

**THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL
ASSESSMENT REPORT**

Organisation/Venue: Theatre Babel at Perth Theatre

Title of Event: Uncle Vanya

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: 25 April 2002

1. Artistic Assessment

1.1 Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event - its Vision and Imagination; Ability to Communicate and Quality of Production.

An engaging production of Chekov's Uncle Vanya in a new translation by Tom Leonard. Quality performances, well directed and with appropriate design.

1.2 You are also asked to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the event with specific reference to the following:

- **Script (particularly in relation to new work, or second productions)**

Leonard's script was clear and used Scottish idioms where appropriate, without using broad Scots. The effect was of a conversational language that suited the play. Roubles were translated into pounds and various other idiomatic expressions into a contemporary Scottish equivalent.

- **Direction**

Direction was assured and avoided any directorial tricks. I thought that the character of Astrov was presented as being rather too attractive. His physical good looks did not betray the fact that he was, or was in danger of, going to seed. There was little sign of his over-fondness for vodka in his appearance. The use of off-stage sound-effects was restrained and effective.

- **Standard of performers**

Performances were strong with particularly good results from John Kazek as Astrov and Isabella Joss as Sonya –despite the latter’s slightly hesitant start. Clare Onyemere as Helena certainly had the looks to carry the part, but I thought her manner just a shade too suburban to inspire Vanya’s and Astrov’s longing. I liked Brian Pettifer’s knowing performance as Vanya, but found his sawing arm-gestures in his passion slightly over-done.

Peter De Souza was irritating as the Professor, which suited the part, but I would have hoped for some redeeming attractiveness that might have given a clue to how he managed to attain the position of professional and personal power that he commanded. The portrayal of him as an unmitigated nag and manipulator felt that there was a dimension to this character left out.

- **Design**

The design reflected the modernising of the script. Costumes were semi-contemporary and a china tea-pot replaced the samovar. The upstage curtains worked well to create a credible space and were used to reveal various comings and goings. At times there was a slight sense of the actors being over-directed in that their positioning for their significant speeches was rather obvious, and telegraphed in advance of the speech. The portrayal of Astrov’s and Helena’s mutual sexual attraction was just a little too explicit. Their respective leering lacked subtlety and would have benefited from a lighter touch.

- **Technical Standards**

The production was technically well presented.

- **Appropriateness of production for the audience**

An important component in the programme for a regional theatre of this nature-good for the audience to see classic European drama done in a contemporary Scots idiom

- **Approximate size of audience and reaction**

The audience (around one-third full, perhaps) was deeply attentive and clearly found this a rewarding experience. They were literally hanging on every

word. There was a mixed age range, with a younger profile than normal at Perth.

- **Overall Production**

Overall, a thoughtful and fresh Chekov, that found the humour and also portrayed the deep pathos of the play.

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.

2.2 Suitability of the venue for the event:

Excellent

2.3 Information/Interpretative material provided at the venue (eg programmes, displays) - range, quantity and clarity

Stylish print, with informative programme content.

2.4 Publicity/Pre-Publicity for the event (leaflets/posters, etc) - range, content and when and where available

2.5 Accessibility of the venue:

- **ease of payment** Good
- **location** Good
- **direction** Good
- **access for disabled people** Good
- **timing of event** Good

2.6 Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (eg box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)

Service from Perth Theatre staff was excellent – attentive and friendly.

3. Background to your visit

3.1 Have you seen the work of this artist/company before? YES

3.2 Is this your first visit to this venue? NO