

THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL
SPECIALIST ADVISER ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: Traverse Theatre

Title of Event: Dark Earth

Type of Event: performance (World Premiere)

Date of Visit: 31 July 2003

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 <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: This was a relationship play with a sub text about historicity and identity. It took an imaginative approach to a conventional situation where a young couple is marooned in a potentially hostile rural location. Using extensive symbolism it sets out to explore the themes and issues that impinge on the couple's relationship, and the relationships within the family that they stumble across.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	√	
Excellent		

1.2 Clarity of Communication.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: The play is presented clearly and comprehensively.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
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: From the outset-the first line is "Have you found us yet"- the play (David Harrower) lays down its rules of engagement. This is a piece that seeks to illustrate inter-personal relationships with reference to historical parallels, and topographical features. Much of the dialogue stands as an oblique commentary on the couple's relationship. The young couple's life-plan has reached a watershed-represented by the play's location on the divide between the West and east coasts of Scotland. Some kind of no-mans-land is indicated by the location. I found that the play was rather overloaded with these symbols ranging from Romans and indigenous tribes, to Bonnie Prince Charlie. Dichotomies and oppositions abounded and one felt that this led to the play being rather too schematic. The narrative itself did engage and one cared about the outcome. The dialogue was witty at times and the revelations through reported conversations not shared with all the characters was intriguing. One felt that the revelation that the family were to leave the farm did not live up to the obliqueness and suggestiveness of the previous action. The characterisation was believable. The ending was baffling with the farmer's illogical rant. Was this meant to signify the break-down of civility and the transformation of hospitality into aggression in the face of threat (economic or otherwise)- the shout of "barbarians" certainly seemed to suggest this. An interesting , if perhaps slightly over-wrought script.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	√	
Excellent		

1.4 Direction

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: The Direction was measured and reflective. The blocking was very precise with physical interrelationships reflecting emotional states. An atmosphere of potential danger, or at least strangeness is created in the first act through the use of lighting and music and some staccato aspects of the delivery.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	√	

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

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: An accomplished cast with a particularly telling performance by the farmer with the every so dry wit. Portrayals were convincing.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	√	

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 (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: Recorded music worked to create a spooky, unreal atmosphere. There was some unaccompanied singing by cast members which formed part of the action and was meant to be singing as performed by amateurs.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	√	
Excellent		

1.7 Use of Movement or Choreography

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: There was no significant movement and no choreography.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent		

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: A significant set representing stone walls which stood for the farm house and environs. It also stood symbolically for the much discussed Antonine Wall –albeit it was explicit that it was made of turf and timber. There was a dynamic look to the set with its sharp angles that worked well to create a sense of tension. Moveable elements were used to change the scenes from the roadway to the house. These worked well. The lighting was for the most part naturalistic with a convincing fade from daylight to evening and then dark
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	√	
Excellent		

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: Well presented technically. There appeared to be a slight glitch relating to one of the sliding screens and a momentary mis-cue on a recorded sound cue.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	√	
Excellent		

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 <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating: An accomplished fully professional production with all aspects working well together. I thought that the play was interesting but ultimately the burden of the historical and topographical symbolism was too heavy for the characters to support. The epic background of the Roman Empire, Sots history and “the Great Divide” I felt overpowered the rather small story of this couple and the isolated family. One would perhaps have needed a longer time frame, for the action of the play to sustain the weight of symbolism that was brought to bear.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	√	
Excellent		

1.11 Was the performance appropriate for the audience?

Yes

1.12 Estimated size of audience and reaction to the production.

A full house who were enthusiastic in their response.

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?

Yes

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

- range, quantity and clarity.

Due to the multiplicity of events on at the Traverse at the Fringe there is not much room for interpretive material. The script was on sale, but many may not wish to spend £2.50 , and no other cast list was available.

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.

As usual an attractive and clear brochure.

2.4 Accessibility of the venue

- ease of payment- Good
- location-Good
- external signposting – not apparent in the vicinity
- internal directional signing- fair
- access and provision for disabled people- reasonable
- timing of event- just a touch on the long side.

2.5 Customer service

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

Good

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. “

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.

I could not find acknowledgement on the website. Other acknowledgements are appropriate.

Name: David Taylor

Date: 1 August 2003

Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

(Please tick above as appropriate)