

THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL
SPECIALIST ADVISER ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: Edinburgh International Festival/Tron Theatre

Title of Event: San Diego

Type of Event: performance

Date of Visit: 18 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 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: A challenging and innovative play with a production that served it well, using multi-media well to support and enhance the text.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	x	

1.2 Clarity of Communication.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: The play was non-linear and did not present clear narrative. For this reason it may not have been easily accessible to audience members not familiar with this kind of post-modern (for want of a better term) approach. That said, younger people might well find this style ,more congenial than those of an older generation. The performances and the video material were all very clear and there was no problem about intelligibility on the practical level.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	x	
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: A new palsy by David Greig. This piece was definitely self-referential and could lay itself open to self-indulgence. The play had the author as one of its central characters, although he was dispatched by a knife-wielding attacker within the first quarter of the play. The writer appeared to be concerned with the artists as observer, and the artist as protagonist. Having a number of characters wearing T-shirts bearing the author's name seemed to be concerned with the relationship between the writer and the characters he creates- as some one said, perhaps every painting (work of art) is a self-portrait. The play deals with topical modern themes such as location and dislocation. Families kept apart by distance in this age of global travel-with disastrous results for emotional and spiritual well-being. The idea of location runs through the play- the airline pilot who cannot locate himself in the strange city, the artificiality of location and action in the making of the movie. Greig creates a surreal world which one suspects is meant to reflect the actual surrealism of the city of San Diego which seems to have provoked the work. He critiques the modern human condition and points up the banality of much of contemporary popular culture through the running gag of the Wings song, Band on the Run. At the heart of the play is a moving family tragedy of the alienated father and daughter and the grotesquery of self mutilation and cannibalism. Greig here is matching the outrageousness of some of his contemporaries- Kane and Ravenhill, but with a lightness of touch and wit that marks his work out as more redemptive and positive than others. Like much of his previous work this is a dense play with a great deal of important material woven into it. As such it is not an easy ride either emotionally or intellectually. I does feel like an important piece of work- assuming that one can find intellectual justification for the self-reference and see beyond what superficially appears as self indulgence, to see the exploration of the role of the artist and his relationship with his fictions and his own life. The critical tests of quality writing- did this provide fresh insight to the human condition; did it help me to look at anything in a different way; did it feel authentic and serious, and did it resonate with my experience of the world, and did it entertain?. The answer to all of these is in the affirmative.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	x	

1.4 Direction

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: Direction was by David Greig and Marisa Zanotti. The production is rather slowly paced, and it does feel long. There are elements that are over-stretched- e.g. the grave-side rendition of Band on The Run is taken too far- the point could have been made more quickly. The use of video was interesting and looked slick. There was use of over-lapping scenes with action in different locations and time-frames going on at the one time on stage. This was imaginative and served to flag up some of the thematic material. The actors used their own accents, it appeared. This led to American characters speaking in a Glasgow accent- this could have been justified in terms of the immigrant nature of the San Diego population, but I suspect this (successful) directorial decision was to be accent-deaf for this production.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	x	
Excellent		

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

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: The cast were all of a high calibre, with no one standing out above the others, although Billy Boyd's semi-cameo role was sensitively and comically delivered.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	x	

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 sound design was comprehensive and worked well with the text and direction.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		

Good	x	
Excellent		

1.7 Use of Movement or Choreography

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: The production was moved in a fairly straight manner, and I do not recall any choreography as such.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	x	
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 design was largely abstract with an illuminated backdrop. The only real set items were a potted palm, and a working cold-drinks dispenser. A series of trolley-suitcases were placed at regular intervals across the stage and were used as anchors and locations for the actors in their different scenes. This all helped to create the impression of impermanence and anonymity that is a central theme of the play. The costumes are all of a good quality and give a good shorthand for what the characters signify. The two character –had costumes that seem out of kilter with the rest of the cast. These characters are absurdist-a kind of American Vladimir and Estragon, but their costumes seemed just too bizarre within the context of the rest of the design and threw the look of it a bit off balance. The use of the live video in the early part of the play was good. I was not clear how the two larger video screens contributed a great deal to the totality of the play. The overall look was sophisticated and modern and served the play well.
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 (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: The production was very well presented technically.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	x	

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 (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: A challenging and at times difficult piece, that would have benefited from a little more pace and some editing. However, I thought that the quality of the writing and the seriousness of the themes made it a production worthy of inclusion in an international festival, and a worthy representative of contemporary Scottish theatre.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	x	

1.11 **Was the performance appropriate for the audience?**

Yes- insofar as a major international festival should present work that challenges its audience and can expect a large proportion of the audience to have knowledge of and appetite for contemporary theatrical arts.

1.12 **Estimated size of audience and reaction to the production.**

It was a full house. The production clearly split the audience. A number of people (maybe 5%) did not return after the interval, and a discernible number did not applaud. There was a majority I would have thought who responded during the performance to the humour, and applauded warmly at the end.

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

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

- range, quantity and clarity.

Good

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.

Good

2.4 Accessibility of the venue

- ease of payment

Good

- location

Good

- external signposting

Fair

- internal directional signing

Good

- access and provision for disabled people

Good

- timing of event

At three hours this was a fairly long evening- see direction, above.

2.5 Customer service

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

Good

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.

Acknowledgment standard for the EIF

Name: David Taylor

Date: 18 August 2003

Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

x

(Please tick above as appropriate)