



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

**Organisation/Venue:** 7:84 at The Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh

**Title of Event:** Boiling a Frog

**Type of Event:** Performance

**Date of Visit:** 18<sup>th</sup> March 2005

**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.)

**Good** – Directed by 7.84's Artistic Director Lorenzo Mele and adapted for the stage by Christopher Deans this production of *Boiling a Frog* based on the novel by Christopher Brookmyre was thought-provoking and entertaining in equal measure. Slickly produced, with good performances from a strong cast and an ingenious set, the near capacity audience at The Brunton Theatre clearly enjoyed their evening of dark wit and intrigue from this political touring theatre company.

**Name:** Judith Docherty

**Date:** 13.06.05

**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:**

**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, taking account of the following:

1.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
1.1	Vision and imagination	Good	<p><i>Boiling a Frog</i> has been adapted for the stage by Christopher Deans from Christopher Brookmyre's darkly witty novel which looks at the multifarious layers of corruption which exist in contemporary Scottish political, religious and social life.</p> <p>The novel was published in 2000 but the problems it exposes still resonate very strongly for the 2005 theatre audience.</p> <p>7.84 state that they are 'committed to producing high quality drama that entertains and politically energises audiences across Scotland' and, without a doubt, they have achieved this aim through this slick, intelligent and entertaining production.</p> <p>It is a complex narrative and demands the full attention of the audience as layers upon layers of corruption are revealed in almost every aspect of public life. Every one of the many characters in the play - politicians, journalists, the NHS, petty criminals - is involved in some form of dishonest activity. It is a harsh, hopefully too harsh, reflection of the society we live in, but director Lorenzo Mele manages to avoid the production becoming overly didactic or depressingly heavy by employing a deft comic approach.</p>
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Good	<p>The many layers of narrative in this story, along with the lighting pace of the production and the copious number of locations could have made this an impenetrable, or confusing experience for the audience however, good, unfussy direction and a strong cast enabled the story to unfold in a very clear way.</p>

## 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	Good	This adaptation for the stage by Christopher Deans, the newly appointed Playwrighting Fellow at the Traverse Theatre, captured Brookmyre's trademark sharp, glib writing style and presented the audience with an intelligent and intelligible dramatised version of the novel.
2.2	Direction	Good	7.84's artistic director Lorenzo Mele directed this complicated play deftly and with a light comic touch which saved the production from descending into didacticism or purely political posturing. This made for an entertaining and enlightening few hours which, in forcing the audience to think about the world we live in, meant that the whole experience was active rather than passive, and very rewarding as a result.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	Good	Mele's five strong cast included some of Scotland's most exciting and prolific actors who gave uniformly good performances. Stewart Porter, Gary McInnes and Robbie Jack (who played a great number of different characters with great panache) were particularly strong. Unfortunately, Kate Dickie, who is a very fine performer, was woefully underused but the blame probably lies with the source story rather than the performer or the director.
2.4	Use of Music <sup>1</sup>	Good	Robert Burlin's prerecorded score was dark, brooding and suitably reminiscent of 'TV thriller' music for the tone and content of the production.
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	N/A	N/A
2.6	Design <sup>2</sup> – including set, costume and lighting design	Good	Becky Minto's metal framed set was ingenious, with its sliding panels, many doors and magically appearing shelves and surfaces making it easy for the audience to envisage the very many different locations where the action was taking place. Wardrobe Supervisor Karen Toal provided very suitable costumes, which were particularly effective for the actors who played multiple roles with their task. The lighting by Designer and Production Manager Dave Shea was a little too dark at times although this did seem in keeping with the mood of the piece.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Competent	Technically, this performance seemed a little bit shaky at times but this didn't appear to detract from the audience's enjoyment of the piece.
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Good	The Brunton Theatre was very nearly full for this Friday night performance and the audience, who were a very healthy mix of ages, responded to the production warmly and enthusiastically.

### 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	Very suitable
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue <sup>3</sup>	Brunton and 7.84 programmes readily available.
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity <sup>4</sup>	I was aware of very strong word of mouth about the production although I hadn't seen posters and flyers. A well designed and informative programme accompanied the production and the company have an interesting, easily accessible website.
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	Good
3.5	External signage and signposting	Good
3.6	Internal directional signage	Good
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	Good

<sup>3</sup> These include programmes, displays etc., including the range, quality and clarity.

<sup>4</sup> 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

3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Very appropriate
3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	Excellent
3.10	Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding <sup>5</sup>	The SAC logo appears on the printed material accompanying the production and on the company's website

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<sup>5</sup> 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.