



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: THEATRE WORKSHOP

Title of Event: THE LAST LITTLE FISH IN THE NET

Type of Event: PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

Date of Visit: 22/12/04

Overall Rating GOOD – this was the Christmas show at the Theatre Workshop. “A magical tale, set in a fairytale castle, on the romantic shores of Wester Ross.” It marks a continuation of Robert Rae’s commitment to having mixed ability casts in all productions. This bears comparison with Anthony Clark’s work, when at Contact, confronting multi racial issues. As such, this production must be warmly applauded. The performers brought a genuine passion to the show and the music was brilliant. However, issues of location in acting and script, directorial decisions regarding sound effects and the length of the piece meant that, for me, this was probably not the most successful example of Theatre Workshop’s work.

Name: JON POPE, ADVISOR

Date: 08 / 01 / 05

Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

Please tick the relevant title

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:

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, taking account of the following:

1.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
1.1	Vision and imagination	EXCELLENT	There can be no question that the programme that Robert Rae and his team are involved in is important. The issues regarding inclusion and public perception of disabled performers were, demonstrably, being addressed in this production.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	EXCELLENT	The lighting, sound, staging and music were clear and unambivalent.. All the actors could be clearly heard and the script was lucid and without overt artifice.

2. Strengths and Weaknesses

Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the event with reference to the following:

2.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
2.1	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions	GOOD	This new work by Dolina MacLennan was a lively interpretation of a silkie story but substituting a Spanish Sailor for the mermaid. This was interwoven with a cantankerous king and his three – very varied - daughters. I was confused why the publicity emphasised the geographical location of the play when this was not as clearly borne out in the script.
2.2	Direction	GOOD	The decision by Robert Rae to have the opening scene of a shipwreck was important to the plot. But the number, volume and realism of the thunderclaps that accompanied this scene and the following one meant that a number of younger members of the audience had to leave. All the family group in front of me left and others were carried out as the sound effects continued.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	GOOD	All the performers were of a high standard. The discovery of Robert Softly (as Sebastian) on a beach by Sally Clean (as Isean) was genuinely moving. Melanie Bradley and Helen Trew were exuberant as the other sisters and did a fantastic magical box trick. However, the decision to emphasise the location in Wester Ross made the wide range of accents being used, baffling.

2.4	Use of Music ¹	EXCELLENT	The music by Tim O’Leary – played live by Tim O’Leary and Norman Chalmers – was superb. Sally Clay – as Isean – sang with great warmth and emotion. The variety of instruments used was intriguing and set the magical mood very well.
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	GOOD	All the movement was of a high standard. There was a good deal of pratfalls and clowning. It was all done with great bravado and some skill. Clearly, Melanie Bradley was an experienced clown and Abby Warilow was credited as choreographer.
2.6	Design ² – including set, costume and lighting design	GOOD	Given the limited storage space of the Workshop the design by Janis Hart was ingenious. The appearance of the King’s wife’s ghost was particularly effective. The costumes by Christine Ross were effective in evoking another world – not necessarily in the past.
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	EXCELLENT	The show was presented to a high standard – but what was really impressive was the calm and considerate way the stage team reorganised the stage and performers when a wipe wouldn’t draw properly.
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	GOOD	Those who survived the thunderclaps very much enjoyed the show and joined in with the call and response sequences and the audience invasions. My 12 year old daughter was very intrigued and talked about the story and the performers a great deal on the way home. More than half full. Good applause.

3. 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.

3.	Criteria	Comments
3.1	Suitability of the venue for the event	Entirely suitable.
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue ³	There was a good programme that was full of information about the show and the company. There was a series of productions photos and reviews as we entered the venue.

¹ 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 parts, and what effect this has on the quality of the production.

² Take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue and, where appropriate, the touring schedule

³ These include programmes, displays etc., including the range, quality and clarity.

3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity ⁴	I used the website to pick up information. There was no show diary so discovering dates and times had to be done over the phone. This hampers those travelling distances to shows.
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	GOOD – nice and friendly – tickets sent out and arrived in good time.
3.5	External signage and signposting	GOOD
3.6	Internal directional signage	GOOD
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	EXCELLENT – there is a ramp into the theatre from the front door – there were no disabled audience members at the performance we attended but I am confident they would have been treated with equality.
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	This was a problem for me. The show was without an interval and was (if I remember correctly) nearly one and half hours long. There should have been a break after 50 minutes – especially with young children in the audience.
3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	SUPERB – the front of house staff made us feel welcome from the moment we walked in – but there was no hint of us being patronised or they seeming over zealous.
3.10	Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding ⁵	The Scottish Arts Council was clearly acknowledged in the programme and on the website.

⁴ 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

⁵ 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.