

THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL
SPECIALIST ADVISER ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: Arches Theatre Company / The Arches, Glasgow

Title of Event: PLAY by Samuel Beckett (part of three short plays in one evening)

Type of Event: (e.g. performance, work in progress, opens rehearsal etc)
PERFORMANCE

Date of Visit: Friday 26th September 2003.

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 a Council Officer, as indicated at the end of the form. The report will be circulated to the organisation which produced the work, 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

1.1 Vision and Imagination.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: Play stays true to Beckett's darkly comic vision of the human struggle. It brings to life the pared down text with strong performances highlighting the fickleness, weaknesses and vindictiveness of human relationships, in this case a complicated and bitter love triangle, still ongoing even after death. Employing affected accents heightened the comedic tension.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	/	
Excellent		

1.2 Clarity of Communication.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: Clarity, in the normal sense of the word, is not something that Beckett strives for. Instead he prefers to leave gaps for the audience to fill in for themselves. The performances were precise, focussed and audibly clear where intended.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	/	

You are also asked to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the event with specific reference to the following:

1.3 Script (particularly in relation to new work, or second productions).

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: Beckett - brilliant - no other comment required.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	/	

1.4 Direction

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: This is a sharply directed production with precise timing and rhythm highlighting the humour whilst also allowing the shadows to take hold as a backdrop. The only perverse criticism is that it felt a little too fast, perhaps a little too slick and programmed thereby missing out on some of Beckett's expression of the uncertainties and ludicrousness of the human condition.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	/	
Excellent		

1.5 Standard of performers- where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: Highly focussed performances from all three performers - three heads protruding from three large funeral urns. All the attention is on the words and faces, thereby magnifying every nuance of vocal and facial expression. In this production the performers are imbued with a repressed eccentric suburban quality that brings out the dark humour.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	/	
Excellent		

1.6 Use of music – 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 part, and what effect this had on the quality of the production.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: The only sound employed is the pre-recorded sound of a clock ticking fast - minimal, energetic, effective. No music employed.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

1.7 Use of Movement or Choreography

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: The only movement employed are the facial expressions.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

1.8 Design – including set, costume and lighting design. Please take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue, and, where appropriate, the touring schedule.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: The set consisted of three well-constructed large funeral urns inside which the three performers stood revealing only their heads. Their faces were painted partially white adding to the ghostly air of claustrophobia and sense of imprisonment and afterlife. The lighting was superb - very simple white focussed light flitted from performer to performer as they spoke, supporting the stripped down yet rich nature of the writing.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	/	

1.9 Technical Standards – please comment on whether the production was professionally presented from a technical point of view.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: See 1.8. The lighting was extremely effective and precision perfect. It followed the tight text and highlighted performers as they spoke - even a single missed beat / cue would have thrown the rhythm.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	/	

1.10 Overall production – was the production successful overall in relation to any stated aims (e.g. in the programme or other printed material, and stated aims and objectives)

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: There were, as such, no stated aims in the programme. However, this was a strong, clever and imaginative performance true to Beckett's vision.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	/	
Excellent		

1.11 Was the performance appropriate for the audience?

The audience was mixed in terms of age - from 18 to 60yrs approx. As this performance was part of the Beckett Festival I can only assume it was appropriate. Beckett, anyway, is relevant to anyone wishing to explore the darker side of what it is to be human.

1.12 Estimated size of audience and reaction to the production.

60 people (60% capacity approx). Reaction was very positive. Beckett can be quite exhausting with its darkness and myriad of possible interpretations and this audience (judging from after-show conversations) found this tripple-bill fascinating.

2. Management of Event

Please evaluate the way the event was presented/organised by the organisation and by the venue. Please answer, where relevant, with reference to the checklist below adding any other comments/observations you may have.

2.1 Was the venue suitable for the event?

Yes, it was great to see Beckett performed in a small theatre where every detail could be clearly seen and heard.

2.2 Information/Interpretive material provided at the venue (e.g. programmes, displays etc)

- range, quantity and clarity. - a press display showing previews (no reviews at time of assessment) raised issues relating to Beckett.
- the free programme replicated information already in the Arches brochure with the addition of performers' CV's. It would have been interesting to read some Director's Notes.

2.3 Publicity/Pre-Publicity for the Event (leaflets, posters, etc)

- range, content and when and where available. Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event. Please also view and comment on the company's website where one is advertised. Comment on the ease of use, and quality of content and presentation, and currency of information.
Publicity - included in Arches brochure and replicated on website. Website was up-to-date and clear but provided nothing not already in the brochure - wanted website to be more imaginative but it is still a usefull tool.

2.4 Accessibility of the venue

- ease of payment - paid in person at box-office - no problems.
- location - cannot get more central than the Arches.
- external signposting - reasonably well-lit.
- internal directional signing - no signs in foyer to theatre, some public asked where theatre was.

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- access and provision for disabled people - ground floor level, wheelchair accessible.
- timing of event - 8.00pm, as part of Beckett Festival.

2.5 Customer service

- quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering). - box-office staff friendly, informative. Bar busy and friendly.

3. Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding (if applicable)

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 and 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, and computer programmes etc. "

Please comment on whether the above conditions of grant were met, including use and prominence of the Scottish Arts Council logo on the company's website.

SAC logo prominent on website, brochures and programmes.

Name: Mark Waddell. (advisor)

Date: 29.09.2003.

Advisor * Scottish Arts Council Officer

(Please tick above as appropriate)