



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DANCE

Artist/Company: Music at the Brewhouse

Venue: Tramway

Title of Event: Life's Hard!

Type of Event: (e.g. performance, informal showing, work-in-progress, etc)

performance

Date of Visit: 7 May 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).

Competent – a potentially strong idea was compromised by naive theatrical treatment. This was an energetic and, at times, entertaining hour, which was musically conceived and presented to a high standard but lacked comparable dramaturgical input. The piece would have also benefited from an experienced theatre director.

Name: Cindy Sughrue

Date: 21/05/04

Specialist Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

Please circle 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:

1-Very Poor – standard falls well below what is acceptable.

2-Poor – not attaining acceptable standards of conception or presentation.

3-Competent – routine rather than especially interesting.

4-Good – well conceived and executed

5-Excellent – conceived and executed to a high standard.

1. Artistic Assessment

Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event, taking account of the following

Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
Vision and imagination	2	The idea of a dance-theatre cabaret inspired by Glasgow's underworld is potentially a good one. It could have been conceived and presented in a number of ways, and although this piece was musically strong, I thought the theatrical content was naively conceived and quite disconnected from the socio-cultural starting point. The characters were all stereotypes – gangsters, molls, prostitutes – which, together with the jazz/cabaret style of the music and choreography, created a derivative piece that was more evocative of prohibition Chicago than any events or characters from Glasgow's living memory.
Clarity of communication	3	With the score providing a musical framework as well as the continuity links, this was a series of scenes/vignettes using stock characters and movement language. There was little originality, but the stereotypes ensured clear communication of images and ideas. The one exception was a surreal scene (set in a prison cell?) involving a whole salmon being beaten.
Quality of production – production's success in relation to stated aims i.e., in the programme or other printed material)	2	There was no programme, so no stated aims other than the brief description of the idea in the promotion material (as noted above).

2. Strengths and Weakness

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

Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
Choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	3	There was nothing inventive in the choreography, but there were some good ensemble sections and the space was used effectively. I would have welcomed more dynamic in the pace.
Performers - technical standard, performance skills, and ability to communicate	3	The technical standards of the performers varied, but all seemed to achieve at least the minimum of what one would expect of an international company appearing at Tramway. The dancers seemed under-rehearsed, which was particularly evident in ensemble sections. Several times the musical ensemble sang a short chorus, but I have idea what they were saying – the words were unintelligible.
Sound – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	4	Good – this was very much a musically driven work, and the central placing of the Music at the Brewhouse ensemble on the stage, with composer/conductor Stephen Deazley at the front reinforced this. With his energetic conducting style, there were times when the dancers were superfluous.

Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
Design – costume, set, lighting	3	Simple set and lighting, with costumes evocative of a 1930s American gangster movie. This was effective in achieving a theatrical look, which was clearly intended.
Technical standards – technical presentation of the production (e.g. lighting and sound cues, etc)	4	Although not a technically complex piece, it was well presented.
Audience – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	3	The piece was extremely well received by the audience. There was a good house – perhaps 75% full.

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.

Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
Suitability of the venue for the event	3	The production looked good in Tramway 1, and the concept and artistic ensemble should have worked well. However, it simply didn't achieve the standard one expects from an international arts venue.
Information/ interpretive material at venue ¹	1	No programmes were produced/available, and there were no obvious displays of any material.
Publicity/ pre-publicity ²	3	Good information and placement in the new, improved Tramway season brochure and a couple of preview articles (List, Herald). Otherwise, limited visibility.
Ease of booking and payment	4	Booked in advance by phone through Tramway box office. Service has improved noticeably in recent months, although box office staff didn't seem to know the name of the company, only the title of the show.
Location of venue	4	Although perceived as out-of-town, Tramway is only half an hour's walk from the city centre and a short trip by bus or train.
External signage and signposting	3	Signage from bus stop/train station could be improved, as well as at the entrance to the building. It would be easy to miss if you didn't know it was there.
Internal directional signage	3	Signage suffers slightly from its design (too subtle), but front of house staff help to overcome this when performances are on.

¹ These include programmes, displays etc., assessing the range, quality and clarity

² Publicity/pre-publicity (leaflets, posters, etc), including the 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

Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
Access and provision for disabled people	3	Adequate – but not as evident as it might be (linked to signage).
Timing of the event	3	8 pm is a good starting time for a piece lasting only an hour.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	4	Friendly and helpful staff – this has improved in the past 6 months.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ³	3	Visible on leaflet I received by post, but I wasn't aware of any other promotional materials. Tramway acknowledges the Scottish Arts Council on its website (home page).

³ 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.