



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: THEATRE BABEL @ PERTH THEATRE

Title of Event: HEDDA GABLER

Type of Event: Public Performance

Date of Visit: SATURDAY 23/04/05

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- This production of Henrik Ibsen's famous tragedy is just the sort of play this ambitious and enterprising company should be tackling. There were many good things about this interpretation, notably the pace and economy of the staging and the excellent acting. However, there were flaws in text and characterisation that prevented this version really evoking the responses that this difficult play is capable of. It was a disappointment that this performance did not achieve the same level of sophistication and individuality that this company's previous work has demonstrated.

Name: JON POPE

Date: 27/04/05

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	EXCELLENT	I'm not sure when a Scottish company last staged HEDDA GABLER. So it is to Theatre Babel's great credit that they are touring this important and relevant text.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	GOOD	The production was very well presented. The lighting, voice projection and sound were of a high order.

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	COMPETENT	This was one of the areas where the production was at its' weakest, for me. After some searching in the programme it is clear that Babel had updated an early translation by Archer and Gosse. I had difficulty in reconciling; an opening passage in Scots, widespread use of Standard English terms and references to "fjords". I was surprised that the script was not more coherent or specific in its setting.
2.2	Direction	COMPETENT	This was a well paced, economically staged production by Graham Maclaren. But there were decisions regarding characterisation that let it down. The protagonist must evoke fear AND pity. She was so unsympathetically depicted that it diminished the character of Tesman. The issues regarding her advancing pregnancy were not given enough detail and contributed to the unsatisfactory reaction to the catastrophe.

2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	EXCELLENT	The acting was confident and well observed. Simon Roberts, Ian Grieve, Eileen McCallum and John Kazek gave powerful readings of their characters. Lorna McDevitt, tackling one of the great problematic female roles, needed to be encouraged to encompass a wider range of emotions to allow us to understand how her character is driven to cruelty and destruction.
2.4	Use of Music ¹	GOOD	The use of recorded music was effective. It was unaccompanied cello. However, I could have done without the preshow music that created a mood that seemed to overshadow following two scenes.
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	GOOD	The action on stage was well handled.
2.6	Design ² – including set, costume and lighting design	GOOD	The period design by Graham Maclaren was mercifully free of clutter and obstructive scenery. The costumes were excellent but there was an inconsistency about the use of outside clothing. The use of a slow moving rear backdrop was overly portentous. The lighting, by Kai Fisher, made excellent use of chiaroscuro.
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	EXCELLENT	The show was presented to a highly professional technical standard.
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	GOOD	The predominately older audience (and what's wrong with that!) very much enjoyed themselves. There were two curtain calls at the end. The stalls seemed well filled whilst the circle, where I was seated, was about a quarter full.

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. 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	Entirely suitable. The proscenium of the theatre made this an ideal context in which to see this great "naturalistic" play.
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue ³	There was a good programme for £1.50.
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity ⁴	I was able to choose my performance very easily from the info on the Horsecross website. Rather than printed media I use the internet more and more for this sort of information.
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	VERY GOOD. Booked and paid on the first call and tickets were waiting at the box office.
3.5	External signage and signposting	Easy to find and there is excellent access to a carpark 5 mins from the theatre.
3.6	Internal directional signage	GOOD.
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	There are moving ramps to take disabled audience members up the steps into the foyer but they seem overtly cumbersome and might be off-putting.
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	GOOD – the show started at 2.30pm and finished by 4.30 – which was fine.
3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	GOOD – very nice and friendly without overwhelming you -

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

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

3.10	Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding ⁵	The SAC logo is prominent on the THEATRE BABEL and HORSECROSS websites and on all printed material I saw.
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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.