

**THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL
ASSESSMENT REPORT**

Organisation/Venue: Theatre Workshop

Title of Event: Nothing Ever Burns Down By Itself

Type of Event: Work in Progress

Date of Visit: October 2002

1. Artistic Assessment

1.1 Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event - its Vision and Imagination; Ability to Communicate and Quality of Production.

This production used a format that has been used before successfully for political theatre. A promenade piece that involved the audience in the action, and hence, almost unavoidably, the audience members become complicit in the political thrust of the piece. This approach has been seen in the work of the Pip Simmons Group in the early 1970's, and Wildcat and 7:84 in the eighties. The result can be powerful and unsettling as the audience's ability to remain detached is compromised. The weakness is that this approach can lead to the audience feeling manipulated and therefore led to reject the message that is being promulgated. In other aesthetic approaches the audience is offered a range of interpretations and viewpoints and can feel freer to engage on his/her own terms with the subject matter without their reaction being predetermined by the artist or artists.

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)**

The script was devised by Robert Rae and Morven Gregor with Inigo Garrido, Alex Rigg, Pete Baynes and the company. Largely it consisted of a series of personal stories told by individuals taking part in the protests at the Genoa 2001 summit. It was, therefore, topical and relevant to contemporary issues. A range of shades of opinion/motivation within the protest movement was represented, but the main thrust of the piece was entirely supportive of the protestors. The tone accurately reflected the over-wrought, quasi-religious fervour of the converted. This was most evident in the disembodied voice of the ad hoc radio announcer, and the barely suppressed glee with which he reported the "outrages" of the authorities. There was some humour, but the joke about anarchists' organisational abilities was overplayed.

- **Direction**

The direction seemed to be compromised by the lack of space available. The movement of the audience round the various benches and large wheelie bins, was rather awkward and I felt it would have worked better in a larger space. That said, the switches of focus from character to character worked well. The use of video projections of the actual events in Genoa were effective.

- **Standard of performers**

The company consisted of members of the inclusive company, supplemented by various “extras” some of whom were Theatre Workshop staff. There was a marked improvement in some of the performances achieved by the company members. Performances were clearly heart-felt and committed.

- **Design**

The design consisted mainly of large wheelie bins which corralled the audience. As mentioned above, there was a large video screen at one end of the space. Costumes seemed appropriate.

- **Technical Standards**

Technically, the production was well presented.

- **Appropriateness of production for the audience**

The audience members on the whole seemed to support the spirit of the production and therefore it would appear that the target audience had been reached.

- **Approximate size of audience and reaction**

The audience seemed to be at capacity, and the majority participated willingly where appropriate. The response of the audience was positive.

- **Overall Production**

Overall, this was an interesting production, which could be further developed to be a little smoother in its execution. Some might find the evangelical tone of the piece alienating, and perhaps a less black and white portrayal of the issues would provide greater opportunities for intellectual engagement. I do not think the production managed to achieve a strong sense of physical threat towards the protestors/audience in a dramatic sense. The atmosphere was largely celebratory and self-affirming and did not manage the shift to danger and fear that would have been felt by protestors in their situation that was required. Always at risk of being sanctimonious, and at times the piece needs a little more edge and analysis to really hit home.

2. **Management of Event**

Please evaluate the way the event was presented/organised by the organisation and by the venue. Please answer, where relevant, with reference to the checklist below adding any other comments/observations you may have.

The performance was followed by a well-attended discussion on some political issues raised by the production.

2.2 Suitability of the venue for the event:

Rather small

2.3 Information/Interpretative material provided at the venue (eg programmes, displays) - range, quantity and clarity

Simple programme that contained the necessary information.

2.4 Publicity/Pre-Publicity for the event (leaflets/posters, etc) - range, content and when and where available

No comment

2.5 Accessibility of the venue:

- **ease of payment** Fair- box office on the street due to the nature of the piece.
- **location** Car parking is always a problem
- **direction** Fair
- **access for disabled people** Good
- **timing of event** Good

2.6 Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (eg 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