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**THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL**

**SPECIALIST ADVISER ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA**

**Organisation/Venue:**           **Traverse Theatre**

**Title of Event:**               **The Nest**

**Type of Event:**               **Performance**

**Date of Visit:**               **20<sup>th</sup> April 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<br><i>(Please tick)</i> |          | Comments and key reasons for rating: |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Very Poor                                       |          |                                      |
| Poor                                            |          |                                      |
| Competent                                       |          |                                      |
| Good                                            | <b>x</b> |                                      |
| Excellent                                       |          |                                      |

A conventional situation – storm-bound strangers thrown together is here used skilfully to explore relationship and metaphysical issues. Within this tried and tested format the play works well, with the production gently subverting the melodramatic thriller genre.

**1.2 Clarity of Communication.**

| Rating for this section<br><i>(Please tick)</i> |          | Comments and key reasons for rating: |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Very Poor                                       |          |                                      |
| Poor                                            |          |                                      |
| Competent                                       |          |                                      |
| Good                                            | <b>x</b> |                                      |
| Excellent                                       |          |                                      |

All performances were very clear – the storyline was also clearly communicated.

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<br>(Please tick) |          | Comments and key reasons for rating: |
|------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Very Poor                                |          |                                      |
| Poor                                     |          |                                      |
| Competent                                |          |                                      |
| Good                                     | <b>x</b> |                                      |
| Excellent                                |          |                                      |

I thought the success of the script was uneven. The relationship between the couple was well drawn and the motifs of betrayal, loss of trust and lives not fully shared were potently illustrated in the metaphors involved in their completion (or non-completion) of the Munroes. The other 'travellers' tales' convinced me less. I was slightly bemused by and sceptical of the old man's story and mission and the young girl's testimony about the emptiness of her life was rather perfunctionary and I felt it was written in for the sake of neatness. The 'continuous' Munro-bagger's tale felt more substantial. The metaphor of his self-imposed burden in the shape of a beautiful but heavy rock had creative resonances.

The play, however, was itself in danger of being over-burdened with metaphors. I thought the central dynamic of the couple was the nugget that the play should have concentrated on and that some of the other elements were distracting. The central premise that the climbers were marooned was undermined by the fact that Cam could go and return to shops and could have called assistance. I may have missed it, but I was not aware that the old man's rucksack contained a full skeleton (as opposed to a skull only) until late in the play. This meant that the wife's anxiety (about the presence of a skull) seemed an over-reaction. The story of the skeleton was not engaging and, to borrow an expression from the script, was rather "addled".

**1.4 Direction**

| Rating for this section<br>(Please tick) |          | Comments and key reasons for rating: |
|------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Very Poor                                |          |                                      |
| Poor                                     |          |                                      |
| Competent                                |          |                                      |
| Good                                     | <b>x</b> |                                      |
| Excellent                                |          |                                      |

The play was well directed by Lorne Campbell. There was a good sense created (well supported by the set) of an empty space – echoing the 'ghost town' reference – that was pregnant with possible presences. Finally the space returned to silence and a contemplative atmosphere prevailed.

The production was full of business with props: stoves, food, clothing and bedding and this was handled well, adding to a sense of adjacency and potential violation of personal space (physical and emotional).

As mentioned above, there were occasional tongue in cheek references to melodrama (e.g. the thunderclap at the appearance of the skull) and this helped to lighten the tone and avoid the production being too ponderous.

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

| Rating for this section<br>(Please tick) |          | Comments and key reasons for rating:<br><br>All were good and presented the characters well. I particularly liked Candida Benson's portrayal of the taut, angry wife. |
|------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Very Poor                                |          |                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Poor                                     |          |                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Competent                                |          |                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Good                                     |          |                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Excellent                                | <b>x</b> |                                                                                                                                                                       |

**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<br>(Please tick) |  | Comments and key reasons for rating:<br>N/A |
|------------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------------|
| Very Poor                                |  |                                             |
| Poor                                     |  |                                             |
| Competent                                |  |                                             |
| Good                                     |  |                                             |
| Excellent                                |  |                                             |

**1.7 Use of Movement or Choreography**

| Rating for this section<br>(Please tick) |  | Comments and key reasons for rating:<br>N/A |
|------------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------------|
| 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<br>(Please tick) |          | Comments and key reasons for rating: |
|------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Very Poor                                |          |                                      |
| Poor                                     |          |                                      |
| Competent                                |          |                                      |
| Good                                     |          |                                      |
| Excellent                                | <b>x</b> |                                      |

The simple but effective design (Andrew Burt), created just the right atmosphere. The oblique angles of the roof and windows suggested discord and disharmony, while creating a believable bothy.  
Costumes were appropriately chosen, but did look rather clean and could have been broken down a bit.  
Good lighting design.

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

| Rating for this section<br>(Please tick) |          | Comments and key reasons for rating: |
|------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Very Poor                                |          |                                      |
| Poor                                     |          |                                      |
| Competent                                |          |                                      |
| Good                                     |          |                                      |
| Excellent                                | <b>x</b> |                                      |

There was a very convincing sound design, indicating the storm outside. This was sensitively employed to create atmosphere, without drowning out the dialogue.

**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<br>(Please tick) |          | Comments and key reasons for rating: |
|------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Very Poor                                |          |                                      |
| Poor                                     |          |                                      |
| Competent                                |          |                                      |
| Good                                     | <b>x</b> |                                      |
| Excellent                                |          |                                      |

A very interesting first (produced) play from Alan Wilkins. Lots (perhaps too much) of good metaphor and naturalistic but allusive language. I thought the central trope of the couple's story was inventive and illuminated their emotional and marital situation. The script received very fair service from the Director, cast and production team, providing an engaging and stimulating evening.

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

Yes

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

Full house- attentive with warmish response at the end.

**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.

Attractive posters in the foyer for a range of Traverse events.

Programme was the published script with cast list.

**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.

Good- usual high standard

**2.4 Accessibility of the venue**

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

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.

Appropriate

**Name: David Taylor**

**Date: 26 April 2004**

Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

*(Please tick above as appropriate)*