



Scottish Arts Council

## ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

**Organisation/Venue:** Dundee Rep, the Tron and Young Genius at the Tron

**Title of Event:** Ubu the King

**Type of Event:** (e.g. performance, work-in-progress, open rehearsal etc.) performance

**Date of Visit:** 8/11/05

**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.)

Excellent

This was an energetic and spirited adaptation of *Ubu* which, set in a run-down, care-less nursing home, revelled in the rude and grotesque to the great appreciation of an enthusiastic audience.

I did find that the production, at times, had to strain to maintain the realism and specificity of the nursing home setting and I wasn't entirely convinced that the high production values were appropriate to such an experimental and anti-establishment piece.

**Name:** Rebecca Robinson

**Date:** 9 / 11 / 05

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.

**Advisor**  
*relevant title*

**Scottish Arts Council Officer**

*Please tick the*

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## 1. Artistic Assessment

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

1.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
1.1	Vision and imagination	Excellent	The setting of the play in a run-down, care-less old peoples home, had the potential for allowing the plays inherent grotesqueness and its relentless Grand Guignolesque nature to be fully explored. Prejudiced notions of old age and its accompanying indignities (ie impotence, incontinence, senility), were used to create, often striking, imagery supported by the strong 'bouffon' style chorus. However, I did find that the production, at times, had to strain to maintain the realism and specificity of the setting. I was also unsure as to whether the high production values of the performance were appropriate to a play that is essentially an experimental, fiercely anti-establishment piece. Nevertheless, I was most definitely not alone in appreciating the staging of this production and it was, without doubt, highly successful in terms of audience reaction. The audience seemed exceptionally receptive and appreciative of this production and, by the end, many enthusiastically accompanied the actors during the pantomime-styled finale song.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Good	Overall, the production conveyed and sustained the anarchic energy and joy of the play. While, at this early stage in the run, the production did sometimes feel slightly episodic, certain scenes stood out for the way in which they encapsulated ideas with great clarity.

## 2. Strengths and Weaknesses

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

2.	Criteria	Rating	Comment and key reasons for rating
2.1	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions	good	David Grieg's adaptation captured the energy and spirit of Jarry's original play whilst at the same time meaningfully and playfully updating it for a contemporary audience and Scottish voice. The script had great assurance and lucidity and, while perhaps no longer able to shock, was, in Greig's own words "funny and anarchic and spirited rather than 'in-yer-face'" (programme).
2.2	Direction	Good	I felt that the play was directed with much confidence, humour and clarity as well as having a very strong and brave overall vision. There was an immediacy and vitality about the direction that helped to sustain the momentum over the sometimes-episodic parts in the play. I felt that, as the run progresses, the pacing of the production will become

			more fluid and the focus more certain.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	Excellent	Gerry Mulgrew and Ann Louise Ross gave wonderfully mischievous, forceful and generous performances as <i>Pa</i> and <i>Ma Ubu</i> while Emun Elliott skilfully met the inherent challenges of his role as <i>The Carer</i> . The strong, supportive chorus comprised 6 actors who were, at times, I felt, somewhat under-used.
2.4	Use of Music <sup>1</sup>	Good	Throughout the performance ‘live’ music came from a pre-programmed piano placed on stage. As well as creating a constant and dynamic live soundtrack, this was a very effective and specific audio and visual reminder that the play was set in a nursing home. Other, pre-recorded, music supported and complemented the action as necessary. The songs, sung live by the company, had a lively, music-hall style and received an enthusiastic response from the audience.
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	Good	Although the actors could have been inhibited by the use of wheel chairs and Zimmer-frames, this was a very embodied, physical production that seemed to be constantly in movement. Humorously choreographed sequences were tightly directed and well executed and, as the run progresses these will, no doubt, grow in confidence and precision.
2.6	Design <sup>2</sup> – including set, costume and lighting design	Excellent	The well constructed and designed set used the stage very effectively. The set provided a neutral backdrop while at the same time creating the impression of a building whose grandeur had faded to be replaced by the blandly utilitarian institution of a nursing home. Though uncluttered, the set cleverly contained a multitude of well-placed props (xmas tree, tv, pay phone, piano, wheel chairs and chairs etc) and was adaptable enough to create different spaces and atmospheres. The costumes all seemed appropriate without being overly eccentric. Though the lighting helped to create some very powerful images, I sometimes felt that there were too many lighting changes/ states. While this added to the creation of a very polished and professional production, as mentioned above (1.1), I sometimes felt that this detracted from the potential rawness and simplicity that the play can allow.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	The production appeared to run smoothly and sound and light levels all seemed good.
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Excellent	There was an audience of approximately 250 people, mainly from the under-40 age range. The audience appeared to be very engaged by the production and there was rapturous applause (and three curtain calls) at the end.

### 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	I thought the Tron was a very suitable venue for this production.
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue <sup>3</sup>	There were posters and flyers clearly displayed in the box office and foyer areas. The programme contained a generous amount of information, including an interview with David Greig and company biogs.
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity <sup>4</sup>	I was aware of a fair amount of pre-publicity (pre-views, posters, flyers) for the production coming from various media outlets. Dundee Rep's website has fairly clear information about the production, including performance dates and prices but I couldn't find a tour schedule.
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	No problem
3.5	External signage and signposting	I was not aware of any external signage or signposting.
3.6	Internal directional signage	Fairly clear.

<sup>3</sup> These include programmes, displays etc., including the range, quality and clarity.

<sup>4</sup> 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

3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	Seemed to be ok.
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Good
3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	Good – all were friendly and efficient.
3.10	Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding <sup>5</sup>	SAC funding was acknowledged on all publicity material that I saw.

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<sup>5</sup> 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.