



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: Theatre Babel / Tron Theatre

Title of Event: “Macbeth”

Type of Event: Performance, Touring

Date of Visit: 31/08/05

Overall Rating : EXCELLENT.

This was a well thought through, professional and tight / economic production of Macbeth from a company at ease with the material. For anyone coming to Macbeth for the first time it would prove to be a ground breaking experience – For those who know and love the play well, this production upheld the historic significance of Shakespeare’s work while making it accessible to a modern pallet. Well-done Theatre Babel!

Name: Steve Slater

Date: 05/09/05

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	Good	The Company played a straight hand with this production of Macbeth, going full on with atmosphere and brooding medieval menace. On the dark shrouded stage much of the plays sweeping scale was left to the audience to build in their own imagination – as it should be.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Excellent	Babel have always made communicating the story behind the lines one of their defining priorities. And here lies one of the companies real strengths. This was a lean adaptation of the play – straight forward - with minimum fuss regarding both the spoken and visual language of the piece

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	Excellent	What can I say – It's Shakespeare, and Macbeth! So many of the plays lines are re-used these days that it is always a pleasure to here them in their original context. Babel handled the text well, and are very comfortable with the Bard's words.
2.2	Direction	Excellent	Again, as mentioned above – this was a tight production from a company who know their strengths. I was hoping for something a little more radical in the plays interpretation – possible in it's setting or design – but overall the direction hit all the right buttons and zipped along at a very pleasing clip!
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	Good	This is a company that is very at home with this type of work – and it shows. I was particularly taken with Pauline Knowles rendition of Lady Macbeth, also, the supporting performances by Ian Grieve as MacDuff and Greg Powrie as Banquo stood out. Lewis Howden as Macbeth was (for me) a little soft around the edges, but with a few more performances under his belt in this role he should adequately fill the central role without a problem.
2.4	Use of Music ¹	Good	The recorded music was very filmic with a nice pre opening score to build up the atmosphere prior to the start of the play being a particularly nice touch. The music also added to the dark atmosphere of the play in general.

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.

2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	Good	The use of choreography was most evident in the fight scenes, and were I felt very well done. There is always a tendency to feel that there is a constraint on the actors due to lack of space (most theatre stages seem to shrink as soon as the action becomes more expansive!) However the actors managed to convey a good sense of “action” during the play.
2.6	Design ² – including set, costume and lighting design	Excellent	The design of the play was very distinctive – the men looking not unlike middle aged bikers on a stopover at the seaside – all black leather and beard! This worked well with the striking set design of swords hanging from the rig – a nice take on the sword of Damocles hanging over the characters. The darkness hid any shortcomings in set design, and in-fact became a very strong element in the entire production.
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	I felt that the production ran very smoothly from a technical point of view – with no obvious problems to mar the play.
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Excellent	This was the first night of Babel’s Tour, and the Tron Theatre was sold out. For me, this proves that Babel are now considered a leading Scottish Theatre company and also that there is still a huge audience for Shakespeare’s works when combined with a good company and a good adaptation.

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	While I sometimes find the auditorium at the Tron Theatre not best suited to some forms of live performance (dance is an example) I have to say that this production of Macbeth really worked well and was for me a memorable experience of the venue complementing the production.
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue ³	Babel / Tron sold the show well. There was good coverage in the venue and an excellent programme giving good background information on the play, the company and the other influences on this adaptation of Macbeth.
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity ⁴	Again, I saw many posters for the show in the weeks prior to the show, with leaflets also being in abundance at venues I frequented. The design gave a very good impression of the style and atmosphere of the show itself.

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.

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

3.4	Ease of booking and payment	I paid by phone and had no problems booking my ticket, which was then posted out to me. The operator / Box Office person was very helpful.
3.5	External signage and signposting	As mentioned above Babel's publicity seemed to be everywhere and The Tron's Logo was never far away. The external signage at the Tron could be better, but understand some of the difficulties for the venue in that area!
3.6	Internal directional signage	Signage in the theatre is good, with directions for the first time visitor being quite straightforward. Good, (if a little loud) announcements made it clear that the show was about to start.
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	Good access through-out the venue for disabled people with space at the front of the auditorium for wheelchairs.
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Time (8.00pm) is a standard start time for most theatres, giving the audience time to get home and out again comfortably. The shows length being comparable to most films these days the audience was under no pressure to leave to get the last bus.
3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	Tron staff seemed very polite and helpful both at the bar and in the auditorium. I encountered no problems during my visit.
3.10	Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding ⁵	Scottish Arts Council funding was acknowledged on both the publicity (posters and flyers) and also in the companies well put together programme. The Tron also displayed its SAC logo on the back of their brochure.

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.