



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: 7:84 at Universal Hall, Findhorn

Title of Event: Boiling a Frog

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: 23 February 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. A play of two halves – the first slightly slow as characters are established and the plot introduced; the second picks up the pace and there is a real feeling of wondering how everything is going to be resolved. A darkly comic, contemporary political thriller set in the world of politics, the Catholic Church and PR.

Name: Specialist Advisors Reference Nick Fearne

Date: 25/2/05

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:

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	Good	With the Scottish Parliament 5 years old this is a timely production that pitches politics, press, PR and the Catholic Church into an entertaining and thought-provoking whodunnit.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Good	Despite a slightly laboured first half in which characters and plot were established the production carries the audience along to the resolution of the piece. Narrated by the imprisoned hack, Jack Parlabane (Gary McInnes) the style is very much TV – cutting from location to location, shifting time and jumping to different strands of the story. Potentially difficult to replicate on stage but this production achieves this well.

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	An adaptation of a Christopher Brookmyre novel by Christopher Deans. I have not read the novel but saw the TV adaptation of Ugly One Morning. I think this adaptation owes a lot to a TV drama – and it works, particularly in the second half when action and plot moves us quickly round Scotland.
2.2	Direction	Good	Generally well paced, particularly second half. Given the style of the piece there were a lot of scene changes often quite short and involving the bringing on of furniture – prison bunk, restaurant table etc. On a few occasions I felt these were unnecessary e.g. MSP Elspeth Doyle (Linda McLaughlin) sitting at a keyboard and illuminated screen to take a phone call.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments	Good	Strong all round with all but two of the cast playing multiple roles, all clearly defined and differentiated. Stewart Porter as Ian Beadie, PR guru, had a particularly strong stage presence. The cameo roles of Fooaltiyeman (Kate Dickie) and Teddy Graham/Mike Briggs (Ross Stenhouse) were great comic moments. Robbie Jack's back-to-the-audience Cardinal Doollan

			was deeply unsettling and effective.
2.4	Use of Music ¹	Excellent	I thought Robert Burlin's score was entirely appropriate – it was like an unseen character. It had a TV score quality – ever present but unobtrusive but coming to the fore at key moments.
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	N/a	No choreography as such
2.6	Design ² – including set, costume and lighting design	Good	Quite an intricate set comprising high, sloping flats with a central door set up stage – imagine sitting in the audience and drawing 'M' on the stage. Lots of panels that slid up/down in black out to reveal different props for different scenes – bible and cross, gun case, intercom, files etc. Doors that concertinaded in/out to create barriers, booths, cars, toilets etc. Well lit – lighting integral to production in terms of cutting to different scenes and locations. Some nice touches – right down to car indicator lighting effect and paparazzi flash bulbs. Although set now the costume had an 'authentic' feel to it – the priests looked like priests.
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	Quite a technical show. Lighting and sound technically good – sound was never obtrusive, lighting effects well executed.
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Good	100+ on a snowy midweek night. Very well received. Fairly mixed including secondary school party. 7:84 has a good name and strong following in this area and a good relationship with the venue and its audience. I think the audience appreciated such a contemporary piece

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

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	Excellent venue for this production and size of audience
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue ³	None
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity ⁴	Local press, posters, NEAT website
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	Fine
3.5	External signage and signposting	Fine
3.6	Internal directional signage	Fine
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	Wheelchair access
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Fine - 8pm start, finished 10.20pm. Maybe 7.30pm start better given people will have travelled to the venue
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	On poster, programme etc. Not on 7:84 website This production not on site

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

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.
