

THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL
SPECIALIST ADVISER ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: Produced by Edinburgh International Festival
Title of Event: The Seagull
Type of Event: Performance
Date of Visit: 16th 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 <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	√	

The themes of artistic aspiration and frustration, sexual and familial tension were strongly presented in this production, with an over arching sense of stagnation and dread mirrored by the design. This production would provide a very good introduction to Chekhov.

1.2 Clarity of Communication.

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

The production clearly set out the different interactions between the various characters and the end point of the play was foreshadowed by the ongoing action. The sense in which Konstantin continually questions the status quo of contemporary art through his own was clearly defined, and his relationship with his mother became as much about the stagnant nature of her art, as her attitude to him as a mother.

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:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	√	
Excellent		

The script was presented very clearly, with the performances foregrounding the wit and poignancy of the script.

1.4 Direction

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: The direction is clearly the main reason for the production's success. It presents <i>The Seagull</i> as a unified whole, pulling the different strands into a cohesive piece. The pacing, as with many Chekhov pieces, was not overly slow. It was mannered but as such was appropriate to the piece. However, at times Arkadina's neurotic hysteria, although fully grounded in the text, seemed a little too caricatured.
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: The quality of the actors was uniformly high as one would expect from such a cast.
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 <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: The soundtrack was of a high quality and added to both the realism and symbolism of the piece.
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: Movement was appropriate to a scripted work of this type.
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 design was very appropriate to both the venue and the production. It echoed Peter Stein’s comment (in the programme) that this is a play about theatre, by continually showing us the back wall of the actual venue, and the way in which the play’s set and the makeshift stage made for Konstantin’s tableau were moved around. The projection screen was very effective by making the symbolism of the seagull itself tangible, and by providing evocative back drops for the live action. However at times the lighting seemed overly murky, without adding to the sense of the text.
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 technical standards were very high as one would expect.
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 (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	√	

In his interview with Mark Fisher in the programme, Peter Stein says that "The general problem (with Chekhov) is that nothing goes on... You have to work on the subtext." The production is successful in that it feels as though a lot goes on. The subtexts are clearly, though never obtrusively, presented. This was an international collaboration of world class standard and as such addressed the aims and objectives of the Edinburgh International Festival.

1.11 Was the performance appropriate for the audience?

Yes the

1.12 Estimated size of audience and reaction to the production.

The show was sold out and the reaction was good. Most of the audience appeared to be over 50 with some student groups.

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 the venue was suitable for the event

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

- range, quantity and clarity.

The programme was interesting and informative.

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.

The relevant listing in the EIF programme and website was clear.

2.4 Accessibility of the venue

- ease of payment - Good
- location - Good
- external signposting - Good
- internal directional signing - Good
- access and provision for disabled people – relatively good within the context of an old theatre
- timing of event - good

2.5 Customer service

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

All the staff encountered were courteous and helpful

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.

Yes the conditions of grant were met.

Name: Felicity Hall

Date: 28 October 2003

Advisor

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Scottish Arts Council Officer

(Please tick above as appropriate)