

# tête à tête

## THE SALAD DAYS EVALUATION NOVEMBER 2009



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Evaluation Data - compiled and written up by Eleanor Baugh December 2009

### **1. Main report: Introduction and Aims of the Production**

*Salad Days* was Tête à Tête’s first ‘Musical’. The work is an old review piece, written by Julian Slade and Dorothy Reynolds and first performed in 1954. It was written to help the Bristol Old Vic Theatre which was then in serious trouble. It premiered at the Bristol Old Vic in 1954, and transferred to the Vaudeville Theatre in London on August 5 of that year, running for 2,283 performances to become the longest-running show in British musical theatre history. It thus saved the theatre and the Bristol Old Vic theatre school.

When one of Tête à Tête’s major sponsors reneged on its contract earlier this year, the company’s response was immediately to put on a happy show which once saved another company. It was also an opportunity to bring some joy in these dreary times of recession and to bring back memories for some of our faithful/ loyal audience members.

For this production the Studio was transformed in to a park. Presented in traverse on one side there were tiers of Cafe Tables in cabaret style spilling on to the astroturfed main performance space in the centre, with the turf continuing up on the other side to tiers of In the Park seating, then up to rows of standard Theatre seating.

Tête à Tête’s aims in staging the production all fit within the company’s overall mission to “bring uplifting, surprising, daring and intimate productions of the highest quality to the widest possible public”; but an opera company putting on a musical?

Specific aims for this production were

- a. To introduce fresh new/young talents
- b. To produce high quality, accessible and affordable work
- c. To move, inspire and delight people
- d. To challenge the company with a totally new direction and widen the audience base

This evaluation is based on the feedback forms from audience members, comments from the cast and from the venue, and box office data.

## 2. Outcomes

### 2.1 List of shows and ticket sales

The work was performed on 10 nights between 12-22 November 2009 at The Riverside Studios, Hammersmith. The studio used for the performances had a capacity of 250.

#### Attendance for each night:

DATE	AUDIENCE	COMPS EACH PERF
Thursday 12/11	246	0
Friday 13/11	106	40 (Press Night)
Saturday 14/11	47	5
	138	12
Sunday 15/11	107	7
Tuesday 17/11	203	14
Wednesday 18/11	204	15
Thursday 19/11	158	16
Friday 20/11	224	19
Saturday 21/11	218	12
	229	15
Sunday 22/11	225	17
Total	2105	172

In total 2277 people out of a possible 3000 saw the 12 performances – an average of 189 tickets a night or average of 70% attendance. 2105 were paying audience members, exceeding the company’s target of 1950.

Tickets were:

Preview: Pay What You Can

In the Cafe: £35/no concessions (ticket included Pimms or fruit punch and cucumber sandwiches)

In the Theatre: £25/£12 disabled only

In the Park: £15/£10

### 3.3 Financial outturn

The production finished with a £21,000 deficit, as predicted at the final budgeting stage prior to opening, and agreed by the Board. The reason for this was the short timescale from making the decision to stage the production to opening night, forced upon the organisation following the sponsor renegeing on the funding contract mentioned in section 1.

- It meant that all funds had to be raised from scratch, and it was only 5 weeks before opening that the funding to ensure the production could go ahead was in place.
- Without reserves, no commitments to purchases or personnel could be made until funds were in place.
- This resulted in a suppliers market when asking companies to supply eg set and props, lights, costumes, and crew on a quick turnaround.

## 4. Audience Feedback Evaluation

### 4.1 Methodology

Feedback was via an audience questionnaire distributed to audience members as they left the show. Tête à Tête Front of House and Marketing team were on hand to encourage people to complete forms and/or sign up to the email subscribers list.

The form collected both quantitative and qualitative feedback from the audience as well as some demographic data. The form used was an adapted version of the 2008 *Cumnor Affair* form. This allows comparison with some of the last Autumn Production evaluation data.

In total 452 forms were completed, giving a return rate of 22% of paying audience - exactly the same as for the previous year's production. This is a high data capture response rate.

### 4.2 Results for Production content

#### 4.2.1 Scoring ratings for quality of experience

The following numbers/ ratings were used:

1="Sorry, didn't work for me"; 2 = "not bad, but could have been better"; 3 = "good worked for me for sure"; 4 = "Look at me – I'm dancing". Some audience members filled in 4+ which must be taken as a positive response.

These are designed to be a humorous take on the usual rating definitions. It is intended that 1 and 2 are used to express a negative opinion, whilst 3 and 4 are positive.

When asked to rate the overall quality of their experience, results break down as follows

Rating	Experience	Quality
4+	0.5%	1%
4	92%	89%
3	7%	10%
2	0.5%	0%
1	0%	0%

Total Responses      409                      404

90% of the respondents gave overall quality the maximum score, and 92.5% gave overall experience the maximum score. Overall, 99% of respondents expressed a positive opinion. This is an extremely high level of approval, higher than that for the 2008 autumn evaluation (95%). Further analysis below suggests this reflects the fact that this was a 'loved' piece given a unique production.

#### Individual element ratings:

Rating	Music	Plot	Singing	Acting	Dancing	Musicians	Production
4+	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.7%	2.7%	1.8%	1.2%
4	88%	66%	85%	85.2%	86.3%	90%	91%
3	11%	31%	14%	13%	10.5%	7.7%	7.3%
2	0.5%	2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%
1	0%	0.5%	0.2%	0%	0%	0%	0.1%

**Total Responses**            412            408            411            413            409            413            411

Ratings for individual elements of the production also show a very high level of approval.

For those who had given scores of 1 or 2 for the plot or production, it should be noted that the great majority still rated the performance and their evening's experience very positively.

#### 4.2.2 Would they attend again and would they recommend Tête à Tête to anyone else?

	Attend again?	Recommend?
Yes	99.5%	99.7%
No	0.5%	0.3%
<b>Total responses</b>	407	404

As with the 2008 production of *Cumnor Affair*, a very strong positive answer is given to both questions. In terms of numbers of people answering no, this is only 2 people and 1 person respectively.

The feedback forms also show that 40% of respondents gave their address for the mailing list. A further 20% indicated that they were already on it. Whilst these are good figures, it does show that intent to attend again did not necessarily translate into closer engagement with Tête à Tête.

#### 4.2.3 Did the experience change their opinion of what new opera could be?

This question is included in all previous evaluations but was not included in this evaluation since the piece is a Musical and not an Opera.

#### 4.2.4 Choose from a list of given words to describe the experience

Respondents were given a list of 22 words and asked to choose three which best described their experience. This question was intended to shed more light on the answers given to the questions above and to collect some form of qualitative feedback, without people feeling they had to write comments. There is a noticeable use of positive and few negative words and phrases, with many of them with more than 3 circled.

Words	Numbers	%
Loved it	290	20.3%
Joyous	229	16%
Put a spring in my step	197	13.8%
Funny	164	11.5%
Great Night out	150	10.5%
Polished	105	7.3%
Unforgettable	73	5%
Quality	68	4.8%
Original	53	3.7%
Passionate	32	2.2%

<b>Intelligent</b>	29	2%
<b>Yellow</b>	19	1.3%
<b>Confusing</b>	2	0.1%
<b>Un-engaging</b>	2	0.1%
<b>Unfinished</b>	2	0.1%
<b>Second Rate</b>	1 (1 <sup>st</sup> rate)	0.07%
<b>Serious</b>	1	0.07%
<b>Challenging</b>	1	0.07%
<b>Dull</b>	1	0.07%
<b>Not my cup of tea</b>	0	0%
<b>Commonplace</b>	0	0%
<b>Should have stayed on the sofa</b>	0	0%
<b>Others...</b>	10 (positive)	0.7%

In general, the order of words on this list shows that the production was of high quality, accessible, and much enjoyed. As with the 2008 autumn production evaluation, positive words occupy the top half of the table and negative words the bottom.

It is interesting to note the presence of the word ‘challenging’ so far down the list; for the 2009 Opera Festival, with very different repertoire, it appears in the top 5.

This shows Tête à Tête meeting a new challenge of putting on an uncharacteristic production yet still producing excellent quality and maintaining its standard of production.

#### 4.2.5 Qualitative Feedback

Respondents were given space to add any comments. Some suggestions for content had been given as

- commenting on any of the answers they had given on the rest of the form
- What they liked best or what we could have done better.
- commenting on non artistic aspects of their experience – ticket price, venue, marketing etc

Just under ¾ of respondents gave some kind of written feedback about their experience, most of which was on their experience of the event and the artistic content of the production. This is encouraging as it shows people were engaged and inspired by this production.

The following themes emerged from their replies:

The overall quality of the production and experience is noted by many:

- “The dancing/ choreography flowed effortlessly with the singing.”
- “Very professional and singing and acting with super attention to minute detail made the show excellent.”
- “All the cast were outstanding”
- “Brilliant diction from the cast without mics, could hear everything perfectly!”

The set and production in particular attract praise:

- “Wonderful Idea and design of the set and a brilliant use of the space.”
- “Lovely to be traverse stage and involve the audience!”
- “The costumes, hairstyles and vocal talents were perfect!”
- “Loved the cafe tables with the Pimms and perfect Cucumber sandwiches, set the scene perfectly.”

One common theme in comments on the music style and lyrics:

- “The music and lyrics fabulous and fresh.”
- “Splendid stuff I truly wanted to end up dancing!”
- “Full admiration for the musicians and their improvisation skills.”
- “Most wonderful interpretation and true to the original piece.”

In terms of the drama and plot:

- “Loved the simplicity, humour and fun.”
- “Took me right back to my Cambridge days!”

- “Had me singing in my seat.”
- “Cut the Fashion show scene” (many times)

In terms of non-artistic elements commented on, ticket prices are one theme:

- “Preview Pay what you can idea was brilliant.”
- “Happy with the prices but confused by the labels given to the different types.”
- “Elderly should have been given discount in theatre seats, we need back support too you know!”
- “Ticket prices - fair. A good price.”

Air Conditioning was another:

- “Beautiful production, but TOO HOT!”
- “So much fun! Great juxtaposition of plot, funny characters, music, period. Need Air Conditioning.”
- “Get some Air conditioning; those at the back under the yellow lights were baking.”

Some people who usually prefer opera said they really had an ‘enchanting evening’ and ‘thoroughly enjoyed it’. The most common comments coming through were:

- When and where will it be produced again?
- Why was the run so short?

## 4.3 Results for Demographics

### 4.3.1 Previous experience with opera and new opera

Respondents were asked to indicate when they had last seen Musical theatre, an opera and a new opera.

Have seen in...	Musical theatre	Seen opera	Seen new opera
last 6 months	55%	43%	16%
last year	29.5%	22%	17%
last 5 years	15%	25%	26%
never	0.5%	10%	41%
<b>Total responses</b>	371	366	333

Although targets for ‘new to opera’ or for ‘new opera’ would not have been relevant, the question was asked so that the data could be compared with previous productions, particularly given that Tête à Tête has seen both of these categories growing in the past two years. It shows that this audience is made up of people who visit opera and new opera less frequently than Tête à Tête’s previous Autumn productions (eg. Cumnor Affair Autumn 08 - 70% seen opera and 44% seen new opera in the past 6 months). It also shows that over half of the audience had been to other musical theatre recently.

### 4.3.2 Age range

Age	No	%
Under 16	8	2%
17-22	11	3%
23-28	18	5%
29-45	55	16%
46-55	61	18%
56-65	106	31%
66+	88	25%
<b>Total Responses</b>	347	

Overall the audience was older than was the case for previous Tête à Tête productions. The 29-45 shrank most markedly to 16% (from 28% for the 2008 autumn production ) and the 66+ group increased most to 25% (from 11% for the 2008 autumn production). This no doubt reflects the nature of the repertoire. It should be noted that the 2008 autumn show *The Cumnor Affair* also showed a marked increase towards older age groups from the company's 2007 production. Whilst the Festival over time is playing to younger audiences the Autumn Production is appealing to older audiences.

#### 4.3.3 What other art forms/entertainment do they partake in?

This question was not included on the feedback forms because the information provided in the past was deemed to be immaterial to Tête à Tête's marketing criteria.

#### 4.3.4 What did respondents do during the day?

This was intended to throw further light on what kind of people were attending. The question was not particularly successful in that it only attracted just over ½ , 224 serious responses.

Apart from those who were mostly retired, the majority of respondents were professionals and a good number of those worked in the creative industries.

#### 4.3.5 Where had they heard about *Salad Days*?

Respondents were asked to indicate how they had been made aware of the 2009 production.

<b>How heard?</b>	
<b>%</b>	
<b>Somebody else booked</b>	27%
<b>Read about it in newspapers</b>	18%
<b>Cast</b>	18%
<b>Riverside Brochure/website</b>	14%
<b>Tête à Tête physical mailing list</b>	7.5%
<b>Relative</b>	3.5%
<b>Picked up a leaflet</b>	3.5%
<b>Tat email list</b>	3%
<b>External Marketing i.e. poster</b>	2.5%
<b>Tete a Tete Website</b>	2%
<b>Social Internet sites</b>	1%
<b>Total responses</b>	336

These are similar to other recent evaluation results. As usual, word of mouth (booked by somebody else/cast/relative combined) is the strongest selling tool. A new addition to the list is social internet sites.

The 14% brought in through the venue's publicity and website is encouraging. Although this figure has decreased from 19 % for the 2008 autumn production it still suggests that the partnership with The Riverside is effective in bringing in an audience. However, little marketing support is given by the Riverside Studios over and above standard mailouts and in-house displays.

Tête à Tête's own marketing with the e- and mailing list was fairly successful at 10.5%. The company's website appears to be the least successful method.

## 5. Artists feedback

The following was sent to all cast, creative team and support staff:

‘How was it for you? We use what you tell us to see we are on track and develop as appropriate. We are not after your opinion of the production, more were the expectations placed on you realistic. Eg. The Music was too demanding for the rehearsal period, or the rehearsal period was too long, the tech time was too short, the venue staff were unhelpful, the marketing unrepresentative of what the production was about, the direction fantastic, the stage management a shambles etc etc etc. It is about letting us know what worked and what didn’t for you in carrying out your job so we can make the experience better for everyone next time round.

Just use the words as prompts and as appropriate to your job: Music and Words, Playing, Singing, Acting and Direction, Set and Lighting, Publicity and Press, Production Management and Stage Management, Schedules and Rehearsals, Administration, Rate of pay.’

A response rate of over 50% was achieved with the most common themes being:

- The support and professionalism both on stage and off
- The team atmosphere that Tête à Tête as an organisation promotes really works and gives confidence
- The rate of pay could be improved on, especially for the older members of the team

A number of the cast, especially the younger ones and those who had not worked with Tête à Tête, appeared to be genuinely surprised to have had such a good professional experience.

## **6. Venue staff feedback**

For the 2007 evaluation, the Riverside staff provided fairly extensive feedback. This was important as the relationship with the venue was new. In 2008 the resulting recommendations were put in place, and similarly in 2009. This has resulted in no recommendations being made for 2010 apart from the request that things are run as well and communication kept up as in 2009.

## **7. Conclusion**

*Salad Days* was a high quality and individual production that was extremely well received and met the company’s aims in choosing a musical for the first time. This was substantiated by feedback from the audience, cast, venue, and the press (very positive reviews in *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *Time Out*).

In terms of the specific aims:

- To introduce fresh new/young talents:

The audience and press responded very enthusiastically to the cast and its quality, while the cast really appreciated the professionalism and support of the company

- To produce high quality, accessible and affordable work:

Again, press and audience, as well as the venue, endorsed the quality and accessibility of the production, with very high audience approval ratings. Audience comments suggest that ticket pricing was fair though more concessions would have been welcome. However despite overwhelmingly positive feedback the fact the production ran on (an agreed) deficit shows that it was not commercially viable to mount the run at this high standard within the short timescale, without unrestricted reserves to cashflow the production expenditure.

- To move, inspire and delight people:

The choice of ‘loved it, joyous, and put a spring in my step’ as main descriptors from the audience suggest this target was well met.

- To challenge the company with a totally new direction and widen the audience base:

The production resulted in a growth and diversity of audience for the company

The production, as we write, may yet have a future life with plans for a revival in discussion with Riverside Studios.

## **8. Recommendations:**

### **Audience development:**

- Internet / Web activity has risen and so should the company’s presence there.
- Consider discounts for the elderly to get the older market from *Salad Days* to cross over to other work.

- Develop the audience feedback forms:
  - Consider why the audience return rate was so high and use these methods in the future.
  - Capture more addresses for mailing. Enable people to include more than one person's details for mailing data. (Eg. 'give a friend/your guest's details.')
  - Explain the company don't get the booking data.
  - Track repeat visits to company productions by individuals, rather than relying on data base de-duping.
  - Track people who have attended Salad Days as their first Tête à Tête experience to see if they return to other productions. (eg. 'did you come to Salad Days in November 2009?')
  - The age streams need to be in line with target stream to monitor with efficiency.

**Physical environment:**

- Assess the possibility of air conditioning in the Studio

**Company activity:**

- Consider a planned revival of the production. The set and props are now made and good reviews have been secured; there is potential for a further box office success which could earn income to cover the deficit of this run.
- Begin to build up unrestricted reserves
- Work to pay the cast better