

Letters to the Living, Songs to the Dead

**an informal sharing of work in progress
on Saturday, July 19 2014 at The Forest Garden, Wimborne**

AUDIENCE EVALUATION

Summary

There were two performances in front of a small invited audience (a. 20 – 25) at 5 pm and 6 pm.

The audience was invited to complete a short evaluation form after each performance. There was a good response to this with 14 forms returned after the 5 pm performance and 13 after the 6 pm performance. In some cases joint responses were returned.

Responses were generally very positive. The audience identified a wide range of scenes and images as most effective but identified particularly: the children's scene (8), the soldiers coming over the hill (8), the soldier and nurse (7) and the roll-call of names and laying flowers on the hill (5).

Elements of the production identified as less satisfactory mostly focussed on difficulties with audibility, either due to background traffic noise or the actors' voices being too quiet. Several found the opening scene either unclear or confusing and in the 6 pm performance particularly, some people felt the background sound was too loud or distracting.

Most felt they had gained some insight into what it was like in Wimborne in the First World War and commented on the use of details, such as local names and places, the roll-call of names, the role of women and children and conkers. However, some would have liked more background or context (5).

The vast majority of the audience felt the site and sounds contributed greatly to the atmosphere with the few negative comments being about the traffic noise or occasional problems with inaudibility.

Further thoughts about the production included: comments on the age range, diversity and inclusivity of the group; the reflections it had evoked about war; the positive effect it had had on the children who participated; the excellent costumes and use of props around the site as well as congratulations to the participants and the hope that the work should continue, e.g.

Totally immersive – brilliant! Lovely to see such a mix of ages working together. Community theatre at its best. Fantastic use of the young people. Well done! What theatre is all about for me. ☺

Responses

1. In your opinion, which scene or images were most effective?

5 pm Performance

- Scenes involving the children.
- Soldiers coming over the top with guns.
- Reading names and putting down flowers.
- Over the top (trenches!)
- List of names (in audio)]
- Reveal that character was invalid/patient.
- The 'schoolroom' scene in the woods.
- The nurse coming to find Mr Cuff.
- The roll call at the end over the music.
- Poem recited by beautiful old lady.
- Crossing the front line over the mound.
- Children re-enactment and death – heartbreaking.
- Solo patient from Colehill Hospital – so striking.
- I thought all scenes were effective.
- The sound in the background set the scene well.
- Flowers on the hill.
- The kids.
- All in different ways, especially the wounded soldier and the children's scene.
- Walking through the garden.
- The Reverend Fletcher speaking to the school children.
- The reading of poetry.
- The children singing.
- Great costumes.
- Entry was very atmospheric although overlapping sound effects were a little distracting.
- Liked the props dotted around in the sun.
- Jack being led away at the end, children being left alone.
- Children round the hill.
- Nurse collecting the soldier.
- Entrance as we went in.
- Good use of hill – particularly when soldiers came over.

6 pm Performance

- Soldiers over the hill.
- The children's scene with dialogue plus the hidden voices at the beginning.
- When the troops came over the top with sticks as guns.
- Surround sound was effective: added to the atmosphere
- The children's scenes.
- The young children and the patient.
- Excellent environment and atmosphere.
- Hidden sounds very interesting.
- Children's scenes.

- When the soldiers came up over the mound – fixed eyes and sticks. Also, reading of names and laying of flowers at end.
- The children
- Patient from hospital.
- Silence of movement.
- Singing songs.
- Not sure.
- Great.
- Gathering of troops over the mound – felt the drama and the fear.
- Lady in the chair was very evocative.
- All very good and thought provoking.

2. Which were less satisfactory? And why?

5 pm Performance

- Initial wander round the site, following the soldier – I wasn't really involved at that point – not clear what it was all about.
- Scene in the hut less effective.
- The lady reciting *Pro Patria* etc.
- Those where you couldn't hear/see.
- Not applicable ☺
- Not applicable – I thought all scenes were effective.
- None.
- Traffic noise was a bit distracting.
- Started a little slow but picked up
- Couldn't always hear.
- Soldier scene a little slow and unclear.
- Perhaps slightly disjointed sound effects.
- Difficult to hear some people's voices from bushes.
- More detail specific to Wimborne would be interesting.
- Venue – traffic noise impaired ability to hear the commentary.
- Couldn't hear everything when going around.
- Some actors' voices too quiet in bushes.

6 pm Performance

- Background traffic noise.
- The noise to begin with was too loud.
- None
- Those with limited dialogue.
- At times it was hard to hear.
- Music too loud for the voices at the beginning.
- The initial walkaround – struggled with the dissonance of different sounds.
- Background of sounds – could not hear words.
- Beginning scene was a little confusing.
- Ken's opening scene – couldn't hear, music still on, much too loud + traffic.
- Not much, only criticism was that it was hard to hear actors when moving with music in the background. Cars on the road made it tricky to hear the soldiers.

- Some sound a bit faint.
- All excellent.
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3. To what extent did the play give insight into what it was like in Wimborne in the First World War?

5 pm Performance

- It gave a good insight into who was involved and how. The reading of the roll call and the dead was significant.
- Good insight.
- Very much – would be nice to know that the list of names were genuine Wimborne soldiers (address perhaps to bring it home?).
- Reasonably well.
- Great facts clearly delivered – more of this would be great.
- Gave a good insight into the role children played.
- Really brought across the severity of the effect of war.
- Yes, good.
- Very good.
- Atmosphere and setting was appropriate to give a feeling of World War One (except occasional traffic noise.)
- Very good – super setting – not too large. Very atmospheric.
- We met some individuals – their particular stories could have helped root it in place.
- Given it was a short piece – effective. Some more context to the town itself?
- More general than specific to Wimborne.

6 pm Performance

- Very much so – it's a shame the rest of Allenbourn didn't watch it.
- Certainly. It was when the names were read out. I knew of them.
- Very well, I think.
- More than I was aware of.
- I felt it was very good. Interesting to see it from the children's perspective.
- Reasonable.
- Very good.
- Very moving. It made me very quiet and thoughtful.
- The small details about what happened gave me new knowledge.
- Good to hear about daily things like conkers. Might otherwise think there was no impact, unless, of course, bereaved.
- Much – it had the sense that all parts of the community were affected. Learnt about women's and children's role.
- Movingly. The list of names at the end was very moving.
- Using local place names and people's names.

4. To what extent do you feel the sounds and site contributed to the atmosphere?

5 pm Performance

- The site was excellent in conveying the idea of a battlefield.

- Unkempt nature of the garden made for realistic backdrop.
- Site – fantastic! Audio – slightly confused at the start although added to disorientation.
- Helpful for audience to walk round and gain an “impression” – less helpful in terms of hearing and seeing.
- The use of the site was fantastic – great use of the levels and surround sound – great!
- Very much. Set the proper mood/tone.
- Really brought across the severity of the effect of war (as previous question).
- Very suitable.
- Very good.
- Site was very appropriate and atmospheric
- Slightly confusing sound effects but overall very good.
- Excellent site for all scenes, especially the hill. Sounds from outside were a bit distracting.
- Good use of site. Bit of noise from the road.
- A lot – loved the music as we went around.

6 pm Performance

- Tremendously.
- Well, at the end – yes.
- All brilliant.
- Very much. It made it a very moving experience.
- Played a major part. A good spot.
- Traffic was a nuisance.
- Site – effectively used small space. Sound – sometimes difficult to hear.
- When there were no spoken words, very good.
- In places sounds were too loud.
- Mound – used very effectively.
- Sounds were excellent. Created a sense of fear, solemnity but also contrasted with the lightness of the children.
- Enormously. And the greenery and ups and downs.
- Very good as near the Minster

5. Any other thoughts?

5 pm Performance

- Not enough time to put them into words!
- Scenes made you think about what it was like. Children made an effective contribution to theatre presentation.
- For those unfamiliar with Wimborne history, just a little more “background” might be helpful.
- Totally immersive – brilliant! Lovely to see such a mix of ages working together. Community theatre at its best. Fantastic use of the young people. Well done! What theatre is all about for me. 😊
- Excellent. Well done to all!
- I was genuinely drawn into the performance.

- Enjoyable and informative.
- Really enjoyed the performance as did Charlie performing! Many thanks.
- Children's activities very realistic.
- Created good atmosphere – sense of foreboding. Perhaps initially, a bit more information at the start about context.
- Children were excellent and brought home how it was for them. Children's argument.
- Nurse Coggin fetching wounded soldier was very effective.

6 pm Performance

- Wish it could continue. It has increased my son's confidence and social skills tremendously.
- It was great.
- Well done all.
- Please continue.
- Look forward to the next one.
- Useful pause for thought and way of considering the anniversary (centenary).
- Mixture of adults and children very good. Very atmospheric and a thought that war is not very far away with bodies in the fields even today.
- As it was open-air, voices could be louder.
- Traffic noise was rather intrusive. "Voices off" often not audible, especially in early scenes.
- Excellent – fantastic to see such diverse inclusion from young to old.
- A wonderful concept. Very moving, thought provoking, very unique.
- Age range amazing.
- Research emerged – local names and places.
- I came to the second performance and as I waited a small boy pleaded with his mother to see it again. I can see why.
- Very evocative.
- Costumes excellent.

Barbara Hart
 (for Wimborne Community Theatre)
 24th July 2014