

**THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL**  
**SPECIALIST ADVISER ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA**

**Organisation/Venue:** Scottish Youth Theatre

**Title of Event:** "Haroun and the Sea of Stories" by Salman Rushdie  
(an adaptation)

**Type of Event:** Performance

**Date of Visit:** 5<sup>th</sup> 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	<b>X</b>	
Good		
Excellent		

The themes and ideas behind the show were interesting and uplifting to a certain extent although they did not push any real kind of moral, ideological or social boundaries. This may be more acceptable given the young age of the intended audience but it felt like a good opportunity put to waste. This is a difficult production to rate in terms of vision as it did what the script asked of it, but no more. I would expect an organisation which is self-proclaimed to be “for and by young people” to be much more groundbreaking.

**1.2 Clarity of Communication.**

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

Given the complex nature of the narrative (which must be especially relevant given that it is a children’s story), I, as someone used to decoding theatre events, found it very difficult to follow what was going on. The vast array of characters combined with a large number of fictional foreign place names and terms made picking out the story a difficult task and although this could have been made easy through the staging of the piece – by greatly differentiating costumes or such like – such opportunities were largely missed.

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	<b>X</b>	
Good		
Excellent		

Again, the issue of clarity of ideas in this adaptation of Rushie's story let down what was otherwise a pleasant and at times humorous script. The opportunity for a large cast of characters was well exploited and at no times did the writing feel like it was beyond the grasp of the performers – if anything, it could have challenge them to a greater extent than it did. Overall, the script felt tight, which was perhaps why the production lacked space to enlighten the audience.

**1.4 Direction**

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

The direction of the piece felt comfortable, if a little undemanding. A major feature which came across from an early stage was the similarity of the performances given by many of the actors. 'Stars' did exist, but it felt like such performers excelled in spite of the direction given. Once again, this uniformity of performance made it difficult to determine who characters were which impacted on the audiences understanding of what was going on.

**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:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	<b>X</b>	
Excellent		

Taking in to consideration the training nature of the SYT, I felt the standard of performance was very high. Having seen this show on opening night, the usual signs of nerves or hitches were not present and it was easy to see a number of the actors going on to become accomplished professionals. Of noticeable quality was the performance given by Kyle McPhail – an actor who you simply did not want to leave the stage.

**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:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	<b>X</b>	

All music used within the production was composed exclusively for SYT by one of it's former participants. It was handled very well, both in the form of the songs sung by the entire cast and in the use of underscoring scenes. The first of these gave a great sense of cohesion among the performers, especially after the starting number. The use of underscoring greatly assisted in setting the mood of the piece and was never intrusive to the performers.

**1.7 Use of Movement or Choreography**

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

The use of the stage and blocking of this production felt comfortable and confident without being forced. Given the large cast involved, it must have been a difficult task to move everyone in such a small space. The dancing was also effective and well executed though perhaps a little unadventurous. With the high standard of acting demonstrated, it would have been easy to see the performers aiming higher in terms of physicality.

**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:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	<b>X</b>	
Excellent		

The use of the Citizens small studio theatre was well handled in this production. The entire room was painted in a green, 'fairytale land' colour which, along with the hanging 'leaves' and greenery, gave the show atmosphere from the off. The lighting worked but felt like it was not exploited as it could have been, with a prevailing tackiness. The costumes were bright and colourful and worked for this type of show – although perhaps a little simple - and the use of body paint was effective.

**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:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent	<b>X</b>	
Good		
Excellent		

The show was well executed on the night of attendance which must be congratulated given that it was the first night. As previously stated, a general feeling of under-ambition prevailed with no use of notable technical feats, which could have lifted the show. The competence of the actors was such that I felt they handled whatever was asked of them technically in a 'professional' manner.

**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:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	<b>X</b>	
Excellent		

No stated aims were immediately attainable from the event's material. However, given the SYT's overall raison d'être to provide opportunities for young people in Scotland to develop their talents and show what the future of Scottish theatre could look like, I feel the production certainly achieved this – it was just a shame to see the direction behind such performances letting them down somewhat.

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

Overall yes, as it reached out to a younger audience in terms of its presentation. However, as previously stated, the complex nature of the story meant that even I, as an adult, had great difficulty following what was going on.

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

The circle studio was well filled though not full, with an estimated 80 people in attendance on this opening night. Audience reaction to the young people's high-calibre performances was deservedly congratulatory, although with a suspected large number of family and friends in attendance, this is to be expected.

## **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 intimacy offered by the small space worked well for this production and seemed to assist the performers in doing their task.

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

- range, quantity and clarity.

The programme served its purpose although it could have said more about the process used to get the production ready for performance. It also used a font which was appropriately decorative for the production but made reading a little difficult, despite my good vision. Boards in the foyer gave further information about the SYT and their summer programme, as well as previous productions, but these were difficult to access during the busy interval.

### **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.

Pre-publicity for this event was not readily available except via the Citizens Theatre web site which briefly gave details. The company's web site was only made known to me by the programme given to me on the night and its mention of the production was also brief. As yet, I have not seen any posters for the show nor have I been aware of any media coverage, other than that for the SYT Summer Programme, of which this show was a part.

### **2.4 Accessibility of the venue**

- ease of payment

Paid for by cash – very straightforward. Previous visits to the Citizen using Switch payments were equally straightforward.

- location

Good – on-site car park with nearby bus-stop and underground station.

- external signposting

Excellent – permanent, established Citz signs were used.

- internal directional signing

OK – previous knowledge of theatre made it difficult to assess this.

- access and provision for disabled people

Very good – independent access provided to all public areas of the theatre although a single wheelchair position in the theatre space used limits this somewhat.

- timing of event

Fine – start time was a little late and the show felt a little long, but not overly so.

## 2.5 Customer service

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

Very good – all staff are extremely helpful and friendly,

## 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.

All available material acknowledged SAC funding and bore the logo as did the SYT web site at <http://www.scottishyouththeatre.org/>.

Scottish Arts Council Evaluation Form

**Name:** Robert Softley

**Date:** 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2003

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