Scottish Arts Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

Organisation/Venue: Wee Stories at Universal Hall, Findhorn (NEAT)

Title of Event: The Emperors New Kilt

Type of Event: Performance

Date of Visit: 15 December 2004

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 – at a time of year when children (and parents) are being subjected to over priced, poorly written, soap star laden pantomimes what a joy it is to experience a production of such wit and charm. A production that has all that should be good about pantomime (humour, song, characters, audience participation, pantomime animal, adult jokes – minus smut) but is a strong piece of children's theatre. Far from simply being a good night out (nothing wrong in that) this is a clever piece of story telling that subtly includes some political messages (political with a small 'p' for small people)

Name: Nick Fearne **Date:** 16/12/04

Advisor [X] **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	Excellent	Rather than simply launching into the Hans Christian Andersen tale the company skilfully sets up the story within another story – a family holiday to the Highlands – and introduces the whole idea of seeing what isn't there and not wanting to appear stupid.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Excellent	Although this is a story within a story and all the cast of three play at least three characters there is never any confusion as to who is who or what is happening in the story. As well as basic costume changes the company move in and out of character using simple but repeated devices on stage eg a blanket becoming a headscarf/shawl

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	Excellent	I think this is a reworking of The Laird's New Kilt (which I didn't see) and is based on the HCA story rather than being an adaptation. The script is witty and clever in the way it introduces and reinforces ideas, it has a clear story that subtly conveys a number of messages (including environmental and land issues)
2.2	Direction	Excellent	A well-paced production that avoids the pitfall that assumes shows for children have to be fast moving all the time – children want to listen too. Good use of space, props, costume, music and movement.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in you comments	Excellent	It's a toss up as to who steals the show – Andy Cannon's Ramsey the Sheep or Iain Johnstone's Big Jessie, or his Laird or his confused Eagle and Stag. Iain and Andy are an established 'double act' and they are joined by Louise Montgomery to create a terrific trio. In the hands of others this could so easily have been played over the top.
2.4	Use of Music[1]	Good	Some recorded pre-show music (The Kinks) and one piece of recorded accordion music that Iain Johnston sings to, otherwise Iain plays the accordion live for songs and dance music. There are two superb moments when the accordion is simply made to in/exhale air without producing music, beautifully creating the sound of the sea on the shore.

[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.

2.5	Use of Movement/ Choreography	Good	No choreography as such but some short moments traditional dance. I don't know whether it would be termed movement as such but Andy Cannon's Ramsey the Sheep is very well realised.
2.6	Design[2] – including set, costume and lighting design	Excellent	A beautiful but simple backcloth comprising a loch and hills landscape made from a collage of sewn pieces of cloth/material. Costume is simple but effective – blankets as kilts, woolly jumpers as wool/fleece. A moveable clothes rail transforms into a cow, wooden coat hangers are antlers, a red glove flames from a fire. As this is a touring show lighting resources are limited but a number of lighting states are effectively used
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	Again, given the limitations of touring the show was professionally presented with no apparent problems re. sound and lighting cues.
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Excellent	The packed house (approx 300) loved this show. There were parties there (eg Cubs) who were obviously out on their Christmas panto trip. But this was some much better and so much more fun than they would have had at the panto (and half the price!). People standing and applauding.

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	Ideal for this show – audience on 3 sides (tiered) with seating on the floor bringing the audience close to the action
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue[3]	Simple A4 programmes with a quiz and game on (free)
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity[4]	Posters and good press coverage (including colour photo). On NEAT, Wee Stories and HI-Arts websites.

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

[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

3.4	Ease of booking and payment	Fine. Performance was also on sale online on 'the booth' the new online ticketing facility set up by HI-Arts. A number of sales were made online.
3.5	External signage and signposting	N/a
3.6	Internal directional signage	N/a
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	Wheelchair access
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	7pm start. Finish 9pm approx (incl interval). A good length
3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	Good. With a lot of kids it would have been advisable to have a table selling juice rather than everybody having to queue at the cafe
3.10	Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding[5]	SAC logo on posters, flyers, programmes and Wee Stories website.

[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.