



Scottish Arts Council

## ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DRAMA

**Organisation/Venue:** Wee Stories Theatre Company, Theatre Royal, Glasgow

**Title of Event:** Arthur - the story of a king

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

**Date of Visit:** 9 September 2005

**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.)

**Overall rating - excellent**

Strengths - excellent story-telling skills by all the performers, strong script and direction, fantastic use of live and taped music, good production values, and an ambitious choice of topic which really works, giving young audiences a first class piece of theatre.

Weaknesses - could be there were too many references unknown to young audiences, eg The Bay City Rollers? My young friend thought there were more jokes for the adults than the children, otherwise he thought it was 'brilliant'. (This was his very first visit to a big theatre).

I think this an excellent piece of theatre for young audiences. It takes a very complex story and brings it imaginatively to life, and always with the proviso that there is room for other interpretations of what really happened, encouraging the audience throughout to read books about Arthur's life and times.

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.

Name: Phyllis Steel

Date: 30 / 9 /2005

Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

*Please tick the relevant title*

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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	To take the story of King Arthur and stage it in such an inventive way that the audience - young and old - remain fully engaged in the complexity of myth, legend, fact and fiction is no mean feat. Wee Stories takes us into the unfamiliar with the very familiar, for at some point we have all cut out the characters on the back of cornflake boxes, or made the boxes into something from our imagination. The audience easily and immediately buys into the world we are taken to by Andy, Iain and David.
1.2	Clarity of Communication	Excellent	The story of Arthur is complex and shrouded in myths and legends. However, the inventive script and the use of the performers being themselves and then becoming Arthurian characters enables the story to be neatly unravelled in a truly engaging way.

## 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	The story of King Arthur is an ambitious undertaking to relate to a young audience. The script, however, cut to the chase with great clarity, always reminding the audience that some 'facts' might be 'fiction' and vice versa. The sharpness of the script allowed the performers to make the transition from being themselves with lively dialogue and jokes into becoming Arthur or Red King of the North or to transform a plain piece of red material into a Merlin puppet with great effect. Each scene was well judged in timing and the amount of information being related. In my view this story of King Arthur will remain with the audience for a very long time. The script worked well on different levels: for all the audience it painted a wonderful picture of Arthurian times, with knights, a queen, battles of honour, the mysterious powers of Excaliber and the values and principles of the Knights of the Round Table; for adults there was some added banter, jokes and modern references; for the children a truly engrossing story of Arthur, his values and principles, and the power of good over evil.

2.2	Direction	Excellent	The overall direction was very strong and, in my opinion, seamless between the two directors. There was very good use of the large performing area; the well integrated use of live and taped music, along with the banner screens showing medieval replicas of the characters we were learning about. I really appreciated the inventive use of the cornflakes boxes, the simple but effective use of the metal spatulas during the sword fights and the instantaneous creation of Merlin from a piece of red material. Overall, the direction was tight and highly imaginative and undoubtedly achieved the aim of telling a very complicated story in an enjoyable and memorable way.
2.3	Standard of Performers – where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments	Good	The three actors played being themselves and moved in and out of their different Arthurian characters with great ease and professionalism. The different relationships with each other were quickly established at each stage of the story, and as themselves they indulged in healthy banter which included some audience participation. (The small number in the audience may have made this more difficult for the actors, but certainly not noticeable by the audience).
2.4	Use of Music <sup>1</sup>	Excellent	Orff's <i>Carmina Burana</i> is a big, powerful and dramatic score, well used in the build up of tension and conflict, and contrasted well with the much more subdued, lyrical and mythical Gaelic songs beautifully sung and accompanied by clarsach, cello and violin. Both live and taped music added great substance and gave a real sense of the Dark Ages, the landscape and the characters in the story. The piano playing was extremely good and mainly enhanced all the comic scenes as well as creating mood and ambience.
2.5	Use of Movement/Choreography		N/A
2.6	Design <sup>2</sup> – including set, costume and lighting design	Good	The three performers' were in dinner/evening suits; there was a grand piano and some candelabra - in essence a cabaret setting - which was all in great contrast to the story they were telling. This juxtaposition worked exceptionally well, enabling the characters to transform quickly and easily to becoming, for example, a knight - the cornflake packet became a helmet - or in combat - the clash of swords effectively made by a couple of metal spatulas. The 'setting' of the table with candles beautifully tells of Arthur's Knights of

<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

			<p>the Round Table, naming them one by one - you could almost see them taking their places.</p> <p>The projected images were well integrated with the story as was the lighting for the scenes with musicians and singers behind the cyclorama. These scenes were haunting and forlorn but, I felt, not frightening. The costumes for the singers and musicians, the lighting and sound effects all echoed a sense of a time long ago and a place far, far away.</p>
2.7	Technical Standards – was the production professionally presented from a technical point of view	Good	<p>In the first half of the piece there were some problems with the sound levels of the radio mics which was resolved after the interval.</p> <p>Otherwise, all the technical aspects of the production were very well presented.</p>
2.8	Audience Response – appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size and reaction	Excellent	<p>The audience was fully engaged throughout the show, enjoying the banter between the characters and captivated by the story of Arthur, Merlin, Lancelot and all the other Knights of the Round Table.</p> <p>The audience in the stalls was about 55-60 and I think there was about 30 in the first circle. A poor house given the potential full house of (<i>circa</i>) 800 (?)</p>

### 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 set looked good and worked well on the large stage of Theatre Royal. There was a great sense of grandness when Andy and Iain as themselves reveal their evening/dinner suits, then the large velvet curtains open and we moved into the Dark Ages and Arthur's story.
3.2	Information/ interpretive material at venue <sup>3</sup>	I was not aware of any other material, programmes or information about the performance in the foyer. The programme was handed out at the end, which was fine, because this doubled as an information and quiz sheet for the audience to complete after the show. This was of reasonable print quality for a 'worksheet'.
3.3	Publicity/ pre-publicity <sup>4</sup>	The show was well publicised in Theatre Royal's season brochure and on Wee Stories website.
3.4	Ease of booking and payment	I had no problems at all when booking and was dealt with friendly and efficient box office staff.

<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

3.5	External signage and signposting	There is one AA sign for Theatre Royal at the corner of Bath and Hope Streets, otherwise I am not aware of further signposting. The theatre is a dominant building at the top of Hope Street but it looks somewhat dowdy and run-down.
3.6	Internal directional signage	I had difficulty in finding the toilets, and eventually got directions from front-of-house staff.
3.7	Access and provision for disabled people	This seemed adequate from an able-bodied person's perspective; access toilet was well signed but I was not aware of any other access equipment for audiences with hearing or visual impairments, for example.
3.8	Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The start time was 7pm and finished by 9pm which seemed ideal for the age range of the children and families attending. The duration of the show seemed absolutely appropriate for the target audience.
3.9	Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g., box office, front of house and bar/catering)	I have no complaints about booking or front-of-house staff - they were all friendly and efficient. I originally booked to see the show at a school matinee, but the school shows were cancelled. It was very disappointing to see the show with such a small audience. The ticket prices may be an issue for schools and although group discounts may have been offered, the ticket price did seem high. My ticket was £13 and for children £9 for the evening show.
3.10	Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding <sup>5</sup>	The SAC logo was in a prominent position in the programme-cum-information-cum-worksheet.

<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.