



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

**Organisation/Venue:** 7:84 at Cumbernauld

**Title of Event:** Borderland

**Type of Event:** (e.g. performance, work-in-progress, open rehearsal etc.) Performance

**Date of Visit:** 15/10/05

**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

Overall the audience seemed to enjoy this well-acted and entertaining play that explored the idea of political/ emotional/ imaginative 'borderlands'. I thought that the set and use of video worked particularly well.

I felt that the script was at times overly convoluted and that the comic aspect of the production and text sometimes undermined its' more serious intentions.

**Name:** Rebecca Robinson

**Date:** \_17\_ / \_10\_ / \_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	I thought that this production did, in some ways, fulfil 7:84's commitment to produce drama that "entertains and politically energises" (programme) its' audience; the audiences' attention appeared, on the whole, to be held throughout, comic aspects of the script and performance were much appreciated and the tension of the ending was held. However, I felt that the political dimension of the play was diluted by an emphasis on the comedy and by the convolutions of the script. While some elements (i.e. the set and use of video) created a very strong and evocative visual dimension to the production, I felt that this was not sustained throughout the piece.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Good	The production was staged and performed with clarity.

## 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	Andrew Doyle (writer) inventively explored the idea of an emotional/ physical/ imaginative 'borderland' between war and peace in this fluent, and potentially powerful, new script. I thought that the two central characters and their relationship were clearly defined and their witty, quick-fire dialogue kept the audiences' engagement throughout. However, I felt that the script was overly full of ideas and - particularly during the first 5-10 minutes – there seemed an overload of information. The convolutions of the text seemed to me to sometime work against the development of dramatic tension. I also felt that the comic elements of the script, though enjoyable, ultimately undermined the more serious themes.
2.2	Direction	Good	I thought the set and the use of video and music all created a very strong and striking stylistic impression and evocative atmosphere to the piece. However, I felt that this wasn't sustained throughout and the video sections thus became a little episodic. While the production was mostly entertaining I felt that sometimes the play was inappropriately played for laughs – resulting, as above (2.1), in a lack of sustained dramatic tension. It also seemed that opportunities were missed using the set to create interesting visual images.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	Good	Michael Condron ( <i>Ciaran</i> ) and Richard Orr ( <i>Sean</i> ) managed to create and sustain a very believable, easy, sibling relationship and good rapport – both handling the quick-fire dialogue with apparent ease. However, while they both appeared to very comfortable with the text and were both very sympathetic, I did feel that neither actor was completely physically at ease with their characters

			and movement sometimes appeared awkward.
2.4	Use of Music <sup>1</sup>	Good	I was only aware of music being used during the video sequences - where it supported the imagery well and helped to create an interesting and evocative atmosphere.
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	Competent	The fight sequence in Act 2 seemed to be (deliberately?) choreographed as a comedy sequence, which, I felt, resulted in a loss of dramatic tension at a particularly crucial point.
2.6	Design <sup>2</sup> – including set, costume and lighting design	Good - excellent	The all-white, 'gable-end' back flat created a very sharp-edged and clear sense of space. In the first act, on either side of the stage, were placed high, wire fences that were exchanged for rather beautiful metallic tree shapes in the second act. I thought that this self-contained set worked very well - creating a well-defined playing area and also the idea of a 'borderland' surrounded by an unidentifiable and desolate sense of threat. I thought that the set worked particularly well with the video footage but sometimes felt that the set's potential for creating striking imagery wasn't always maximised in the staging. Costumes were good and, I thought, that the challenge of lighting a, mainly, white set were well met.
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	The production was professionally presented from a technical point of view.
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Good	There were approximately 50 – 60 audience members- the majority appeared to be from the 40+ age-range. There was much laughter throughout the performance and appreciative applause at the end. I overheard 1 person saying that they "quite enjoyed it – but I drifted off a bit...there was so much information". At the end I overheard a number of people saying that it was "good".

### 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
----	----------	----------

<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>	There were a few display boards carrying posters of the production. I didn't find the poster image particularly attention-grabbing. Free programmes were handed out at the box office. The programmes were clear and informative – containing biographies and some information about the company.
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity <sup>4</sup>	I was aware of a fair amount of pre/ publicity (e.g. flyers, posters, regular postings on the Scotnits site). I read three (relatively positive) reviews of the production. I found the company's website ( <a href="http://www.784theatre.com">www.784theatre.com</a> ) very difficult to navigate and was unable to find the tour schedule or much information about the production from this.
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	No problems
3.5	External signage and signposting	I think Cumbernauld theatre is well known locally but, coming from outwith the area, even with the use of their downloadable map, I found the theatre hard to find. I saw one signpost for the theatre on the main road.
3.6	Internal directional signage	Fairly clear
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	I couldn't obviously see access and provisions for disabled people.
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The running time was 2 ½ hours – which I found overly long – I noticed a few people leaving before the end of the performance.
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>	SAC funding was acknowledged on all publicity material that I saw.

<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:

"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.

