

Organistaion/venue: theatre collective - highland & tosg
North Lochs Community School, Isle of Lewis

Title of event: seven hunters by Ian Stephen

Type of event: Performance

Date of Visit: Tuesday 17th June 2003 at 8pm

Report by: Nan S Macleod

1 ARTISTIC ASSESSMENT

1.1

Vision and Imagination

Powerful impact of three screens – tossing encroaching waves – a statement of the implacable hunger of the sea and close enough to awaken awe and a frisson of primeval fear.

The use of the peripheral area to portray life on shore, visibly islanding the lighthouse rock and contrasting life thereon with the free movement of the wives at the shore-station was very effective.

1.2

Clarity of Communication:

Only the canopy of the set ensured that more of the dialogue was not lost into the lofty ceiling of the Sports Hall. Outwith that area some voices became indistinct and in some instances, eg on board the Archtor, lighting was not strong enough to enable body language to supplement the dialogue.

Scenes in the lighthouse came across clearly in dialogue and body language and movement.

1.3

Script:

This is an excellent script, yet the play faltered and limped to a close. (“There was no end” was one quote I heard.) Looking back on it and recognising that each part of it was essential to the story I came to see how by transposing two scenes and by using elements of one of them – those that hint of the supernatural – in a third the dramatic potential of the play could have been more fully realised and sustained to the end.

1.4

Direction:

Constraints of the venue denied us full perception, aural and visual, of the play as a whole. Nevertheless the lasting impression is of an assured imaginative direction where a core of song, dance, music, humour, love - all the elements of human warmth - is encircled by the encroaching menace of those doom-laden waves.

1.5

Standard of Performers:

While the characters of each of the three keepers was clearly delineated and the interplay there very well done, Simon MacKenzie was in his element here. With the writer he was one of those who “go down to the sea in ships”. He *was* Macarthur, superbly so, with his upbringing, background and beliefs recognisable to us.

Of the two women Caroline Reagh was the better of the two in conveying what it means to share a man’s life with the sea.

I had some difficulty with Alyth McCormack’s words, particularly her Gaelic, as also I did with Artair Donald.

David Walker came across clear and strong and his struggles to keep his footing on a storm-tossed boat were credible.

1.6

Use of music

Live Music - good.

Gaelic singing beautifully executed.

1.7

Use of Movement or Choreography

Where it was clearly visible movement underpinned the characterisation, reinforcing the messages given off by body-language, and conveying a sense of the restricted living space. There occurred occasionally a movement which synchronised with the direction and movement of the waves in the background – a second of pure pleasure to the eye.

Movement off-stage was less easy to see – the space between the stage and audience was limited. Perhaps because of that I gave as much attention to the faces as I did to the feet and thought that Caroline Reagh did not allow consciousness of the choreographed movements to eclipse the need to express emotion facially.

(And anyway, between you and me – the chosen woman of a staunch Free Presbyterian dancing? Eheu! Eheu!)

Movement on board the storm-tossed vessels was well-done.

1.8

Design:

The stage, set and lit before the start of the performance was immediately familiar to all who knew the story.

The canopy – which so successfully trapped dialogue for us – intensified the sense of a small enclosed space and never was this more evident than when the screens behind were switched off.

The trapdoor – yes, that's how lighthouses are, one room below another.

The ships – they weren't there, but we saw them and cramped their crew were within them.

1.8

Design (contd.):

Costume – white shirt-sleeved men on a storm-stricken island in December, ready to brave the storms at any moment?

The impact of the three-screen wave pictures on sense and emotion was breath-catching - an elemental flooding of the senses; their recurrent use throughout served as reminder of the 'eternal surge of the sea'.

The screens' display of translation from Gaelic was essential even for Gaelic-speakers - in the case of some actors their words were indistinct. Sound effects of storm when door was opened strong.

Lighting – a little more light on the Archtor area would have been helpful.

It would be difficult to imagine a set which would fit more naturally into the Sports Hall of a rural Community School. Its air of apparent unsophistication made it immediately approachable, audience-friendly.

1.9

Technical Standards:

Given the fact that the venue was the large lofty Sports Hall of a Community School technical difficulties were largely overcome and dramatically successful.

1.10

Overall Production:

'Stated aims': "the need to make contact"

The pull exerted by the central focus needed very strong play from the actors on the periphery to create a sympathetic understanding of the links binding these women emotionally to the keepers - I looked for a counterpoint to Ducat's mention of holding a child.

I don't think that sense of contact was fully achieved, not with the keepers, not with the audience.

1.11

Appropriate to the Audience:

Overall, yes it was.

1.12 Audience:

85 – 100 (Would have been more but for clash with SCDA Festival)

‘Good in parts’ ‘Very good’ ‘I didn’t like the ending’ were the most frequent comments. All were affected by the power of the screens and rapt during the scenes with the three keepers.

2 MANAGEMENT OF EVENT

2.1

Suitability of venue:

Not very suitable, but probably the only venue available within reasonable distance of the town – other venues having been pre-booked.

2.2

Information/interpretive material provided

Informative programmes and paintings

2.3

Publicity

Article and advertisement in Stornoway Gazette. Poster in Stornoway Library, nothing outside the venue.

2.4

Accessibility

Payment Straightforward

Location 8 miles from Stornoway, within fairly well populated Lochs area.

Access available

Timing unfortunate clash with SCDA Festival

3 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL FUNDING

Logo on programme, flyer and website

4 SCORING

SECTION	SCORE
1.1 Vision and imagination	4
1.2 Communicating clearly	4
1.3 Script (complete only for new work)	4
1.4 Direction	4
1.5 Standard of performers	4
1.6 Use of music	3
1.7 Use of movement	4
1.8 Design	4
1.9 Technical standards	3
1.10 Overall production	3
1.11 Audience reaction	3
Overall score	4

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Advisor