

THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL

Assessment Report

Organisation/venue: Theatre Workshop
Title of event: Gillean Cullaig/Hogmanay Boys
Type of event: Performance
Date of visit: 13 December 2002

1. Artistic assessment

Please evaluate the **artistic quality** of the event - its vision and imagination; ability to communicate; and quality of production

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)

As in past years, Theatre Workshop has skilfully used a specific cultural theme as a vehicle for its Christmas production. This version draws on the Gaelic/Catholic culture of South Uist. The title refers to the local tradition of Hogmanay guising. This was an imaginative approach to the challenge of an original Christmas entertainment.

The script, by Robert Rae (who also directed) told the story of a wedding-match linked to a conflict associated with the expression of folk-culture versus a class-based repression. A traditional folk-tale was inserted, which did slow the narrative down too much. I thought that the scene setting (to do with the estate manager's planned proposal of marriage) took too long and would have benefited from the audience being shown the protagonists rather than only hearing about them. Even in 1940 I doubt that a young woman would be influenced in her choice of husband by her parents to the extent suggested, and this did to some extent undermine the credibility of the plot. The rehabilitation of the estate manager as a suitable husband for the eldest daughter also sat a little uncomfortably.

I thought the use of Gaelic alongside English was well handled, it seemed natural in the context of the play. Overall the script was a little wordy and tended to be diverted by elements that did not move the narrative forward.

Direction

There was a good use of the space – especially the vignettes in the gallery. Effie's accident was effectively staged. The use of music was a key element in the production and made a very positive contribution to its success.

The script incorporated a scene where the estate manager's vanity led him to be set-up for ridicule – very much in the manner of Twelfth Night's Malvolio. However this was not carried through with conviction and failed to deliver on its comic potential. In general the comedy worked less well than one would have

hoped. There was some limited audience participation which, again, was a little half-hearted in the execution.

Standard of Performers

These were of an acceptable standard as far as the acting was concerned with some performances standing out for their solidity and strength. The musical performances were of a high standard and held the show together. Clearly a decision had been made not to attempt Hebridean accents for all characters for whom it would have been appropriate. The character from London, however, did use a London accent. I am not sure that this was a major issue, but I wondered why there was this inconsistency.

The part played by Hannah Logan was very slight and one felt it was written just to make up the numbers, and the performer was left with very little to do.

Design

The design worked well, with an authentically dressed set. Costumes were likewise good and the Hogmanay costumes *looked* appropriate (though I would not know).

Technical Standards

In general the production was well presented, though I thought some of the actors (especially down-stage right) were underlit in the penultimate scene.

Overall Production

Overall a good-hearted production. A slightly rambling script was enlivened by excellent music. The performances were interesting, but prone to hesitancy at times. The apparent intention of recording and celebrating the diversity of Scottish culture was admirable, and I think this was largely achieved.

Appropriateness of production for the audience

Good

Approximate size of audience and reaction to the programme of work

Disappointingly, there was a small house, probably less than half full. The majority were adults, with some younger children. The audience were attentive but not particularly responsive. The piece played for 1 1/2 hours, without an interval.

2. Management of event

2.1 Please evaluate the way the event was presented/organised by the organisation and by the venue.

2.2 **Suitability of the venue for the event:**
Good

2.3 **Information/interpretative material provided at the venue (e.g. programmes, displays etc.)**
Attractive programme with good information. Depended on fairly high level of literacy- not much to look at for children.

2.4 **Publicity/pre publicity for the event (leaflets, posters, etc.):**
Attractive image and use of colour.

2.5 Accessibility of the venue:

Ease of payment	good
Location	poor- parking is always a problem
Direction	Fair- hard to see the venue on approach despite the banners
Access for disabled people	good

Customer service:

Quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)
Good

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