



Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

**Organisation/Venue:** Visible Fictions at Gilmorehill, Glasgow

**Title of Event:** Big Baby

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

**Date of Visit:** 11/10/05

**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.)

Good

I thought that this production displayed a very distinctive and arresting style and presented a challenging and admirably critical theme for its' target 13+ audience.

I sometimes felt that the script's anti 'results culture' argument at times seemed to come across as an argument against education per se and that the ending, particularly in relation to the target audience, seemed rather uncompromisingly bleak. I also felt that the high-theatrical style wasn't sustained throughout the production and that the set wasn't utilised to its' full potential.

**Name:** Rebecca Robinson

**Date:** 11 / 10 / 05

**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

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	Good	This was a very accomplished and entertaining production that created a distinctive, high-theatrical style and darkly edgy atmosphere. The overall look of the piece – with the sepia-toned set, music-hall costumes and painted actors faces – was, I felt, a seductive and immediately arresting way a capturing the attention of its' target 13+ audience.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Good	I felt that the production's admirable aim - of demanding a young audience to question a social system that values the desire for material success more highly than the quest for learning or meaning - was relatively clearly articulated.

## 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 to excellent	I thought Brendan Murray's energetic and charged script communicated its' central theme through an original narrative that, sometimes, challenged and always arrested its' audiences' imagination. I enjoyed the way that the text fluidly segued between styles, particularly for the narrator – moving from an antiquated style of phraseology to modern slang in the same sentence. I also appreciated the un-patronising expectations demanded of the audience (the production was aimed at the 13+ age group) and the motivation behind the sometimes quite shocking brutality of the narrative (e.g. when the baby is force-fed in order to sell its' shit). My only concerns were that the script's anti 'results culture' argument at times seemed to come across as an argument against education per se and that the ending, particularly in relation to the target audience, seemed rather uncompromisingly bleak (the baby is shot by his parents). Nevertheless, I found it refreshing to see a production rooted in and driven by a desire to change the world for the good.
2.2	Direction	Good	The pacing of the production was very good and disciplined and, I thought, directed with a high degree of professionalism and confidence. I thought the high-theatrical style of the production worked very well however; I felt that this wasn't completely sustained throughout (see 2.3) resulting in a slight loss of 'edge'. I also thought that the set appeared to contain more possibilities than were actually realised

2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	Good	Simon Donaldson as <i>Everybody Else</i> had a confident physical and vocal presence and performed a fantastical array of characters (including a spot-on parody of Tony Blair) with great wit and aplomb. I felt that P J Henry and Claire Knight perhaps struggled with their more realistic, less-heightened – though well-performed - style of acting as <i>John</i> and <i>Janet</i> . David Walshe sensitively and skilfully brought the <i>Baby</i> puppet to life bringing real feeling into this challenging role.
2.4	Use of Music <sup>1</sup>	Good	I thought that the pre-recorded music, composed by Daniel Padden, fitted into the style of the production well though music was, at times, I felt quite sparsely used. The songs sung by the company were all performed with energy and discipline.
2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	Good	The performance began with a high-energy, audience-grabbing, music-hall style dance routine. This, and later choreographed numbers, were all tightly choreographed and arrestingly performed with energy and precision.
2.6	Design <sup>2</sup> – including set, costume and lighting design	Good	The set comprised 7 wooden boxes of varying sizes that covered the stage area - creating a rising island of platforms. Side and back flats - covered with peeling brown paper which revealed glimpses of clouds and the odd cherub or bird - created the sense of a crumbling proscenium arch in sepia tones. Cut-out paper figures peopled the space as required and cardboard cut-out props worked equally well. I thought that the set was effective in terms of the overall vision of the piece – reinforcing the sense of life being forced into order (e.g. the boxes) but also hinting at greater possibilities (e.g. the peeping clouds). I did, however, feel that the boxes could have found more uses and kept expecting them to open and wondered what they held – so, was slightly disappointed that they were so little used. Costumes and make-up (all wore painted faces) added to the sense of high theatricality. I thought that the lighting was sometimes too dim and lacked definition (I was also aware of lighting spill).
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	Technically the standards of the production were good – though I did at times feel that lighting levels were too low and sound levels too high.
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Good	There were approximately 25-30 audience members covering a wide age range; approx 7 under 18's. The audience were quite reserved throughout most of the performance though the audience began to laugh more towards the end and there was appreciative applause at the curtain. I overheard a few people saying that they thought the production was “good”.

<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

### 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	The venue seemed quite suitable for the production.
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue <sup>3</sup>	There were 2 clear displays (with posters, flyers and reviews) in the external foyer and leaflets and programmes at the box office. The free programme was, I thought, of a particularly high quality – both aesthetically and in terms of the information it contained; which included interesting biographies and thoughtfully arranged material which gave added weight to the company's aims in this production.
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity <sup>4</sup>	I thought that the company's website was particularly informative and easy to navigate. The site contained useful information about past and current shows including a tour schedule and reviews. I read a number of very positive reviews about the show. I was aware of some publicity about the show and found flyers in a number of venues in Glasgow.
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	No problems
3.5	External signage and signposting	Because Gilmorehill is housed within the same building as Glasgow University's Theatre, Film and TV department, I think that the venue has a challenge to establish a separate identity for itself as a venue open to the general public. I think that clearer external signage and signposting would help audiences to feel less intimidated at entering what currently feels like a private, university building.
3.6	Internal directional signage	Again, university 'branded' signposting internally maintains this sense of entering a private institution and internal directions to the theatre are not, I feel, very clear.
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	There is a lift to the theatre.
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Timing seemed appropriate – although the performance ran for 15 minutes longer than the 1-hour stated in the programme.

<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

3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	No problems.
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.