



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: Mull Theatre/Ardross Hall

Title of Event: Katie Morag

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: 5th October 2005

Overall Rating: Good

Excellent idea to create this piece on Katie Morag with strong choices made in casting and the personnel selected to fit all the roles. This is also an excellent choice for the touring locations Mull Theatre commits to creating work for and where they consistently tour. Good timing on creating this childrens' show when Katie Morag seems to have been put into the spotlight – a film/tv show to be created and the Times did a full page spread on Mairi Hedderwick and Katie Morag. Extensive tour undertaken and appears to have been well received: when I tried to attend in Cairndow Village Hall it was sold out prior to the show and so I couldn't get in. Artistically the show would have been stronger if it hadn't been pushed so far into panto style but the bairns were engrossed. For me Katie Morag should also address the adult audience and weave magic which draws the adult back to the time when they read Katie Morag as a child and for that we need the clarity and emotional honesty of the original Katie Morag stories. I certainly hope Mull Theatre will create more Katie Morag shows.

Name: Alexandria Patience

Date: 10th October 2005

Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

Please tick the relevant title

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

1.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
1.1	Vision and imagination	Excellent	Fantastic idea to create this show and specifically for Mull Theatre with a solid history and ongoing mandate to tour in the Highlands & Islands/ Argyll & Bute. Absolutely a wonderful idea to take this long time loved character to places where she seems very much at home. Seems the kind of show which could become a series with other stories from Katie Morag brought to life in this way. Mull Theatre could create a connection to this character which is very saleable yet creatively interesting.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Good	This was good and the story was clear. The bairns could follow the story easily but I do have a sense that perhaps all was just a little too simplistic and moved towards pantomime and so lost a little of the inherent charm of the Katie Morag stories.

2. Strengths and Weaknesses

2.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
2.1	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions	Good	Good to see the script was written by someone based in the North and someone who works with young people. It did seem to me that the script was a little long but the bairns didn't get too fidgety and seemed to stay engrossed so I'll be guided by them. Katie Morag had very little dark shading to her character – in the books she can be a bit grumpy at times. Character changes happened very quickly.
2.2	Direction	Competent	I felt that the show was taken too far down the road of panto and wasn't allowed to charm us as a straight piece of children's theatre. Although I have mentioned the aspect of too little shading in Katie Morag's character within the evaluation section for the script, I feel the director could have brought more shading into her and into the other characters.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	Excellent	Very good performers who were dynamic, energetic and focussed. Both of the Grannies were great – in fact it would have been good to have more of their presence throughout the show. Katie Morag was just a wee bit too bouncy so although the actress played her very solidly she could have held back on forcing the 'child' a little. Talented group of actors with lots of skills well in command of the material and how to play it.

2.4	Use of Music ¹	Competent	I was disappointed in the use of music within the play. The songs seemed overly simplistic so weren't interesting enough either musically or lyrically. The use of what appeared to be pre-recorded backing music wasn't successful in my mind and the performers were much more charismatic when singing unaccompanied.
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	Good	Performers were strong and the choreographed and movements elements worked very well.
2.6	Design ² – including set, costume and lighting design	Good	Initial image on coming into the non-traditional theatre space was of this commanding ferry. Very good beginning with a strong visual impact. Quite exciting. The changing sets worked very well with the majority of the set change movements being incorporated into the action. There was only one weakness - the audience could see the haunted house set prior to the scene when the set was turned and placed at the back of the playing area. Unfortunate it had to be revealed before the scene happened.
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	Good technically.
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Excellent	Very attentive and engaged audience with group of the bairns at the front of the audience area on mats. They were held by the show with only a few wee souls who needed to be recovered by parents to keep them quiet. Audience was approx 60. Very appreciative

3. Management of Event

Please evaluate the way the event was presented/organised by the organisation and the venue, with reference to the checklist below, including additional comments/observations.

3.	Criteria	Comments
3.1	Suitability of the venue for the event	Great rural hall venue – good design and good acoustics for a multi-purpose sports/community space
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue ³	Good. Good programme available with pictures to colour in on it, and the Katie Morag posters were on sale

¹ 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 parts, and what effect this has on the quality of the production.

² Take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue and, where appropriate, the touring schedule

³ These include programmes, displays etc., including the range, quality and clarity.

3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity ⁴	Very good publicity coverage with posters and flyers in many cities and venues. Katie Morag and Mairi Hedderwick TV auditions stir and the fairly lengthy article in the Oct 2 2005 Sunday Times ECOSSE section.
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	Rural Hall style – call up leave a message they phone back if there's a problem – there was no problem. Pay at the door – but in the way of rural halls there are also no tickets.
3.5	External signage and signposting	Finding the Hall was relatively easy and the place is small enough that from down the road the hired touring van reassures which building is the venue
3.6	Internal directional signage	A small rural Hall which is a recent build so is very well kitted out. Easy and comfortable venue from the audience perspective.
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	Good access
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	I was surprised the show lasted as long as it did but the audience were generally very attentive with most of the bairns very well behaved. The 6.30 pm start was a good idea for this particular show, although there were a number of latecomers probably due to parents working and being unused to such an early start time for rural show.
3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	Very comfortable and easy.
3.10	Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding ⁵	Good acknowledgement of SAC in print but on the web the SAC logo is teeny on the home page although there is a Mull Theatre area where Funding sources are listed and the SAC logo gives a credit there.

⁴ Publicity/pre-publicity (leaflets, posters, etc), including the range, content, and when and where available. Be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event. Also view and comment on the company's website where one is advertised, commenting on the ease of use, and quality of content and presentation, and currency of information

⁵ 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.