



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – MUSIC

Organisation/Venue: Theatre Cryptic

Title of Event: Books of Silence

Type of Event: Performance – music, theatre and visual art

Date of Visit: Friday 19th November 2004

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. NB: for multiple performances or festivals, or if you prefer please feel free to use headings for a more extensive commentary. Please note the artistic assessment according to the rating detailed below)

Score: definitely more than 4 (better than good) and almost 5 (excellent in many respects).

Artistically strong: a genuine collaboration between artists (and institutions); an authentic blend of music, theatre and visual art, whereby the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. Some reservations about the originality of the score and the lack of sustained dramatic interest in the piece as a whole; no reservations about the quality of performance and presentation.

Name: **Ian Ritchie**

Date: 24/11/04

Advisor

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:

1-Very Poor – standard falls well below what is acceptable.

2-Poor – not attaining acceptable standards of conception or presentation.

3-Competent – routine rather than especially interesting.

4-Good – well conceived and executed

5-Excellent – conceived and executed to a high standard.

1. Artistic Assessment

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

Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
Quality of production – was the event successful overall in relation to any stated aims (e.g. in the programme or other printed material)	5	The director's aim (and therefore that of the producing company, Theatre Cryptic) of combining classical and contemporary material into a sensual, "multi-media work" was successfully accomplished. Interestingly, the composer thought he was writing an "opera" and the conductor was seeking "relationships between choir and stage". In this collaboration, I suspect that all parties got what they wanted out of it – although I'd be reluctant to give the piece an operatic label. The production values were high.
Vision and imagination	4/5	There were different visions and imaginations at work: Music – The score sounded like Arnold Schoenberg (especially reminiscent of <i>Jacobsleiter</i>) blended with John Tavener; the electro-acoustic material balanced well with the live; overall it felt too long and unvaried, given the material – score: 4 Visual art – Beautifully executed images; the projection of text was really helpful and provided an artistically integrated new form of "surtitles", a bold and creative model which opera companies should heed – score: 5 Overall conception – strong theatre, if short on drama (and one might expect in such an abstract and inwardly exploratory work) – score: 5
Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments	5	The Latvian Radio Choir members (reduced from 8 to 7 without obvious handicap) were fine and in some cases really excellent, combining choral blend with solo qualities and stagecraft (limited in scope because the piece was somewhat static); one of the sopranos was especially outstanding – vocally and theatrically. The band, assembled in the name of Paragon, was excellent. Good conducting.
Quality of Presentation – was the professionally presented from a technical point of view	5	The sound and visual projections worked well – really professional. The amplification was generally effective but there was some ambivalence as to its real value or necessity in relation to the singers: no extended vocal or microphone techniques were involved, so I presume that the amplification was for balancing sound within the specific space. Generally, this was successful.
Audience – assess the appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	4	This was an enquiring, "contemporary arts" kind of audience which, without wishing to offer a stereotype, one associates with Tramway at its best. The piece found its audience, but not in huge numbers (maybe under 200). The response was positive on the whole, blended with a few adverse comments from some who wanted more dramatic action and musical progression. So it aroused reaction rather than indifference, which means it succeeded in engaging the audience.

<p>Educational Value – comment where appropriate</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>I might have written NA and moved on to section 2. However, while there was no apparent formal educational agenda attached to this production, it offers to performing arts companies and practitioners – potentially rather than actually, because many were absent – a model of working which could and should shake them out of creative stagnancy, artistic stasis and presentational boredom. Cathie Boyd’s NESTA Fellowship allows her to explore new approaches to collaboration, artistic development and presentation; offering wider benefit by “educating” the Scottish performing arts institutions to approach work with the flexibility of the Latvian Radio Choir (or our own Paragon Ensemble, for that matter) could be a Theatre Cryptic mission, but is not something that either a small organisation or one or two individuals should be expected to accomplish single-handed and altruistically!</p>
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2. 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.

Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
Suitability of the venue for the event	5	The Tramway is a good venue for new work, especially when it involves multi-media. The ambience and atmosphere – the culture of the place – lend themselves to this.
Information/ interpretive material at venue ¹	4	Programmes and brochures were well-displayed and readily available.
Publicity/ pre-publicity ²	4	This is a challenge in Glasgow because there is so much going on and lots of competition. The design of the printed material was strong and attractive; e-mail distribution reached interested parties – not me and I presume not others as well, so there is scope for widening the net – and I saw a print-off which was well-designed and attractive.
Ease of booking and payment	4	The box office was fine, based on my experience on arrival before the show.
Location of venue	3	It cannot be helped that one of the country’s most interesting performing arts buildings is not particularly easy to get to.
External signage and signposting	4	Road-signs would help in the approach to Tramway. On the building itself, the signage is clear and helpful.
Internal directional signage	4	Okay but not brilliant. The route to the upstairs of the main venue was not as clearly marked as it could have been.

¹ These include programmes, displays etc., including the range, quality and clarity.

² 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

Access and provision for disabled people	5	Flat access from the street and within the building; lift to upper floor.
Timing of the event	5	8pm is a good time to start a show of this duration (90 minutes without a break) in this part of town.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	4	All quite good: people to ask and people to serve.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding ³	5	All the printed material acknowledged SAC support – and that of others too. Logo management was clearly a significant task – the number and range of credited supporters is also worthy of praise.

³ 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.