary (such as Radio Four’s “File on Four”). While these are interesting they are not regarded as Drama. One longed for a “Mr McChuckemup” to enliven proceedings, even at the risk of oversimplification.</p> <p>However, I did feel that the piece provided me with new information and some direct experiences of how the PFI scheme does or does not work.</p>

2.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
2.2	Direction	Competent	Within the limitations of the concept the direction was sufficient. A series of monologues is difficult to make interesting. The Director (Lorenzo Mele) did a reasonable job of introducing variety of tone, and physical positioning in order to relieve what would otherwise have been fairly monotonous. However the tone of the statements in terms of voice and body language and text, was rather too sweet and reasonable. The individuals were portrayed as rather saintly. Their words were imbued with a sense of righteousness that did not really ring true.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	Good	The actors all gave good performances. They presented their characters with a degree of charm, but were prone to verge on the sanctimonious at times.
2.4	Use of Music ¹	N/A	
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	N/A	
2.6	Design ² – including set, costume and lighting design	Good	A simple, clean setting that supported the production well. Good quality video projection that showed relevant images to the text. Costume seemed appropriate to the characters and was of an appropriate quality.
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	Well presented from a technical point of view.

¹ In particular, please comment on the quality and appropriateness of any original music composed for the production. Please indicate whether the music was performed live or recorded, in whole or in parts, and what effect this has on the quality of the production.

² Take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue and, where appropriate, the touring schedule

2.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Good	<p>Generally attentive throughout, including a group of teenagers, although some were a little restless towards the end. Once or twice members of the audience made comment on the text- e.g. “hear hear”. The performers handled this well. The response at the end was quite warm. There were around 120 in the audience of which perhaps one third comprised a school group.</p> <p>There was a discussion following a short interval after the performance. Around 60 remained. The discussion engaged a large part of the audience. The panel consisted of two cast members, the Director, an SNP MSP and a SSP MSP. There was, however, little real debate as the people present seemed to be of one mind- supporting the contention of the production that PFI was fatally flawed and that the scheme had no merits. Regrettably there was no alternative point of view, or even shades of opinion available. I understand that Labour MSPs had been invited to attend but with one exception, none attended during the run.</p>

3. 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.

3.	Criteria	Comments
3.1	Suitability of the venue for the event	Good
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue ³	Good
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity ⁴	Good
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	Good
3.5	External signage and signposting	Good-recently improved

³ These include programmes, displays etc., including the range, quality and clarity.

⁴ Publicity/pre-publicity (leaflets, posters, etc), including the range, content, and when and where available. Be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event. Also view and comment on the company’s website where one is advertised, commenting on the ease of use, and quality of content and presentation, and currency of information

3.6	Internal directional signage	Good
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	Fair
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Good
3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	Good
3.10	Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding ⁵	Good

⁵ The following is an extract from the Scottish Arts Council's conditions of grant for funded organisations:

“The company should acknowledge Scottish Arts Council funding in press releases, at launches, on all published materials (including leaflets, brochures, programmes, posters, notices display, exhibition materials, websites and advertising). Acknowledgement of the Scottish Arts Council grant must also be made in any secondary or indirect products arising from the revenue funding such as recordings, publications, video, broadcasts, computer programmes etc.”

Please comment on whether these conditions of grant were met, including use and prominence of the Scottish Arts Council logo on the company's website.