



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

**Organisation/Venue:** Theatre Babel at Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh

**Title of Event:** Hedda Gabler

**Type of Event:** Performance

**Date of Visit:** Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2005

**Overall Rating** (Please rate the production overall, taking into account your ratings for each section. Please state the key reasons for your overall ratings – i.e. the particular strengths and weaknesses.)

Good. After a strong in-house season at the Lyceum it was disappointing that this first visiting production was weaker than one would expect, given Theatre Babel's previous productions. There was something of the small-scale about the production, which sat rather uncomfortably on the Lyceum's stage. The intriguing minimalist set raised expectations in the audience that this would be an adventurous production, but sadly it turned out to be rather pedestrian and unsatisfactory. However, there were some moments of brilliance, and some excellent performances, so the "good" rating is appropriate.

**Name:** Alison Coates

**Date:** 24/05/2005

**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

Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event, taking account of the following:

| 1.  | Criteria                 | Rating | Comment and key reasons for rating   |
|-----|--------------------------|--------|--|
| 1.1 | Vision and imagination   | Good   | Hedda Gabler is a natural follow-on to Babel's production of Doll's House, and regular audiences had the opportunity to contrast the lives of literature's two most challenging female roles. The freedom from the usual claustrophobic set was liberating for the audience, but it was disappointing that the production itself failed to rise to the challenge the company set itself. |
| 1.2 | Clarity of Communication | Good   | The pace of the production was fast but clear – perhaps too fast at times to allow the audience to identify with the horrors of the life that society had imposed on Hedda. There was an economy of detail which at times verged on the lazy, but overall Ibsen's darkest play was made accessible and understandable for 21 <sup>st</sup> century audiences.                            |

## 2. Strengths and Weaknesses

Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the event with reference to the following:

| 2.  | Criteria   | Rating | Comment and key reasons for rating   |
|-----|--|--------|--|
| 2.1 | Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions                            | Ex     | I don't know the play well enough to comment on whether there was some abridging of the text, but if there was it was undetectable.  |
| 2.2 | Direction  | Good   | Graham McLaren attempted a production that broke free of the suffocating, claustrophobic tension that director's usually produce for this play. The wide uncluttered stage beautifully conveys Hedda's loneliness and isolation from society. The central role of Hedda was however, deeply unsympathetic and unlikeable, giving the audience no reason to empathise with her plight.          |
| 2.3 | Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments | Ex     | There were some excellent performances, mainly from Ian Grieve (Tesman), John Kazek (Luvborg), Sarah Chalcraft (Thea), and Eileen McCallum (Aunt Julia). The talented Lorna McDevitt as Hedda was unusually disappointing, giving a restrained and self-absorbed performance. There was a curious lack of cohesion in the cast which disengaged the audience and resulted in restless moments. |

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|-----|--|------|--|
| 2.4 | Use of Music <sup>1</sup>  | Good | The production began very effectively with the haunting Bach cello concerto played on a scratchy gramophone with Hedda standing alone on the stage.  |
| 2.5 | Use of Movement/<br>Choreography   |      | N/a  |
| 2.6 | Design <sup>2</sup> – including set, costume and lighting design                                       | Good | The set design was minimalist and over symbolic, with autumn leaves scattered across the stage, which only emphasised the impression of a small scale production on a mid-scale stage. The few pieces of furniture were over-used, which resulted in some clustered scenes that were irritating from parts of the auditorium (certainly from where I was sitting SR stalls). The use of candles to burn the manuscript was wonderfully chilling! Costumes were excellent, as was the lighting design by Kai Fischer. |
| 2.7 | Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view       | Good | Very professionally presented  |
| 2.8 | Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction |      | The audience was varied in age and the response was warm but muted. The reaction at the interval reflected my own feeling – it was a welcome chance to see Hedda Gabler, but not a production that would be remembered for long. The house looked almost full, and the applause was generous to the cast for their excellent performance.  |

### 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 |
|----|----------|----------|
|----|----------|----------|

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

|      |  |  |
|------|--|--|
| 3.1  | Suitability of the venue for the event   | Theatre Babel is between scales, and I do not think that this production was large enough for the Lyceum. It did attract a large audience on the Saturday evening, which was gratifying for the company and the theatre.                                     |
| 3.2  | Information/ interpretive material at venue <sup>3</sup>   | The posters were striking and the front of house displays interesting. The programme was poor – badly conceived and almost impossible to read in the auditorium light. At £1.50 it was also over-priced.   |
| 3.3  | Publicity/ pre-publicity <sup>4</sup>  | The tour has been widely publicised with plenty of editorial.  |
| 3.4  | Ease of booking and payment  | The Lyceum box office always seems to be understaffed – both for telephone pre-booking (3 attempts including one phone-back from the box office), and picking up at the door (slow).   |
| 3.5  | External signage and signposting   | Excellent  |
| 3.6  | Internal directional signage   | Excellent  |
| 3.7  | Access and provision for disabled people   | Excellent  |
| 3.8  | Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience? | 7.45 p.m. for 2 hours. Started promptly.   |
| 3.9  | Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)                   | Bar staff and ushers very friendly. However usher ran out of programmes and directed patrons to find another programme seller rather than taking an active role in replenishing his stock. 3 of my neighbours decided not to bother – loss of revenue £4.50! |
| 3.10 | Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding <sup>5</sup>  | Acknowledged on poster and programmes.   |

<sup>3</sup> These include programmes, displays etc., including the range, quality and clarity.

<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup> 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.