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The Uncommercial Traveller | Dickens 2012 | Melbourne, Karachi, London, Penang, Singapore | audio-guided journeys



[caption id="attachment_21901" align="alignnone" width="576" caption="Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) student Usha Janaki explaining to her peers her observations and inspiration when writing for this audio journey on location in George Town, Penang."][caption]

As part of the [British Council's Dickens 2012 programme](#), [Arcola Theatre](#) and [Punchdrunk Enrichment](#) set out to rediscover the resonance of Dickens's creative process for the 21st century. Leading 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.

One of the great socio-realists of his time, Dickens documented life in a rapidly developing London in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, wandering through the city and capturing its everyday joys and tragedies. Inspired by this little-known collection of 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 – worked with local artists, communities and sound designers in four fascinating international cities. They developed a creative and reflective tour in each location, using Dickens's approach to seek out forgotten places and uncover 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.

The international 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 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.

Later in February, prominent emerging playwrights from St Martin's and Courthouse Arts worked with experienced playwrights to create a journey through Melbourne's architecture for the [National Play Festival](#). The festival launched in Melbourne, Australia on 21 February and the stories are available to download from [ArtsFrontier](#).

The Uncommercial Traveller in George Town, Penang, saw the involvement of ten students from [Universiti Sains Malaysia](#) working with Raquel Meseguer and Stephen Dobbie from Punchdrunk and Bryn Jones from Arcola Theatre to produce four audio journeys across the culturally diverse, historical and UNESCO World Heritage Site, George Town, Penang.

Each audio journey lasts for about ten minutes and takes the listener to a starting point in George Town to discover what the participants felt and experienced - with the exception of a 17 minute track which journeys across several streets and concludes on a Chinese clan jetty.

Bryn Jones highlighted the commitment of the participants and how they took ownership of the process, creating a very personal and unique exploration of George Town. Speaking to the participants at the end of the workshop, he noted that the project seemed to affect the personal growth of the participants, and he was glad that the project is able to do that.

The last leg is The Uncommercial Traveller: Singapore, includes a group of 12 students from [SOTA](#) (School of Arts, Singapore).

Source: British Council

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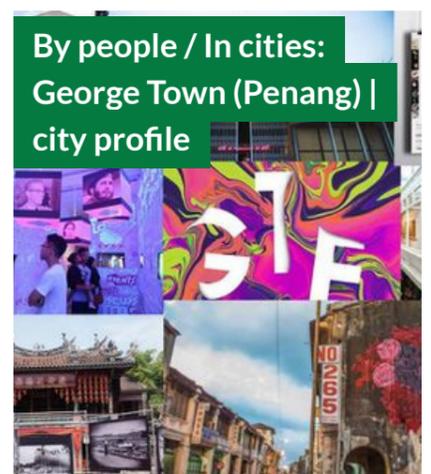
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