



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DANCE

Artist/company: Bordeaux Opera Ballet, Edinburgh International Festival

Venue: Playhouse Theatre

Title of Event: Picasso and Dance: Parade (Massine), Three Cornered Hat (Massine), Icarus (Lifar), and Prodigal Son (Balanchine).

Type of Event: performance

Date of Visit: 23 August 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 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:

1.1 **Vision and imagination**

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		<p>This is an interesting programme, presenting a slice of modern dance history from the seminal work of the Ballets Russes in the 1910s and 20s, and featuring the creative collaborations between choreographers, composers and artists brought together by Diaghilev.</p> <p>Three works for which Pablo Picasso designed costumes and sets – <i>Parade</i>, <i>The Three Cornered Hat</i>, and <i>Icarus</i> – are followed by <i>The Prodigal Son</i> by George Balanchine, Diaghilev's last ballet before his death in 1929.</p>
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	✓	

1.2 **Clarity of communication**

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		<p>Each of the four pieces tells a story – some are more complex than others, but in each the choreography is effective, and enhanced by dynamic costumes and sets, as well as the musical score. The performances, with a few exceptions, seemed rather flat (see below), and without the strength of the design and music, the stories may have been compromised.</p>
Poor		
Competent		
Good	✓	
Excellent		

1.3 **Quality of production**

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		<p>The “period” nature of the programme meant that the production may have seemed quite conventional, but it was extremely well produced. The costumes and sets appeared to be of high quality, which is essential in a programme that relies so much on these elements to communicate. It was compromised only by the quality of the dancers (see below).</p>
Poor		
Competent		
Good	✓	
Excellent		

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

1.4 Choreography (including originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc)

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		<p>These four pieces are major works in 20th century ballet repertoire. Although the style and sometimes laboured approach to storytelling may seem old-fashioned, this was ground-breaking choreography at the time.</p> <p>The one exception to the “dated” look is, in my view, Balanchine – his work has a more timeless quality and stood out as by far the superior work in this programme.</p>
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	✓	

1.5 Performers – including technical standard, performance skills, and ability to communicate.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		<p>This was the one area of weakness. In no piece did the company look uniformly strong – there were excellent lead performances in <i>Icarus</i> and <i>The Prodigal Son</i>, but some very wobbly technique throughout the evening, and particularly in <i>The Three-Cornered Hat</i>. Overall, it was technically competent, but not outstanding. The drama of the costumes/sets and music compensated for the weak performances.</p>
Poor		
Competent	✓	
Good		
Excellent		

1.6 Sound – appropriateness of sound/music to the production. Please also 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:
Very Poor		<p>Live music was provided by the Royal Ballet Sinfonia and played to a high standard. There were, however, a number of times when the dancers were noticeably out of time with the music – I’m unsure whether this relates to the conducting or how well the dancers were rehearsed.</p>
Poor		
Competent		
Good	✓	
Excellent		

1.7 Design – including costume, set, lighting design.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		The costumes, sets and props featured strongly, as one would expect in a programme titled “Picasso and Dance”. Indeed, the bold designs enhanced the action of each piece, heightening the comedy and sense of absurd in <i>Parade</i> and <i>The Three Cornered Hat</i> , setting the mood and underscoring the tragedy in <i>Icarus</i> , and echoing the emotional drama in <i>The Prodigal Son</i> .
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	✓	

1.8 Technical standards – comment on the whether the production was technically well presented (e.g. lighting and sound cues, etc)

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		This was not a technically demanding programme, with fairly conventional lighting and set changes. Everything appeared to run smoothly.
Poor		
Competent		
Good	✓	
Excellent		

1.9 Overall production – assess the success of the production in relation to any stated aims (e.g. in the programme or other printed material)

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		The programme aimed to showcase the work of the Ballets Russes and most certainly succeeded. The four pieces gave the audience a good sense of the visual style, and the range of subject matter, from the almost-frivolous entertainment of <i>Parade</i> to the drama of <i>The Prodigal Son</i> .
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	✓	

1.10 Audience – assess the appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size of the audience and record their reaction.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	✓	
Excellent		

The house appeared to be nearly full on this Saturday evening – the last performance. The response was enthusiastic, although this waned considerably with the multiple curtain calls, which really were excessive.

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 Suitability of the venue for the event.

EIF has the challenge of presenting the highest quality international performing art within the venues available in Edinburgh.

2.2 Information/interpretive material provided at the venue (e.g. programmes, displays etc), including the range of materials, quantity and clarity.

Programmes were clearly displayed by venue staff on entering and exiting. No other display evident internally but good signage externally. The programme includes a good essay and biographical details of the company and performers. The type size for the biographies is very small – no doubt due to space limitations – but EIF should consider how this might be enlarged in line with RNIB guidelines.

2.3 Publicity/pre-publicity (leaflets, posters, etc), including the 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.

Excellent promotional materials and mechanisms for EIF as a whole, with targeted mailings and leaflets for the dance programme.

2.4 *Accessibility of the venue, including:*

- *Ease of booking and payment* – through EIF/Hub box office. The addition of on-line booking this year is very welcome, improving access on top of EIF's efficient personal, postal, fax and telephone systems already in place.
- *location of venue* – Fine. Easy access from public transport and car parking.
- *external signposting and signage* – fine.
- *internal directional signage* – fine, although signage to toilets on some levels could be improved.
- *access and provision for disabled people* – adequate, but the Playhouse may need to consider improvements to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- *timing of the event* – fine.

2.5 *Customer service, including: quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering).*

Excellent – I'm always impressed by the efficient and helpful staff at the Playhouse.

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

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.

Conditions of grant met, with the Scottish Arts Council logo prominently displayed in the EIF brochure, as well as the programme for this event. The Scottish Arts Council is acknowledged on the website, although one has to look for it. EIF may wish to consider putting the logo on the homepage.

4. Scoring

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 strong programme of seminal works in the history of modern ballet, compromised slightly by the uneven quality of the dancers.

Name: Cindy Sughrue

Date: 12/09/03

Advisor **Scottish Arts Council Officer** ✓