

The Uncommercial Traveller

As part of the British Council's **Dickens 2012 programme**, Arcola Theatre and Punchdrunk Enrichment have set out to rediscover the resonance of Charles Dickens's creative process for the 21st century. They lead a unique series of collaborations in cities across Asia and Australia, creating theatrical audio-guided journeys in each location. Each audio journey is then launched at a special event for local audiences, as well as being available to download, offering wider audiences a creative encounter – from a distance – with each city.

Please click **HERE** to download a uniquely creative and inspirational audio guided tour of your preferred city. **(Link to audio guides)**

Background

One of the great socio-realists of his time, Dickens wandered through London, documenting life by capturing the city's everyday joys and tragedies in *The Uncommercial Traveller*. Inspired by this little-known collection of his journalistic writings, the education and community teams at Arcola and Punchdrunk – both of which are known in the UK for their innovative approaches to theatre and community engagement – work with local artists, communities and sound designers in four fascinating international cities. The aim is to develop a creative and reflective tour in each location by using Dickens's approach of seeking out forgotten places and uncovering hidden stories.

The idea originated in Dalston, London, where Arcola and Punchdrunk worked with local performers over the age of sixty, capturing stories from their experiences of living in the area to create an audio journey and an immersive performance in a disused shop. Working closely with the British Council, the UK practitioners have reconceived *The Uncommercial Traveller* as an international project that will take on a new life in each location, with local participants designing their own journeys.

Pakistan & Melbourne

The international version of *The Uncommercial Traveller* kicked off in Pakistan (public events: 10-12 February). Past and present students of Karachi's National Academy of Performing Arts (NAPA) worked with Arcola and Punchdrunk to develop an experience which invites audiences to explore the building in which they studied: the beautiful local Hindu Gymkhana. Constructed in 1925, the Gymkhana was the first public building in Karachi to adopt the Mughal-Revival architectural style. The Karachi Literature Festival also featured a related public discussion about the creative experience.

In late February 2012, prominent emerging playwrights from St Martin's and Courthouse Arts worked with experienced playwrights to create a journey through the city of Melbourne's architecture for the National Play Festival in Australia. The festival launched in Melbourne on 21 February and the resulting stories are available to download from ArtsFrontier.

Penang & Singapore

The Uncommercial Traveller in George Town, Penang, saw the involvement of ten students from University Science Malaysia working with Raquel Meseguer and Stephen Dobbie from Punchdrunk, and Bryn Jones from Arcola Theatre. They produced four audio journeys across the culturally diverse UNESCO World Heritage Site of George Town.

Each audio journey lasts for around ten minutes and takes the listener on a path to discover what the participants felt and experienced. Included is a special 17 min track which sweeps through several streets and concludes on a Chinese clan jetty.

Speaking to the participants at the end of the workshop, Bryn Jones highlighted the commitment of the participants and how impressed he was that they took such ownership of the project, creating personal and unique explorations of George Town in the process. He concluded that the project seemed to affect the personal growth of the participants, and noted how glad he was that the project was able to have such positive effects.

The last leg of *The Uncommercial Traveller: Singapore*, will include a group of 12 students from SOTA (School of Arts, Singapore). ***Watch this space for more information.***

Penang participant **Nik Mohd Hakimi**:

Reading the works of Dickens never made any impact on me internally. I never thought about what he would have felt on his amazing journeys. However, working on this project has helped me understand the beauty of a city, especially George Town which is a place close to my heart.

Peter Higgin, Enrichment Director for Punchdrunk:

The idea of discovery and walking and of creating something is quite universal, so it'll be interesting to see how taking this process to different countries works – whether we'll find a sense of the voice of Pakistan or the voice of Melbourne or the voice of Singapore...