



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: Traverse Theatre in association with An Lanntair at the Coigach Community Hall, Achiltibuie

Title of Event: I was a Beautiful Day by Iain F. MacLeod

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: Oct 13th 2005

Overall Rating: Competent

I was very excited to go and see this piece of theatre since all I had read encouraged me to understand this work would be quirky, story-driven and based in peoples lives. Although all those elements are in the work, this text required more support prior to production and the shame of it would be if this piece remains as it is, since the themes and stories within it have strength and magic. At present that strength and magic are not realised on stage. The direction, the acting and all other elements were of a standard which should have translated the material into an exciting evening of theatre but currently the text is not fully formed and requires more development.

Name: Alexandria Patience

Date: 13th October 2005

Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

Please tick 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:

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

1.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
1.1	Vision and imagination	Excellent	Ideas and themes within the work were interesting, evocative and very meaningful to the Scottish community but also have a larger international resonance. Scope within this piece to build and build from the central themes. Sections of writing had strength and beauty. Moments of lift within the piece from storytelling sections blending the traditional oral form and theatre. Strong and longstanding vision to tour work within the Highlands and Islands and to make a commitment to producing work from and about the North and the more remote areas.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Competent	The work seemed unsure of what it really wanted to be - both in writing and production style – hard edged realism, storytelling, off kilter Pinteresque, homosexual, heterosexual and possibly incestuous love story with a lacing of magic realism. Each of the characters had weaknesses that made them interesting but too much was alluded to but not followed through on. Female character left hanging and had little by the way of a believable through line.

2. Strengths and Weaknesses

2.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
2.1	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions	Competent	An interesting start with intriguing development of character and plot but unfortunately the piece then seemed to move erratically with sections of text repeating without advancing the play and unfortunately that pulled strength and sympathy from the characters. The communication of all the themes and threads of the piece seemed to get tangled and choked - perhaps just too many issues in the work to allow it to fly. The female character was really left hanging without too much support. A re-placement of some of her disclosures to much earlier in the play – in particular the unusualness of her inability to complete the mapping and her fascination with the area and the names and even her focus on her work - could have helped us believe in her and have drawn Dan and Anne together in our minds.
2.2	Direction	Good	The production had shape and clipped along but the weaknesses in the script caused problems for us as audience members in staying connected to the characters and their stories. Interesting directorial choices had been made in contrasting tones and colours of characters and performance levels.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	Good	Performers were good and generally delivered solid performances.

2.4	Use of Music ¹	Competent	What was there was appropriate, but more use could have been made of fragments of sound which could have been used to connect the more magical haunting names /stories through other sections of the production.
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	Competent	Seemed there was a desire to create something a little less linear within the play and perhaps a more interesting non-realistic approach earlier could have married these aspects of the play and given it a touch more magic.
2.6	Design ² – including set, costume and lighting design	Good	Good design with interesting areas created for playing spaces. A design style that one audience member commented to me they had seen from the Traverse before in their tours; a tipped up raked stage. Costumes were ok although Anne seemed a bit uncomfortable in hers. The lighting was fine.
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	No general problems. The final action of running the place name-printed fabric through the audience/hall to create a path of shared knowledge which was walked on by the actress was a little out of the style of the rest of the piece. It also created a problem since I understand from the point of running the show and of safety that the audience couldn't be allowed to walk on the fabric but its removal then excluded all of us and this story is ours. Perhaps another visual image could have been more effective. Also the performers exit to the outdoors through the fire door and then having to have a tec open the other fire door for them to re-enter the hall was a bit clumsy and brought an inappropriate laugh from the audience.
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Good	This was a really good selection of production as far as the themes and issues. These were very interesting for this community and for the other venues in the Highlands and Islands. The audience was approx 40 and the reaction was quiet but generally good with some qualification.

¹ 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 parts, and what effect this has on the quality of the production.

² Take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue and, where appropriate, the touring schedule

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.

3.	Criteria	Comments
3.1	Suitability of the venue for the event	Excellent venue for both the show and for the content and themes of the play
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue ³	Excellent to have the programme also be the text of the play, to have it available at the production AND at such an accessible price. I can't say enough how important I think it is that these texts are created and made available. Brilliant
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity ⁴	Very good. Artistically interesting image created to advertise the show and it engages the mind with the concepts of the work before entering the theatre. Lots of publicity materials to be found all over Scotland. Good informative web site.
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	Rural Hall style – phoned up and spoke to the woman who said 'No fears, you can just show up. No need to book' Very friendly although I must admit I would have been more than a bit upset if for any reason they had been sold out – my theory is they would just squeeze people in. No tickets.
3.5	External signage and signposting	I've never been to Coigach Hall before so I was getting a bit nervous when I had gone right through Achiltibuie and hadn't seen a hall and I didn't see a sign for it but I went on a bit further and there it was. It's a single track road but there are times when it branches off in two directions. I would imagine most people going were familiar with the location.
3.6	Internal directional signage	Small but fairly recently built rural Hall so no troubles on signage inside.
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	Good accessibility
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	8pm seemed to me a very good time for the local & regional community to get to Coigach. I recognised members of the audience who had driven from Ullapool. Mention was made by a couple of audience members at the end of the show that they felt it could have been a 1 act show. I was quite comfortable with the 2 act format
3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	Small village hall staffed mainly by locals on the hall committee but there was one staff member from the Traverse who was only selling the programme/script. Generally it was friendly and relaxed
3.10	Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding ⁵	SAC is credited on all materials and in the text programme has a written thank-you acknowledging consistent support during the thirteen years of the Traverse Theatre's Highland Tour & Writers Project. There are also SAC logos crediting core funding support for the company and also for specific funding for this production. On the Traverse web site it is much harder to see the SAC credit. I finally found it only on the Development page.

³ These include programmes, displays etc., including the range, quality and clarity.

⁴ Publicity/pre-publicity (leaflets, posters, etc), including the range, content, and when and where available. Be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event. Also view and comment on the company's website where one is advertised, commenting on the ease of use, and quality of content and presentation, and currency of information

⁵ 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.