



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: 7:84 at Tron Theatre

Title of Event: Borderland

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: 4 October 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.)

Competent

In interesting theme, I thought, and for me the main interest lay in the social and political milieu that was described through the writing. The play was treated in a way that was at once quirkily non-naturalistic, and at the same time rather pedestrian. There were lapses in stage-craft technique relating to the violence that let the presentation down. As a piece of theatre it lacked real tension and variety of tone.

Name: David Taylor

Date: 27 October 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	This was a new play by a relatively unknown writer. The format was conventional and the staging naturalistic except for a rather incongruous foray into a kind of fantasy conceit relating to the unidentified creature in the box and the role of the "clock". The subject matter was contemporary and current, dealing with the republican community in the midst of the IRA cease-fire. As such it was an interesting topic that had contemporary political resonance.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Competent	While the narrative was relatively straight forward, there were element in the play that were obscure. The symbolism of the "creature" in the box was not explored or explained. The central element of the "Clock"- or as we were led to understand, death, was equally opaque. The delivery of the language and the plot were clear enough.

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	The script (Gareth Morrison) created a believable political and social world with two brothers inhabiting a world that existed just below, and depended upon, the IRA activists. It interestingly revealed the culture of republicanism, and fear and dependency that helped to sustain the violence of the "troubles". The play attempted to explore the new condition within which the republican culture found itself as Sinn Feinn moved more and more towards political as opposed to military engagement . On a socio-political level this worked fairly well, but I did not feel that the writing was up to dealing with the metaphysical issues that were thrown up through the arrival of the serial killer figure, referred to directly or indirectly as "the Clock" (time running out), the Grim Reaper, and Death itself. This symbolism felt rather heavy handed and overworked, and yet was not resolved in a satisfying way. Similarly the reference to the un specific creature that had value by virtue of its pelt, was perplexing. The dark humour in the play worked well.
2.2	Direction	Competent	On the whole the direction tended towards the static. There was some interesting detail in the portrayal of the younger brother as obsessively neat. Within the constraints of the script the production was well presented. I thought that the use of video was good- particularly the opening sequence which led one into the play, establishing the social milieu and drawing the

			<p>viewer into the narrative.</p> <p>I found the behaviour of the other brother in eating a plate of noodles irritating as his movements were not a convincing representation of eating food of this kind. That stiffness and artificiality undercut the naturalism of the piece. This was most evident in the scenes of violence- notably the two incidents of the intruder being knocked out with a frying pan. Neither of these worked well at all, and the violence in general was unconvincing. There was a kind of self consciousness about the performances that seemed to pervade the production.</p>
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	Good	Both actors achieved good characterisation. There was a tendency to monotony in tone and pitch, and the aggressive banter between them probably started at too high a level.
2.4	Use of Music ¹	Competent	Entre act recorded music was appropriate
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	Poor	As mentioned above under ‘direction’ the fight sequences were not well realised.
2.6	Design ² – including set, costume and lighting design	Good	The set consisted of a room, surrounded by high fences in the first act which changed to rather brutalist trees in act two. These two ‘envelopes’ resonated in terms of the brothers besieged and bleak social and psychological circumstances.
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	Well presented
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Good	The audience responded vocally to many of the lines in the show. There seemed to be a buzz of recognition of a lot of the republican references- including Irish Gaelic expressions. The applause at the end was enthusiastic and positive comments overheard from the audience.

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	Good
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue ³	An informative programme
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity ⁴	Good
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	Good
3.5	External signage and signposting	Fair
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- although the play felt a little over-long.
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	Good

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.