



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: Theatre Workshop at the Tramway

Title of Event: The Threepenny Opera

Type of Event: (*e.g. performance, work-in-progress, open rehearsal etc.*) Performance

Date of Visit: Thursday 17th June 2004

Overall Rating (Please rate the production overall, taking into account your ratings for each section. Please state the key reasons for your overall ratings – i.e. the particular strengths and weaknesses.)

Good.

The strengths of Theatre Workshop's (TW) production were a daring vision, the strong political context and powerful, at times disturbing, imagery, which echoed Brecht's political views and represented the contradictions of human nature. The production offered - at times - excellent direction and some powerful performances. However in my opinion the production did not succeed in sustaining this overall vision throughout.

In terms of weaknesses, TPO showed poor quality in regards to several aspects of the production particularly in regards to technical standards as well as singing abilities or lack thereof by some of the cast members.

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.

'The Threepenny Opera' (TPO) promised excellence and showed a lot of potential but did not quite deliver its promise. In reality TPO was a fairly unbalanced production that appeared not quite ready to be performed.

Overall, TW fulfils its CFO criteria addressing social inclusion, in particular through the provision of professional development opportunities for physically disabled actors. However, in my opinion, to create an 'Opera' with performers, who by professional standard, do not have the skill level to sing well enough to carry this production is to set them up for failure and endangers and questions the very principals it set out to achieve.

Name: Magdalena Schamberger

Date: 29/06/2004

Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

Please tick the relevant title

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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	Robert Rae's (RR) vision of using an entire cast of professional disabled actors combined with a well-directed community chorus to tell Bertolt Brecht's story of 'The Threepenny Opera' was excellent and daring. The production succeeded in provoking thought in general, and in particular in regards to the historical context of the play as well as pointing towards a lack of commemoration of crimes against disabled people during the Nazi regime specifically. RR appeared to be using Brecht's polarity (rich/poor; good/bad; white/black; shadow/light; etc) as one of his guiding principles: the set divided the audience into two sides opposite each other and in terms of lighting and staging the performers were either in darkness or in light. Projections from GW Pabst's film were cleverly combined with TW's own materials on the large projection screens in addition to more traditional placards carrying BB's political messages. The cast of professional performers and the community chorus created powerful, striking and sometimes disturbing images. TPO succeeded in showing "Brecht's profound disdain of capitalism." as well as in representing "The complex and often contradictory nature of the human condition." (Programme note)
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Poor	Several of the songs (e.g. The Canon song) or parts thereof (duet between Mr and Mrs Peachum) as well as passages of the script were inaudible not only due to the poor quality of the technical standards (some of the microphones appeared not to be working) but also due to the poor quality of singing and a lack of projection.

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	Excellent	An excellent English translation by Hugh MacDiarmid (1973), which faithfully reflected Bertolt Brecht's lyrics.

2.2	Direction	Good	RR created a mixture of very powerful images and scenes, enabling some very strong performances. These were mixed with more conventional and less interesting scenes that did not quite work. Both were strung and held together by the storyteller and the band. TPO appeared not quite ready to be performed: The cast was at times preoccupied with the singing and staging rather than the actual performances. A major flaw was the casting of otherwise professional performers who's singing abilities were not of high enough quality to carry off the production.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	Good	Some excellent performances - combining high quality acting and singing skills - by: Sally Clay as Narrator; Garry Robson as Mr Peachum; Sarah Caltieri as Lucy; Nabil Shaban as Macheath. Cerrie Burnell as Polly as well as Macheath's three sidekicks were good. Some performances were merely competent, mainly due a lack of ability to sing; Ysabel Collyer was overly stretched as Jenny; Pamela Ann Fry as Mrs Peachum was inaudible when singing without microphone and partnered with Mr Peachum; In general several of the actors seemed worried and preoccupied about their singing which seemed to result in a lack of confidence and a loss of playing tension and gusto in a number of scenes.
2.4	Use of Music ¹	Good	The musical direction and arrangements by Tim O'Leary using the original score by Kurt Well resulted in a good performance by the professional musicians as well as the community musician.
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography		N/A
2.6	Design ² – including set, costume and lighting design	Good	Excellent set design by Gordon Davidson balancing the need for different performance levels as well as restriction of access due to the physical abilities of the performers. The screens for film projections on both sides of the auditorium were extremely effective as was a more modern approach to BB's placards on roller blinds. GD

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

			made some very suitable (band on a plateau with red curtains in the style of Berlin cabaret performances) as well as surprising choices (Macheath's prison becoming his gallows). Costumier Christine Ross' costumes were suitable. Due to technical problems during the show the lighting design by Dave Toneri was hard to assess, In general it appeared to have had the concept of polarity - harsh lights combined with shadowy existence (Licht und Schatten) - to create an interesting atmosphere. However I was at times frustrated because I was unable to see the faces of the performers.
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Competent	The production was not particularly well presented from a technical point of view: Sound Designer and Technical Manager Phil Haldane did not succeed in supporting the production of TPO. As previously mentioned there appeared to be a string of technical problems particularly at the beginning of the show (placards not set in the right place or not working properly; microphones were not working; sound levels between individual microphones were not balanced; lighting stages for scenes appeared off; obvious problems with set changes i.e. Macheath appearing for his gallows scene).
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Good	Approximately 230 audience members. I spoke to two sets of audience members who left during the second interval. They cited the length of the show rather than any quality aspects as their reason for leaving. Other audience comments included: “Some powerful performances, but the singing was not very good.” “Some powerful scenes, some very boring.”

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	Very suitable.

3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue ³	Posters and leaflets were well displayed at the venue. Programmes were available. The content was interesting and clear. There was a display of previews (Scotsman; The Herald; Big Issue;), which was NOT easily accessible - due to artwork installed in front of it. I could barely squeeze in to read them.
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity ⁴	Leaflets and publicity were available well in advance of the performance. A range of previews appeared in The Scotsman; Metro; The Herald; Big Issue. The information on the website was basic, suitable and clear.
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	Very easy.
3.5	External signage and signposting	Very good.
3.6	Internal directional signage	Very good.
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	Easy access.
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The starting time of the performance was advertised as 7:30pm. I was informed by front of house staff that TPO would last 3 hours including intervals. In reality TPO started late, had two intervals and the running time of 3 hours was exclusive of the intervals. This resulted in performance finishing at approximately 11:05pm - a challenge for audience members needing to travel on public transport. On a general note TPO appeared too long for both audience members and cast members.
3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	Box office staff, front of house and bar staff were professional and friendly.
3.10	Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding ⁵	The Scottish Arts Council Logo was clearly displayed on all published materials (posters and leaflets) as well as on the home page of TW's

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

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

		website. The website provides a link to the SAC website.
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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.