

THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL
ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: 7:84 at Paisley Arts Centre

Title of Event: Reasons To be Cheerful

Type of Event: performance

Date of Visit: 20/02/2004

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 a Council Officer, as indicated at the end of the form. The report will be circulated to the organisation which produced the work, 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

1.1 Vision and Imagination.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: The play used the familiar theatrical device of reuniting characters that were once close after a gap of years during which they had all followed diverging paths. The themes of the piece were an exploration of how people's political ideas may or may not change – does this imply “selling out” or pragmatism, a principled approach to life or a simply unrealistic one? This was set against a backdrop of politics over the past 20 years. It would have been interesting to see these themes more fully explored. The choice of book to adapt for stage seems entirely appropriate for 7:84 given the book's authorship (Mark Steele.) However, there was no strong vision apparent behind the production and the political nature of the piece at times seemed incidental.
Very Poor		
Poor	X	
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

1.2 Clarity of Communication.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: The stories of the personal relationships between the characters were clearly communicated, with appropriate nostalgic echoes. The political/philosophical themes were not fully explored. It was unclear exactly what the piece was trying to communicate (see under script.)
Very Poor		
Poor	X	
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

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

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

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: Adapted by Martin McCardie from the book by Mark Steele. (I have not read the book, but it was clear from the programme that McCardie had not literally adapted the book.) The dialogue was realistic and used a lot of humour. The intertwined histories of the characters were clear, but the actual characters themselves were two-dimensional and it was difficult to fully understand their past and present motivations as opposed to actions. There were some speeches that came across as harangues which lectured the audience as opposed to providing elucidation on the political themes or stories of the characters. The script seemed to change its emphasis – the first act concentrating on politics and nostalgia (and indeed political nostalgia) and the second on the personal dynamics of the characters' past relationships. There was a lack of overall cohesion and it seemed unclear what the adaptor was trying to achieve.
Very Poor		
Poor	X	
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

1.4 Direction

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: Directed by Stuart Davids at a consistently fast pace that made it difficult for the actors to develop their characters fully (although the script was also responsible for this, see above.) The humorous parts of the script were well handled, but coupled with the speed of delivery of the play overall felt a little relentless at times. There was only limited use of movement possible as it was all set in one room.
Very Poor		
Poor	X	
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

1.5 Standard of performers- where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: The three actors (Neil Mckinven, Frank Gallagher and Maureen Carr) gave competent performances, but were hampered in developing their characters and allowing the audience to engage on a human level by the fast pace of the direction and the poor script. Frank Gallagher gave a high energy performance throughout and was the most believable of the characters.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent	X	
Good		
Excellent		

1.6 Use of music – 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 part, and what effect this had on the quality of the production.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: Pre-recorded music from relevant years used effectively.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

1.7 Use of Movement or Choreography

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: N/A see under direction
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

1.8 Design – including set, costume and lighting design. Please take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue, and, where appropriate, the touring schedule.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: The set by Moley Campbell of a rundown high rise room worked as part of the play - the designer provided the props necessary to the play (chairs, hi-fi etc.) while suggesting the mood of the place through large graffiti sprayed over the walls. The window/television which showed either images of a Glasgow street at night or old news footage was an effective if unoriginal device. Competent lighting design by Dave Shea.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

1.9 Technical Standards – please comment on whether the production was professionally presented from a technical point of view.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: Professionally presented.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent	X	
Good		
Excellent		

1.10 Overall production – was the production successful overall in relation to any stated aims (e.g. in the programme or other printed material, and stated aims and objectives)

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: 7:84 aims to provide entertaining and politically energising theatre. This production did not fully meet these aims. The background to the play was politics, but this came across as political nostalgia and was not relevant to contemporary political issues or in any sense energising. The humorous angle of the play was entertaining, but in other ways the script was too weak and incohesive to enable the actors to portray the human side of the story with any depth.
Very Poor		
Poor	X	
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

1.11 Was the performance appropriate for the audience?

Yes

1.12 Estimated size of audience and reaction to the production.

Sold out in Paisley Arts Centre (c.100?) This was the opening night so there were many invited supporters of the company in the audience. It was interesting to note the varying reactions from different parts of the audience – definite groups who found the politics very amusing – others who found the human elements amusing. Good reaction.

2. Management of Event

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.

2.1 Was the venue suitable for the event?

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

- range, quantity and clarity.

Free programmes, which were reasonably well designed and informative.

2.3 Publicity/Pre-Publicity for the Event (leaflets, posters, etc)

- range, content and when and where available. Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event. Please also view and comment on the company's website where one is advertised. Comment on the ease of use, and quality of content and presentation, and currency of information.

Flyers, listings in various papers.

2.4 Accessibility of the venue

- ease of payment N/A invited
- location fine
- external signposting difficult to find
- internal directional signing fine
- access and provision for disabled people unclear
- timing of event fine

2.5 Customer service

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

Fine

3. Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding (if applicable)

Scottish Arts Council Evaluation Form

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 and 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, and computer programmes etc. "

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

SAC logo on programme and flyer.

Name: Jaime Lumsden

Date: 14/06/2004

Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

(Please tick above as appropriate)