

THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL
SPECIALIST ADVISER ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA

Organisation/Venue:

Title of Event: **Slab Boys Trilogy**

Type of Event: **3 plays**

Date of Visit: **28th November 2003, 9th January and 15th January 2004**

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 a Council Officer, as indicated at the end of the form. The report will be circulated to the organisation which produced the work, 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

1.1 Vision and Imagination.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: This was a bold project for the Traverse to do on its 40 th anniversary, 25 years after the first of the trilogy was first performed. Whether audiences could relate to a claustrophobic, post-war world where sexual inequality, religious intolerance and rigid social divisions were society's norm, was risky. But in a post devolution Scotland the plays' Scottish-ness, the bleakness of the characters' aspirations and futures, and the generation gap between the Slab Boys and "management", had a poignant resonance. The trilogy has become a landmark in Scottish drama that richly deserved to be revived.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

1.2 Clarity of Communication.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: John Byrne is one of Scotland's most gifted writers and this Trilogy shows him at his most brilliant. The comedy and pathos plays with the audience's emotions – too fast sometimes for us to keep up. However the productions occasionally failed to sustain the pace and there were times (particularly in <i>Cuttin' a Rug</i>) when the direction weakened the danger and blistering dialogue in Byrne's scripts.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

You are also asked to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the event with specific reference to the following:

1.3 Script (particularly in relation to new work, or second productions).

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: All three scripts are brilliantly funny and perceptive, full of black humour, machine-gun one-liners, and gut-wrenching cruelty. The first two – <i>Slab Boys</i> and <i>Cuttin' a Rug</i> can stand alone, but to understand the full pathos of <i>Still Life</i> it was necessary to have seen the first two. Several members of the audience around me had not done so, and were confused by the references.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

1.4 Direction

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: The first and third plays were directed by Roxana Silbert and the middle one by Philip Howard. This was evident in the pace and clarity of the productions. While both directors serve the script well, all three plays seemed under-rehearsed and lacking in energy at times. There were moments when the actors seemed uncomfortable with the development of their characters, shying clear of the danger that Byrne captures so icily in the script. Cuttin' a Rug in particular lacked the bite of Slab Boys, with cartoon side of the characters taking over and interrupting the audience's intellectual engagement.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

1.5 Standard of performers- where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: Excellent performances all round, particularly from Iain Roberson and Paul Thomas Hickey and Una McLean.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

1.6 Use of music – 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 part, and what effect this had on the quality of the production.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: The use of contemporary pop music of the time was excellent – much enjoyed by the audience.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

1.7 Use of Movement or Choreography

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

The dance routines from *Cuttin' a Rug* were very well executed, and the strong physical performances by the two lead actors contributed to the pace and energy of the pieces.

1.8 Design – including set, costume and lighting design. Please take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue, and, where appropriate, the touring schedule.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

All three sets were creative and evocative of the era in which the plays were set. The factory scene in *Slab Boys* and the town hall of *Cuttin' a Rug* were particularly resonant of 1950s post-war, conservative utilitarianism. Although the claustrophobic atmosphere of the Slab Room was difficult to evoke in the new Traverse, the pigment from the paints was almost palpable. The cemetery set for *Still Life* gave a necessary sense of bleakness and chill.

1.9 Technical Standards – please comment on whether the production was professionally presented from a technical point of view.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

All three plays were technically flawless.
Excellent sound / lighting / stage management

1.10 **Overall production** – was the production successful overall in relation to any stated aims (e.g. in the programme or other printed material, and stated aims and objectives)

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

The Trilogy was beautifully presented, with an excellent cast.

1.11 **Was the performance appropriate for the audience?**

All three performances that I attended were sold out. The audiences were predominantly middle-aged (apart from one school party at Still Life) which I found disappointing. Was it nostalgia that had brought these 40 /50 /60 year olds to plays which, when they were first performed, would have attracted students and twenty year olds?

1.12 **Estimated size of audience and reaction to the production.**

All three houses were full and the response from the audiences was very positive.

2. Management of Event

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.

2.1 **Was the venue suitable for the event?**

It was most appropriate the Traverse was the venue for this revival, although for the first time I felt some nostalgia for the old theatre where I saw the original production, for its intimacy and claustrophobia.

2.2 Information/Interpretive material provided at the venue (e.g. programmes, displays etc)

- range, quantity and clarity.

A full script of all three plays was available for £5.00. This seemed good value and allowed me to catch up with some parts of the script which were delivered too fast for the ear to hear.

2.3 Publicity/Pre-Publicity for the Event (leaflets, posters, etc)

- 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.

Beautifully designed posters / leaflets – very striking

2.4 Accessibility of the venue

- ease of payment
- location
- external signposting
- internal directional signing
- access and provision for disabled people
- timing of event

Box Office staff and stewards were as ever friendly and helpful. Signage is good. Access for wheelchairs is not particularly satisfactory, requiring help from back-stage staff. As a deaf patron I appreciate the induction loop.

2.5 Customer service

- quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering).

Excellent. See above.

3. Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding (if applicable)

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 and 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, and computer programmes etc. “

Scottish Arts Council Evaluation Form

Please comment on whether the above conditions of grant were met, including use and prominence of the Scottish Arts Council logo on the company's website.

The Scottish Arts Council is fully acknowledged on all printed material and throughout the building.

Name: Alison Coates
Date: 19 January 2004

Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

(Please tick above as appropriate)