

**THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL**  
**SPECIALIST ADVISER ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA**

**Organisation/Venue:** 7:84 Theatre Co. Traverse Theatre  
**Title of Event:** Reasons to be Cheerful by Martin McCardie  
**Type of Event:** Theatre Performance  
**Date of Visit:** Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> April 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 <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent	<b>X</b>	
Good		
Excellent		

This is the first production under the new artistic director of 7:84 Lorenzo Mele, who has committed the company to continue to tackle contemporary Scottish and global issues from a socialist perspective. **Reasons to be Cheerful** is an adaptation of the book by left-wing comedian Mark Steel and is dense with such references. While the attraction of Mark Steel's outlook on life and his understanding of public performance must have made the idea of an adaptation worth exploring, it required much more imagination and a far stronger script to deliver a theatre piece with any dramatic integrity.

**1.2 Clarity of Communication.**

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor	<b>X</b>	
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

The structure of the play is simple, if obvious. It takes the last 20 years in the lives of three radical socialists and tracks the varying paths they have taken to their current places in the Blair / Bush era. It aims to speak in Scottish popular voice and is crammed with contemporary socialist references. The weak script, compounded by many inaudible rants - and points where boredom affected the concentration - resulted in a patchy understanding of what was going on.

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 (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor	<b>X</b>	
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

The script is at times witty, and the characters are well drawn, but it is generally weak and structurally flabby. It has long, boring rants, which even the most politically sympathetic member of the audience failed to keep up with. At best it could be a television script.

**1.4 Direction**

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	<b>X</b>	
Excellent		

The production was well directed and made good use of the set. At times the pace was unrelenting and one felt battered about the head with every political issue that the last 20 years has thrown up, but the claustrophobia of Bobby's rather pathetic existence in his high-rise was well portrayed. Although the three characters had followed very different roads, one could still sense why they had been friends in the first place. That this came only through the performances and not through the script is a tribute to the director and actors' skill. The relationship between Bobby and Kate was sensitively explored.

**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:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	<b>X</b>	
Excellent		

The performances of all three actors were good, given the difficult script. In particular Frank Gallagher as Bobby gave a sensitive performance as the one who had been left behind. Maureen Carr's Kate was based on every New Labour female MP/MSP of the last seven years, full of passion and commitment to her cause, but with an insecure, soft centre which Bobby could still manage to expose. Neil McKinven had the easiest role as the guilt-ridden stand-up. There were, however, lots of times when it was difficult to hear the dialogue.

**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 <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent	<b>X</b>	
Good		
Excellent		

The production used contemporary popular music in an obvious way, rather heavily underlining the script

**1.7 Use of Movement or Choreography**

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

N/a

**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 <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent	<b>X</b>	
Good		
Excellent		

The set tried to convey the misery and poverty (in the widest sense) of Bobby's life, with stylised stacks of newspapers, a seventies sofa, bottles of booze and not much else. The video screen served both as a window on the bleak outside world and a way of projecting images of the political highs and lows of the last 20 years. The overall effect was half futuristic and half fifties kitchen sink, and curiously uninteresting and unsatisfactory.

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

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	<b>X</b>	
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 <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor	<b>X</b>	
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

**1.11 Was the performance appropriate for the audience?**

Yes

**1.12 Estimated size of audience and reaction to the production.**

Full house (Saturday evening).  
Reaction was very muted – I sensed a great disappointment from the audience, many of whom were loyal 7:84 attenders

## **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?**

Yes

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

- range, quantity and clarity.

Programme, posters, fliers etc. were informative and attractive. Displays were extensive.

### **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.

Pre-publicity was good, particularly because the production was at the end of a tour. The web-site was informative and easy to access.

### **2.4 Accessibility of the venue**

- ease of payment
- location
- external signposting
- internal directional signing
- access and provision for disabled people
- timing of event

All excellent.

2.5 Customer service

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

Excellent, as always

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

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.

Yes – fully acknowledged.

**Name: Alison Coates**

**Date: 18<sup>th</sup> April 2004**

**Advisor**

 **X**

**Scottish Arts Council Officer**

*(Please tick above as appropriate)*