



Scottish Arts Council

**ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA**

**Organisation/Venue: 7:84 Theatre Company**

**Title of Event: Boiling a Frog**

**Type of Event: Performance**

**Date of Visit: 31 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**

While I found the content lacked sophistication in terms of its comedy, and there were some weaknesses in the performances, the audience response was strong and the choice of material clearly met a demand.

**Name: David Taylor**

**Date: 1 April 2005**

**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	Competent	An adaptation of a popular contemporary Scottish novel; an astute decision from the point of view of attracting an audience. The adaptation is part of a long tradition of political satire, married to the thriller genre and it did not really offer any new slant on this. In terms of form or approach this was not an innovative production.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Competent	Most of the production was clear, although the doubling and complexity of the plot did lead to a bit of confusion from time to time. Gary McInnes' diction was poor on several occasions and this led to a lack of clarity, and also undermined his role as the narrator and moral centre of the piece.

## 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>The script was an adaptation of Brookmyre's novel, by Christopher Deans. I am not familiar with the novel, although I believe that the script was faithful to the original in terms of storyline and style. The narrator Parlabane moved the story on when necessary. I found the humour relatively unsophisticated, with an over-reliance on fairly gauche swearing for comic effect. At times this verged on the juvenile.</p> <p>The storyline was interesting and had a measure of coherence although it was hyperbolic in its expose of cronyism within Scottish politics and duplicity within the Catholic Church. Its moral message seemed to be that we have nothing to fear but fear itself, and that moral integrity is about taking responsibility for one's actions and not trying to evade the consequences.</p>
2.2	Direction	Good	<p>This was a tricky piece to direct (Lorenzo Mele) with many scene changes and a relatively complex plot to put over. It did suffer from short scene syndrome leading to disjointedness and a feeling of being formulaic at times. For example, the restaurant scenes (I counted three) were rather predictable with the table setting being whisked out rather routinely. I thought that the treatment of the cardinal's presence was not well handled. His keeping his back to the audience felt awkward. While one could understand him being represented by a mysterious presence, perhaps in shadow, the device used (always with his back to the audience) felt it was dictated more by cast size than aesthetic or symbolic significance.</p>

			The directorial preference seemed to be to go for laughs and that was perfectly legitimate. I was less sure about Parlabane coming out of character in the final housebreaking scene, as this can be a rather lazy way of getting laughs. That said, the moments of threat and violence were convincing.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments	Good	Performances were of a good standard, with the exception of Garry McInnes' diction as mentioned above.
2.4	Use of Music <sup>1</sup>	Competent	Recorded music was used to create atmosphere and increase tension. At times this was a little intrusive. The apparent sampling of the sound of camera shutters as part of the sound design was a nice touch.
2.5	Use of Movement/Choreography	N/A	
2.6	Design <sup>2</sup> – including set, costume and lighting design	Good	The set worked well as an amalgam of different locations, standing for prison, various offices, the parliament, etc. If anything it was too fussy and at times the changes of detail to indicate a change of place were unnecessary at times.
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	Generally good, although the small shutters moved to reveal different set details ( e.g. flowers, CD racks) were rather sticky in their operation.
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Excellent	The audience responded well to the humour and there was warm applause at the end. The house was full and I understand it was full for the run.

### 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
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<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

3.1	Suitability of the venue for the event	Good
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue <sup>3</sup>	Limited to some reviews and FOH photos.
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity <sup>4</sup>	7:84 website not accessible – being renewed. Tron website informative with helpful extracts for reviews of the show and background material taken from the programme. No online booking facility. Good press preview material. Print of a high standard with appropriate images and text that communicated the nature of the show well. The prominence given to the show (and hence the book's) title was well judged. I thought the company's name could have had more prominence if the brand is considered a selling point also.
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	N/A- ticket arranged through the company.
3.5	External signage and signposting	Fair. Poster Boards in front foyer looked tacky- not well looked after.
3.6	Internal directional signage	Good
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	Good
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 <sup>5</sup>	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

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

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“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.