

# THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL

## ASSESSMENT REPORT

Organisation/Venue: Theatrecollective@highland and Tosg at Phipps Institute, Beaulieu

Title of Event: Seven Hunters

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: 14 June 2003

### 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 was an imaginative production in terms of its conception and its presentation. Its ability to communicate was hampered by performances that were vocally unclear at times and direction that did not fully take in to account the in-the-round presentation. The audience's experience was slightly frustrating in that one was conscious that there were elements of the script that one was missing.

- 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 bi-lingual in Gaelic and English though the bulk of the plot (the lighthouse scenes) was in English. The bi-lingual elements worked well in creating atmosphere and underlining the theme of "otherness" that ran through the play, with there being simultaneous translation from Gaelic to English projected on the four large screens.

The script was lyrical and engaging, with much seemingly specialist language associated with things maritime. These were skilfully interwoven with the action. The action as such was limited by the burden of the play-i.e. what events could have led to the unexplained disappearance of the Flannan light crew.

Writer Ian Stephen created a credible fiction that the keepers' deaths were foreseen by the temporary stand-in keeper Macarthur, and resulted from freak bad weather. The internal tensions between the keepers are well established by the writer. He also introduces an anti-war theme based on McArthur's experiences in Afghanistan. There is an epilogue when Ross visits Macarthur's widow 13 year's after the disaster. There appears to be little reason for this episode to be included other than to form a link with World War I. As such, it feels superfluous. Similarly, the scene between Ros and Macarthur's wife early in the play is unexplained and hard to fathom. This may have been due to difficulties in hearing the dialogue at times or it may have been due to structural issues in relation to the script.

The script raised issues of identity, cultural differences, spirituality and the strong sense of place. These were skilfully and lyrically evoked and produced a real sense of poetry and mysticism.

- **Direction**

The production was presented in the round, with a central round podium representing the lighthouse interior. The playing and audience area was defined by four large projection screens onto which were projected identical video scenes of stormy seas and shores. This was very effective and created a haunting and threatening atmosphere for the production. It would have been more effective if the extremely interesting music had started simultaneously with the video projections. As it was, the projections began at the start of the show without the benefit of the evocative music.

In one corner of the playing area was a raised area representing the bridge of the relief ship, the Archtor. The musicians were located in this area, and the use of music in the production was one of the strongest elements of the evening.

The playing in the round was generally successful, but I would have to say that most of the keepers' playing seemed to be out front and there was a sense that those sitting "behind" the tables and chairs came off less well than those facing full on. The Director used the void below the podium to create a sense of the lighthouse's height with the keepers entering and exiting via traps in the floor of the podium, except when they ventured out of the lighthouse. This helped to create the necessary sense of confinement and claustrophobia.

There was effective use of dance and movement in the piece. The direction of the scenes between the keepers made good use of natural movement to enliven what was essentially a static and enclosed situation.

- **Standard of performers**

The performers were all very able. Those who danced, sang, played instruments and spoke lines all acquitted themselves well in terms of naturalism and tone. There was a problem of audibility and clarity with key words becoming inaudible at times. This resulted in the piece seeming disjointed at times and I think some key plot elements being unclear.

- Design

The design was centred on the podium, with simple but appropriate furniture. The screens were supported by metal struts thus linking the whole together. This was an ambitious technical structure for a tour as described in the brochure. The lighting was good and complemented the use of video projection.

Costumes were of good quality comprising period women's rural costume and men's maritime service uniforms. Both felt right and were convincing.

The Principle Lighthouse Keeper's jacket lacked one button and this seemed out of character-probably this was a temporary oversight. A second small detail was that the binoculars on use on the bridge of the Hesperus had a blue nylon strap-or what appeared to be nylon, and this seemed out of period.

In general the design was bold, and convincing.

- Technical Standards

This was the first night, and this could explain a number of minor technical problems. The show was 10 to 15 minutes late in starting, but this could have been due to late audience arrivals. One of the four projections seemed to fail about two-thirds of the way through the show. There was a lighting mis-cue near the end which effectively spoiled one of the final scenes. None the less there was a sophisticated use of digital technology and this created a powerful effect.

- Overall Production

Overall and imaginative, original and engaging production. Teething troubles did slightly lessen the impact of the first night, but would imagine that the production once fully worked in could become a powerful and popular piece of theatre.

- Appropriateness of production for the audience

I think this production could be of significance for people living in the Highlands-Gael and non Gael alike. It would also have appealed to visitors to the region, but I think that the diction and projection of the English text needs to be improved.

- Approximate size of audience and reaction to the programme of work

A full house that seemed to enjoy the performance.

## **2. Management of Event**

2.1 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.

Good

### **2.2 Suitability of the venue for the event:**

Good

### **2.3 Information/Interpretive material provided at the venue (e.g. programmes, displays etc.**

- range, quantity and clarity.

Attractive informative programme, well produced. At times a bit repetitive as though a cut and paste job without re-checking the material. There was not much in the way of in-situ material outside the hall to indicate that there was a theatrical event on at the venue

The performance was presented in conjunction with a related exhibition. I was not able to see the exhibition.

### **2.4 Publicity/Pre Publicity for the Event (leaflets, posters, etc):**

- range, content and when and where available.

The Highland Festival brochure as supplemented by a bi-lingual sheet with details of the production. I think there was a little lack of clarity between the nature and relationship of the Seven Hunters, and what I believe was a companion entertainment- Uisge Beatha/Water of Life. I did not see any pre-publicity in the adjacent Lovat Arms Hotel or in the surrounding area.

### **2.5 Accessibility of the venue:**

- ease of payment      Good
- location              Good
- direction             Poor
- access for disabled people      Seemed OK
- timing of event.      Good

### **2.6 Customer service:**

- Box office was only real service and this seemed to work OK

**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?

Yes

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15 June 2003