

## Appendix 2: Arts Council/Abbey Theatre Critical Evaluation Report Form (CER)



ARN: 02003

### ARTS COUNCIL CRITICAL EVALUATION REPORT – ABBEY THEATRE

DATE:	8 <sup>th</sup> September 2013
PLAY/AUTHOR:	<b><i>The Hanging Gardens by Frank McGuinness</i></b>
CREATIVE TEAM:	Directed by Patrick Mason, Designed by Michael Pavelka, Lighting Davy Cunningham
PERFORMERS:	Cathy Belton, Barbara Brennan, Niall Buggy, Declan Conlon & Marty Rea

Please ascribe a value for each criterion below. It is important to keep in mind what the numbers represent in **language**, and not the value of the number itself.

- 1 – Falls below what would generally be regarded as an acceptable standard for professional theatre presentation
- 2 – Achieves an acceptable standard, but not much more in terms of technique, ambition, innovation or quality
- 3 – Is good in terms of overall standard
- 4 – Is very good in terms of standard
- 5 – Is of an excellent standard in the view of the assessor

CRITERION	VALUE
<b>The Abbey's Mission</b> ( <i>The Abbey Theatre, as Ireland's national theatre, has a cultural, social and political role in Irish society. Its stated mission is to "to create world-class theatre that actively engages with and reflects Irish society." To what extent does the production deliver on and reflect this role and this mission?</i> )	3
Please comment briefly on your score here: A domestic Irish family drama about a writer, his wife and three very different children. The plays themes of alzheimers or senile dementia, false memory syndrome, old age and death are amply explored and seemed to resonate with an older, and, what looked-like, a reasonably affluent middle-class audience.	
<b>Ambition</b> ( <i>innovation, risk-taking, originality</i> )	3

Please comment briefly on your score here	
<p>Not a particularly challenging evening in terms of structure or style. The writing, as to be expected from Frank McGuinness, was assured – a particularly lovely interchange between husband and wife about the telling of a joke in the first act. But this play was certainly far from his best work, the plot structure was often predictable and the narrative somewhat thin. The relationships between parents and siblings lost interest in the length of their telling</p>	
<b>Execution</b> ( <i>quality of technique, skill, performance, scenography, direction, etc.</i> )	3
Please comment briefly on your score here:	
<p>A good production with two inspired central performances from Buggy and Brennan and the cast around them also very assured. The set was uninspired – especially considering the imaginative leap that the title suggested. Sadly it was both old-fashioned, and aesthetically disappointing.</p>	
<b>Effectiveness</b> ( <i>connection with the audience, engagement &amp; response, the extent to which piece affects change and leaves a lasting impression</i> )	4
Please comment briefly on your score here	
<p>The auditorium was about 75% full on a Friday night. The audience was extremely attentive, and rewarded the actors with a rousing ovation. Many stood at the curtain call. Senile dementia and loss of memory is a difficult subject and certainly worth exploring in the theatre, and obviously it did strike a chord with many in the audience, but I felt that the reaction of the audience was more in appreciation of the actors than the play – but that is a subjective judgement.</p>	
<b>Excellence</b> ( <i>the extent to which, in the view of the assessor, the work presented is excellent when compared to best international practice, i.e. the extent to which the work is "world class"</i> )	3
Please comment briefly on your score here	
<p>I thought this good overall, but not world-class.</p>	
<b>Quality of New Writing</b> ( <i>in the case of new writing, dramaturgical technique as well as artistic ambition and originality will be taken into account</i> )	3
Please comment briefly on your score here	
<p>I cannot say that I feel confident that if this play was by unknown writer it would have received the attention that it did, or even necessarily have been staged by the Abbey. It was well within the genre of Irish family drama and as such seemed neither particularly original or exciting. This was not Frank McGuinness at his best, and if compared to <i>The House</i> (beautifully revived by the Abbey last year) or Friel's</p>	

Aristocrats it looked uninspired and somewhat pedestrian. The subject is interesting and this is a writer who has the ability to explore it in exciting and challenging way, but sadly this play did not do so.

**Any other comments:**

Sad to see the auditorium only about 60% full for one of the final performances of the run. Not the fault of the Abbey, but perhaps it was slightly risky to programme such a difficult political play in the run-up to Christmas.

**Report Completed**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



# Arts Council/Abbey Theatre Critical Evaluation Report Form (CER)



ARN: 02003

## ARTS COUNCIL CRITICAL EVALUATION REPORT – ABBEY THEATRE

DATE:	5 October 2013
PLAY/AUTHOR:	<b><i>The Hanging Gardens by Frank McGuinness</i></b>
CREATIVE TEAM:	Director: Patrick Mason, Set Design: Michael Pavelka, Lighting Design: Davy Cunningham, Costume Design: Joan O'Clery, Sound Design: Denis Clohessy, Voice Director: Andrea Ainsworth.
PERFORMERS:	Cathy Belton, Barbara Brennan, Niall Buggy, Declan Conlan, Marty Rea

Please ascribe a value for each criterion below. It is important to keep in mind what the numbers represent in **language**, and not the value of the number itself.

- 1 – Falls below what would generally be regarded as an acceptable standard for professional theatre presentation
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CRITERION	VALUE
<b>The Abbey's Mission</b> ( <i>The Abbey Theatre, as Ireland's national theatre, has a cultural, social and political role in Irish society. Its stated mission is to "to create world-class theatre that actively engages with and reflects Irish society." To what extent does the production deliver on and reflect this role and this mission?</i> )	4
This is the first new original play from Frank McGuinness in 14 years, which tackled a range of contemporary issues but focused on dementia and modern families. It fits the Abbey's Mission to commission and produce a new full-length play from a master Irish playwright.	
<b>Ambition</b> ( <i>innovation, risk-taking, originality</i> )	3
It had a couple of good parts for older actors and while some of the topics received some refreshment the device of using a family reunion to bring these issues to a head is more regularly seen.	

<b>Execution</b> ( <i>quality of technique, skill, performance, scenography, direction, etc.</i> )	4
<p>Acting was good throughout. [REDACTED] gave a powerful performance as [REDACTED] gave a thoughtful and impressive performance as the [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] was sparky as the lawyer daughter [REDACTED].</p> <p>The Direction was light touch and kept the production from getting too static. Set was not to my taste and I found my eyes regularly being drawn to the lumpy section of lawn. The set was a bit nondescript given that one of the characters was supposed to be a well-known gardening author. Nice rain effect to open and the sundial was a subtle mechanism for tracking the passing of time over the course of the day.</p>	
<b>Effectiveness</b> ( <i>connection with the audience, engagement &amp; response, the extent to which piece affects change and leaves a lasting impression</i> )	4
<p>Good house were very appreciative and given how early it was in the run the cast were well on top of it. It makes for an interesting evening at the theatre but didn't leave me with particularly lasting impression</p>	
<b>Excellence</b> ( <i>the extent to which, in the view of the assessor, the work presented is excellent when compared to best international practice, i.e. the extent to which the work is "world class"</i> )	4
<p>This is a good production of a difficult play. Visually the production could have been better but the direction was good and the performances were excellent given that some of the smaller parts were quite underwritten.</p>	
<b>Quality of New Writing</b> ( <i>in the case of new writing, dramaturgical technique as well as artistic ambition and originality will be taken into account</i> )	3
<p>The structure of the play does make it quite ponderous at times and the children seemed to be a collection of contemporary issues to be commented on and ticked off as the play progressed. There was some lovely poetic line by line writing and I'm sure it would translate well to radio.</p>	
<b>Any other comments:</b>	
<p>This was a preview performance, which looked ready to open. Programme/script was available which included multiple acknowledgements for Arts Council financial support.</p>	
<b>Report Completed by:</b>	[REDACTED]