

**---THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL
SPECIALIST ADVISER ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA**

Organisation/Venue: Theatre Workshop
Title of Event: Jasmine Road
Type of Event: Performance of new TW play.
Date of Visit: 23rd October 2003.

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 a Council Officer, as indicated at the end of the form. The report will be circulated to the organisation, which produced the work, 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

1.1 Vision and Imagination.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	

I was tempted to tick 'Excellent' in regards to the Vision of Jasmine Road, but chose 'Good' in that I feel it could be a play, production narrative, acting and directing of excellence through touring and a bit more development. I was very much entertained and intrigued as a dramatist, by this TW production. Foremost, I want to say that it cannot be simply labelled an agit-prop piece; it proved to be much more than that, much more. TW has a history of

<p>Excellent</p>	<p>political theatre and agit-prop drama, so I can see where one or two theatre reviews [that's all it was] referred to agit-prop. The speech by Marnie's character Rowan at an international solidarity meeting might be in your face statistics and images of the suffering of Palestinian communities, but she is in character, it is not Marnie. So if we are listening to Rowan and we are at an ISM meeting, it's not agit-prop, because all that suffering info. becomes overwhelming for us, we are helpless to act and we need to shut ourselves off against the over load of this character's desperate message. As a piece of theatre at that point of Rowan's scattered photos and statistics,. The audience becomes a player in the piece, we are not going to man the barricades, the play never asks that of us, but we are part of the play's narrative. We are left stunned, helpless and passive after Rowan's political speech to us at an ISM meeting, therefore we turn to the character of Adham for some guidance, and he just grunts and rolls away. As an agit-prop device Rowan's speech is a failure, we are not called to arms, it is the wholeness of the play and its strong characterisation that is a success.</p> <p>Another little said criticism of the Play by one reviewer was that it didn't give an Israeli point of view, I would question the dramatic experience of such a reviewer if he thinks plays are there to give a balanced political view point. Where in the narrative of Jasmine Road could have this happened, unless a driver of a bulldozer decides to hop out of his fortified cabin, calmly explain to Rowan why he's knocking down a family home and maybe then rescue her from underneath a bad bulldozer and live happily ever after back in Scotland next door to the 'crippled' Adham</p> <p>I chose to focus on Rowan's political speech, because I feel Jasmine Road is a wonderful and challenging piece of theatre for TW. But it is theatre. This is again evident with Nabil Shaban's excellent portrayal of the exiled poet who is now physically & emotionally impaired after assassination and torture attempts by Israeli and Arab perpetrators. Nabil's acting and Robert Rae's direction never let go, never ponder to disability politics, by allowing Adham to continually refer to himself as 'crippled' or 'half a man'. Adham never becomes political about being a disabled person, he truly sees himself as 'broken'. The Vision of the play, is that Adham's poetry is alive beyond crippling politics and overwhelming oppression. Adham is often bitter and twisted, but his imagery and poetic sense of place leaves one with a sense of hope, art continuously reflowering among rubble and dead children.</p> <p>TW is an inclusive theatre company, yet as I say above, the politics of disability equality never make a presence in the play's narrative and this is a mature reflection of the devising process used to create Jasmine Road. The Vision and Imagery of this play proof that TW are not just to be labelled as political theatre or agit-prop.</p>
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1.2 Clarity of Communication.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

You are also asked to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the event with specific reference to the following:

1.3 Script (particularly in relation to new work, or second productions).

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

1.4 Direction

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

I would have ticked Excellent, apart from the portrayal of the Rowan Character [see below]. Robert Rae should also be congratulated on separating the intense and at times personal testimony of the devising process, especially with Ghazzi's involvement, to direct a product that is theatre. Again Nabil's Adham is reflective of Robert's direction, that is not confused or clichéd by the presence of a disabled actor portraying an impaired character. Also the use of an agit-prop scene, as commented above, is placed within a narrative that is not politically led, so TW inferred politics do not ever impinge on the dramatic arch of the characters.
TW might have a new narrative style burgeoning through Jasmine Road.

1.5 Standard of performers- where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		<p>I've put two Xs in the boxes to reflect on the two actors. Nabil Shaban was excellent as the exiled poet Adham and would agree with one review that said <i>audience was spellbound by Shaban's depiction of Adham's pain and strength</i> [British Theatre Guide]. Although Nabil is a disabled actor and prominent activist, he rightly portrayed Adham as reflecting on his impairments as an outward symbol of his broken character, something a non-disabled actor would miss or find hard to portray. Nabil the actor as Adham is also not tempted to signify an attraction towards the younger activist, something that the show's actors, writer and director should be congratulated on, as the temptation to rely on a love angle must have been present in the devising process.</p> <p>I've ticked the Competent Box in relation to Marnie Baxter's portrayal of Rowan, the initially idealist young woman who is eventually crushed as a wholehearted activist by an Israeli bulldozer. It is a difficult part to play, the character being the most inclined of the two that could veer towards agit-prop, but again I would somewhat agree with a review by Edinburgh Guide, that sees Marnie's portrayal as <i>insipid...pure hearted...irrevocably naïve</i>. Marnie is obviously a confident actor, but I feel her portrayal of Rowan does not reach the characterisation and acting of Nabil as Adham. I also felt, that her portrayal of Adham's sweetheart in the story Marnie re-enacts, might have been better served by having a Palestinian woman in the role, as the Scene's terrible pathos was somewhat undermined by the actor trying to act a story . This is not necessarily a comment on Marnie's acting out of that story within the Play, it's probably more of a production decision.</p>
Poor		
Competent	X	
Good		
Excellent	X	

1.6 Use of music – 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 part, and what effect this had on the quality of the production.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

The use of traditional music, newly arranged and Palestinian pop by Daniel Williams, wove wonderfully into the drapes and lighting narrative of the show.

The live performance of the music paralleled the unbreakable beauty of Adham's poetry.

1.7 Use of Movement or Choreography

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

Nabil Shaban's portrayal of Adham was not bogged down by an actor trying to portray disability by getting in and out of a wheelchair, something non-disabled actors seem to enjoy emphasising when they take on disabled characters. Adham is obviously a character, although tortured and now permanently impaired, not caught up in the voyeurism of getting in/out of wheelchair, he is crippled by the anguish of memory and war. Other directors could have used disability in Jasmine Road as an alienating device or metaphor to portray the 'otherness' of the character, but Robert Rae and his actors let go of such a performance crutch to focus on Adham's character and internal pain and apathy.

1.8 Design – including set, costume and lighting design. Please take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue, and, where appropriate, the touring schedule.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

Alison Irwin's use of collapsing drapes and the growing prominence of rubble and sharp corners as the narrative moved towards the prominence of bulldozers and harsh machinery beautifully reflected the poetry in the text. As a visitor to the Middle East, I appreciated Phil Haldane's capture of light and shade throughout the production, it was very simple, yet rekindled my experiences of colour through light in that part of the world.

1.9 Technical Standards – please comment on whether the production was professionally presented from a technical point of view.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

Falling drapes, live music, Rafah lighting – I didn't notice the technical process in the production – as it should be.

1.10 Overall production – was the production successful overall in relation to any stated aims (e.g. in the programme or other printed material, and stated aims and objectives)

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

As it stated Aims was not primarily to show oppression in Rafah and Gaza, but to portray the relationship between Adham and Rowan, I would say it was quite successful.

1.11 Was the performance appropriate for the audience?

The audience was mainly made up of adults and some teenagers, from a variety of communities and was appropriate, with no unnecessary use of language or gratuitous sex or violent scenes.

1.12 Estimated size of audience and reaction to the production.

The audience at the 7.30pm show on October 23rd was approximately 65 people. Reaction to the production was very positive and looking around at the audience during the show, I noticed nobody drifting off or alienated from the narrative of the performance. The actors received a very good applause at the end, but I'm not too sure how appropriate it is for the actors not to return to stage for a bow. The audience were a bit lost for words and although I understood the reasoning behind abandoning the final curtain call, as a sign of empathy with the people in Palestinian enclaves, I think not all audiences would know of such a theatrical tradition, and this may alienate, especially as the Play's narrative is quite clearly empathising with Palestinian people enduring oppression.

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.

2.1 Was the venue suitable for the event?

I feel the venue was quite suitable for Jasmine Road, as TW has a tradition of reaching out and working with communities who do not necessarily find theatre accessible or that relevant to their cultural lives. The Play was positively marketed to Palestinian communities and other Middle East groups, and this evident by the reaction of such audiences to the Work. It's also attracted a growing disability audience for TW and Nabil's portrayal of the emotional/physically crippled Adham can only proof that not all plays with disabled actors have to refer the disability politics.

2.2 Information/Interpretive material provided at the venue (e.g. programmes, displays etc)

- **range, quantity and clarity.**

I didn't see a programme on the night of 23rd October.

The accompanying exhibition in the foyer and café, did somewhat prepare for the character of the exiled Palestinian poet and life in a restricted area.

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

- **range, content and when and where available. Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event. Please also view and comment on the company's Website where one is advertised. Comment on the ease of use, and quality of content and presentation, and currency of information.**

Publicity encountered by this reviewer included:

e-mails – These were clear and simple and did not take up time receiving as some other theatres PR so often can – they also gave plenty of notice of the event.

Posters – clear and concise info. with an accompanying image relevant to the Performance.

Press Releases - Again dates/production team all clear and concise. The blurb on the Play clearly stated where the narrative was coming from, although it could have led with the characters on paragraph two, as that is the strength of the production.

2.4 Accessibility of the venue

Access as audience for disabled people is very good to the main theatre, as is access to café and the one disabled toilet are clear and staffs are responsive to such requirements.

- **ease of payment**

The TW box Office is quite accessible, with low counter for wheelchair users, access to sign language interpreters and staff who are trained in customer relations for people who are from different communities. Cash, credit card and reductions are clearly marked.

- **location**

As an outsider from Ireland, retailers and people made my first visit [3 years ago] to TW easier in Stockbridge knowing what TW is about and how to get there.

- **external signposting**

The exhibition of photographs facing out to the street on Hamilton Place/Raeburn Place/etc. very much increased the welcoming nature of TW to various communities accessing performance/theatre. Since the SAC Review last year [2002] there seems to have been an effort to increase external signage with draping flags and more info. facing out to the Street.

There's probably still a need for a bit of spectacle to signify TW apart from retailers on Hamilton Place – to project a sense of theatre to the Street – TW might think of itself as somewhere working class people and TW's other communities can feel a sense of celebration. Maybe the SAC might facilitate TW with a bit of cash to blossom with spectacle onto Hamilton Place.

internal directional signing

Internal signing for people who have sight is very good and signs are simple and clear

- **access and provision for disabled people**

Access as audience is good, with staff being always conscious of requirements but not Patronising.

- **timing of event**

With a show at 1pm and a show at 7.30pm on 23rd October, there seemed to be an accessible choice for various audiences.

2.5 Customer service

- **quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering).**

Very good. Staff at TW always seem to be open to different communities and do not panic around disability or cultural varieties as other mainstream theatres often fall foul of doing.

3. Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding (if applicable)

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 and 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, and computer programmes etc. “

Please comment on whether the above conditions of grant were met, including use and prominence of the Scottish Arts Council logo on the company's Website.

All material relevant to the production of Jasmine Road prominently displayed Scottish Arts Council logos and acknowledgements.

Name: Peter Kearns

Date: 1st November 2003.

Advisor

X

Scottish Arts Council Officer

(Please tick above as appropriate)