

THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL
SPECIALIST ADVISER ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: Mull Theatre

Title of Event: The Designated Mourner

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: 22 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: A difficult, challenging piece both for audience and, I presume, the acting company. Not a lot 'happens', there is no real plot or storyline and little action – so, a brave decision to include it in the season's programme. But given the intimate nature of the venue and the style of the piece – most of the play is directed straight to the audience – one is slowly drawn in and intrigued by this piece and the characters that inhabit it. You have to listen, you have to think about yourself and the wider world. Not an easy night out but a rewarding one.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

1.2 Clarity of Communication.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: I presume, not having come across the play before, this was a fairly straight reading on the piece relying on good, clear performances, no tricks or gimmicks, leaving the play to speak for itself through clearly defined characters. Characters who in one moment we laughed with, in the next felt sympathy for and then, for an instant, even despised. Diction and delivery was clear and projection not a problem in this size venue!
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: Not a new work but probably not widely performed. Three characters mostly talking directly to the audience. They talk of people and friends they know as though we should know them too. What country are we in? A country of rebellion, torture, killings, disappearances and division. It could be anywhere, probably, but felt like South America. It also had, and I'm not sure why, a 'Death and the Maiden' feel to it. The script drew you in. We, the audience, were complicit in the world inhabited by these characters.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

1.4 Direction

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: What does a director do with three characters who sit behind desks and talk to the audience? Well Alasdair McCrone resisted the temptation to have the characters get up from behind their desks to 'add a bit of movement'. In fact apart from Howard entering to sit at his desk the character of Jack was the only person who got up from behind his desk – to look out at the rain. The piece was well paced – not rushed, took its time, and drew us in. I wasn't sure about the use of the TV/video screens (see below)
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 <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: Couldn't be faulted. Alasdair McCrone as Jack talked directly to us, took us into his confidence, let us in to his life –exposed himself and his feelings towards Howard and his group, Judy his wife and his encounters with other women. Beth Marshall as Judy never moved from behind the desk – trapped by her feelings for her father, occasionally glancing at but physically separated from Jack. John Langford as Howard really only appeared in the first half and had little to say but was a very physical barrier between Judy and Jack.
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: Martin Low is credited with being Composer/Sound Engineering. I am assuming all the music was composed for the piece but difficult to know. The score was virtually continuous throughout the piece, which gave it a very filmic quality. The music was not intrusive but definitely a fourth character, perhaps reminding us that we were in the presence of the middle or ruling class (for the moment). The music was recorded and was an integral part to the production rather than an 'add on'.
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: This doesn't really apply in that movement or choreography was not a distinct element of the production and is probably covered under my comments in 1.4 above.
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: Designed by Alicia Hendrick. A backdrop of translucent screens that slid open to allow access and to look at the (real) rain. Part of the screen carried words (from one of Howard's poems), charred as if the remnants of papers burnt (by Howard or the rebels?). Two chic black and glass desks – one for Jack the other for Judy and Howard. Hung above each desk was a TV/video monitor into which was fed the images of the characters as they were filmed live from the back of the auditorium. Often in close-up, head only creating greater intensity/examination of the characters. At times this was slightly distracting.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

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: Well lit. Good use of small lights on desks highlighting individual characters' faces. Music score – level was unobtrusive but very obviously present. Good rain effect both as a soundtrack and as a physical effect – so that was why a hose was running out of the dressing room! I've commented on the TV screens above. Sitting in the back row it was easy to glance up at them but I suspect the front row must have had to look up at a greater angle.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
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: This was a well acted, well presented, challenging piece of theatre. The programme acknowledged it was 'complex, challenging and difficult to pull off' - so it is a credit to the company that they succeeded and did pull it off. Probably not everybody's cup of tea but interesting to see this company in this location trying something different.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

1.11 Was the performance appropriate for the audience?

What's appropriate for a Mull Theatre audience? The theatre would appear to have a very loyal and solid, local (Mull) audience base plus the visitor audience many of whom, I suspect, will be visiting the theatre out of curiosity and for who the choice of play may or may not be relevant but governed by when they are on the island.

1.12 Estimated size of audience and reaction to the production.

The theatre seats 43 and on this occasion was less than half full although it had been during the rest of the week. There were obviously a few overseas visitors in, some of the loyal regulars and two or three connected with the company.

The production was well received although a little unsure as to whether they could laugh at the humour in the piece.

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 piece was produced for the venue and the intimate nature of the space suited it perfectly.

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

- range, quantity and clarity.

Programmes available, production photos and reviews on display, photos from past productions – there is not a lot of space for displays!

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.

In such a small community (Dervaig) there were posters, 'A' frame boards etc outside every shop, pub, post office etc.

The website is easy to access, informative and up to date.

2.4 Accessibility of the venue

- ease of payment - fine
- location – well, 5 hours travel and two ferries mean it is not the easiest to get to! The location of the theatre within Dervaig is in the grounds of a hotel up an unlit track complete with cattle grid.
- external signposting – signposted 10 miles south where there is a road junction and clearly signposted off the road and on approaches.

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- internal directional signing – all roads lead to the auditorium!
- access and provision for disabled people – not good
- timing of event - 8.30 pm (but still some latecomers – which delays the start - and no-shows)

2.5 Customer service

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

All very friendly. The lady who ran my B&B was on FOH duty that night (as a Volunteer?) – this included box office, catering (tea/coffee/soft drinks – money in an honesty tray) hoovering etc.

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.

No SAC logo on website
SAC logo on posters, programmes etc

Name: Nick Fearne
Date: 25th August 2003

Advisor **Scottish Arts Council Officer**
(Please tick above as appropriate)