

THEATRE WORKSHOP

DEGENERATE 2 FESTIVAL 7-24 August 2003

Introduction/Summary

This festival aims to provide an international showcase for disabled artists which will challenge negative stereotypes of disability and provide good models of practice. The 2003 event follows on from the initial pilot festival launched in 2001.

The programme also incorporated British Council Showcase events and a visual arts exhibition exploring human form.

In my view Degenerate 2 represented a development from the first event in terms of the quality and range of the programme, audience numbers and general profile of the event.

Programme

Performances viewed were:

Spatial Theory

I have before me a young lady from Rwanda

Adventures In A Bath

The All Star Charity Show

Bill Shannon

Theatre Workshop

Theatre Workshop

Laurence Clark

Spatial Theory

Spatial Theory was an inspiring piece of work. Bill Shannon is extremely charismatic and inventive and demonstrated a range of skill through his presentation of work ranging from classical based work to street dance. He is known as the "Crutchmaster" given his use of crutches in the performance as part of a "rhythmically expressive weight sharing". In my view his approach presented an excellent model of practice which can change people's negative perceptions of disability and provide a clear understanding of the meaning of the "Social Model". I enjoyed his interaction with the audience in which he talked about how his work develops and his relationship with the stage and space. This was a rare opportunity for the barrier between audience and artist to dissolve and provide an opportunity for insight into the creative process.

I have before me a remarkable document given to me by a young lady from Rwanda

This was a very moving piece of theatre based on award winning playwright Sonja Linden's script which was inspired by her experience of Rwandan refugees. It centred around the relationship between a young Rwandan refugee and a professional writer as she seeks his help in telling her story. The script was of good quality and delivered well by Robert Softley and Malawi Logan. The interaction between the two characters worked really well, creating an atmosphere which enabled the audience to experience the play on a deep level. Having viewed the work of both actors before I felt this piece enabled them to demonstrate a clear development in terms of maturity and skill. In particular I was impressed by Malawi Logan's interpretation and delivery of her character's experiences.

Adventures In A Bath

I found Adventures In A Bath to be an interesting and entertaining piece of theatre. This new piece of work by Ysabel Collyer was based around the conflict which can arise when

the talking voices in your head aim to arouse self doubt and fear when you try to live a life based on your own unique and honest perspective of life. The protagonist (and her voices) were played by Ysabel Collyer and Robyn Hunt situated in 2 baths on stage. While the piece seemed slightly under cooked I found the energy created by the 2 actresses to be fresh and stimulating. There is a rawness about the way Ysabel and Robyn interact with theatre presentation which I believe has the ability to touch audiences on a subtle and surreal level. In my view this can create an extra dimension to the theatre experience which can transport it from the traditional form and offer the audience something new – like a piece of modern art which forces you to consider different perspectives.

The All Star Charity Show

Laurence Clark's "irreverent look at the charity industry" through dialogue and comedy is cleverly and skilfully delivered and offers the audience a great deal of food for thought. While I appreciated the theme and the need for a voice which challenges the medical model of disability I found the strong ridiculing of well known celebrities who have supported the charity industry to be distasteful. I would have preferred to see this performer provide more creative ways to make his point. In my view he chose the easy option which guarantees (lowest common denominator) impact and missed out on the opportunity to set himself (and the audience) a more inventive and risk taking artistic challenge.

Audience

Audience numbers were reasonable. Almost full on the shows I attended. Audience reaction was generally good. There was a buzz in the café area suggesting that the overall experience in attending the event was positive.

Organisation of the event

Tickets booked were readily available on the night. Front of house staff were helpful. One production from Ireland was unfortunately cancelled due to illness.

Information/Interpretive material

Basic performance programmes were available which included biographies of the cast. It would have been good to have information on the productions included as well.

Publicity/Pre-Publicity for the Event (leaflets, posters, etc)

The Festival programme was clear and colourful with interesting images and photographs.

Venue (suitability/access)

Fine

Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding

While the overall festival programme accredited the Scottish Arts Council the individual programmes for each show had no acknowledgement of support.

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