

## CULTURAL DELEGATION TO CHINA: WELSH GOVERNMENT TRADE MISSION 18-25 FEBRUARY 2017 – REPORT FOR WELSH GOVERNMENT BY WALES ARTS INTERNATIONAL

This cultural delegation from Wales to China aimed to deepen and extend the cultural links between the two countries, as set out in an Agreement signed in September 2015 by Vice Minister Ding Wei and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure Ken Skates, during Vice-Premier Mrs Liu Yandong's visit to Wales.

The delegation hoped to instigate new partnerships, new learning opportunities, and new exchanges of exhibitions and performers, to and from both countries.

Delegates included representatives of artists and cultural organisations and other types of businesses, as well as Welsh Government, and Wales Arts International, who organised the visit. This was the first time that a Welsh Government trade mission had included arts and culture organisations as well as commercial businesses from other sectors.

The visit was facilitated and many of the meetings organised by the British Council, in particular the Shanghai office, who were responsible for co-ordinating and organising the delegates' schedule during their time there.

The delegation included:

Name	Organisation
<b>Eluned Haf</b>	Wales Arts International
<b>Elen Roberts</b>	Wales Arts International
<b>Clare Williams</b>	Hijinx Theatre
<b>Maggie James</b>	Open Books
<b>Michael Garvey</b>	BBC National Orchestra of Wales
<b>Peryn Clement-Evans</b>	Ensemble Cymru
<b>Wyn Mason</b>	Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru
<b>Michelle Carwardine- Palmer</b>	National Theatre Wales
<b>Julia Brooker</b>	Julia Booker Paintings
<b>Collette Ellis</b>	Flying Viper Illustration
<b>Peter Owen</b>	Welsh Government

### Key Outcomes

A large number of meetings took place between the delegates and arts venues, organisations, and individual artists in various locations across China, including Shanghai and Beijing.

Many conversations took place, and from these several new partnerships and associations have been formed. A number of projects have now begun. Generally these are at fairly early stages of development and discussion, and most organisations expect a further period of conversation, planning, research and development.

Some specific projects that are being planned with Chinese partners include:

- BBC National Orchestra of Wales tour of 6-8 cities across China (possibly including Wuhan, Nanjing, Xiamen, Guangzhou and Chongqing) to take place over two weeks (October 2018). This will involve approximately 80 musicians (a full orchestral ensemble) with the Chinese-

born conductor Xian Zhang, and a soloist and repertoire tbc but likely to include some of the best-known Western classical repertoire e.g. Beethoven, Tchaikovsky

- Visit to Hong Kong by Ensemble Cymru (1 March 2018)
- A 'Wales night' at the Shanghai International Arts Festival for Asia Promoters (October 2017)
- Tour of Hijinx Theatre puppet show *Meet Fred* to approximately six cities in China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Taiwan, to spend up to 4 or 5 weeks touring the Far East with cast including actors with learning disabilities. Tour to be organised by the commercial promoter A C Orange, based in Shenzhen
- To adapt Wyn Mason's play *Rhith Gân* into a bilingual show (Welsh/Cantonese OR Welsh/Mandarin) to be performed at the Shanghai International Contemporary Theatre Festival (2019) and to tour to other venues in China, directed by Ceri Sherlock of the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts
- National Theatre Wales is continuing its conversation with the Shanghai Media Group and Shanghai International Arts Festival. It is hoped that NTW will be invited to speak at the Festival this autumn (2017). They would also plan to visit Beijing at the same time to converse with the National Theatre and various promoters with whom they are already connected
- National Theatre Wales have also been in conversation with CUBEL to assist with tracking down a suitable freelance choreographer to conduct five weeks of tutoring in Guangzhou. They have probably secured a suitable practitioner from Wales to do this, an outcome that 'highlights the spirit of sharing opportunities for the whole sector - which we all undertook' (Michelle Carwardine-Palmer, NTW).

## Successes and Discoveries

### Combining Artistic, Commercial, and Political Sectors

A number of delegates commented on the value of having both arts and other business sectors represented on the mission, as well as politicians. This is the first time that arts and cultural organisations have been included on a Welsh Government trade mission, possibly because Ken Skates' brief (from May 2016 to present) includes Culture.

This combination was fruitful, and delegates felt that they had learned a lot from working closely with, or observing, those from the other sectors.

*Inviting both the commercial and cultural sector to the trade mission is a real strength to the country's international offer. Both sectors really complemented each other and supported one another too. I particularly value the business insight provided at the breakfast meeting on the first day and [learning about] the Chinese trade and its systems (Tiers and major cities etc). – Michelle Carwardine-Palmer*

*From my perspective, the combination of government, business, & culture was very helpful – Peryn Clement-Evans*

*It was good as a group for commercial and arts organisations to realise that we're not isolated sectors. Externally, Wales was able to demonstrate the full range of organisations that we have: that we have thriving arts, commercial, and entrepreneurial sectors, completing the picture and showing that Wales is just as supportive of its arts as it is of aerospace or education or mining. – Michael Garvey*

*Welsh Government took a big risk taking a trade and a cultural mission on same trip, and it was hugely beneficial to both sides: the real world of business and the world of the arts. We learned a great deal from each other. – Clare Williams*

The artistic organisations felt that their work was given credibility and status through the presence and support of the government:

*Going with Ken Skates and having Peter Owen there stepping between Welsh Government and the arts fraternity, having the trade mission there, was absolutely invaluable. It endorsed what we were doing, it mattered very much to the Chinese that when they liked the show, Ken Skates would talk to them and say that he fully endorsed Hijinx and would support to make it happen. For our promoters to be invited to receptions in Beijing and Shanghai was terribly important, for them to see that Wales really wanted to do business. – Clare Williams*

### Soft Power

As well as the specific projects that are underway, many delegates felt strongly that the visit had been very successful in terms of 'soft power' and reinforcing the MOU between Wales and China.

*I met with the Minister of Culture and Peter Owen came to represent the Welsh Government. It was very evident that the Chinese knew they had a MOU with Wales and recognised the effort we were making by bringing a cultural delegation to the country for the first time. The impression I got was "Thank you for making the effort, it now makes sense of this MOU we've got and we can see how we can begin to work with you and value and engage with the relationship." – Michael Garvey*

### New Audiences, New Venues, New Funding Opportunities

Many delegates noted the huge 'hunger' among Chinese audiences for Western artistic productions. There are various audiences in China that would be likely to be interested in the different projects under development; young, wealthy audiences who are keen to see contemporary, innovative, non-traditional performances, as well as a more traditional audience who are keen to develop their familiarity with the canon of Western classical music.

*There's a growing middle class in China and understanding Western 'high art' is high on the agenda. So there's a huge appetite for western classical music. Particularly in (and this is possibly what I learned most from the trip) what they call the second tier cities. The big cities like Beijing and Shanghai already have a surplus of touring orchestras and can pick and choose. The second tier cities are wishing to get to first tier status, so they are even hungrier and are building amazing new concert hall complexes. They will spend lots of money and energy to get a Western orchestra in their concert halls to show they can compete. – Michael Garvey*

Clare Williams of Hijinx described the close, trusting, mutually respectful relationship that she had developed with the promoter A C Orange, and that she was now acting as a form of 'conduit' in introducing them to other companies and productions that might appeal to Chinese audiences:

*There is a huge hunger for content. There are so many venues opening in China, and just not enough content to fill them and to programme them. When I came back from China, the following week the Chairman and President of A C Orange came to London to see our show Meet Fred and to discuss other options. They talked very enthusiastically about working with Hijinx so we could help them populate their venues. They were picking my brains: "do you know any small-scale opera, immersive theatre, mid-scale dance projects?". I was surprised by the real hunger for anything new or innovative, aimed at a young audience with money in their pockets, who are very curious and prepared to spend a lot of money on performance that isn't traditional Chinese performance. – Clare Williams*

Delegates described the huge new arts and culture complexes that are being built very rapidly in many cities across China, and the need for artistic productions to fill these spaces.

*I was surprised by the Chinese appetite for exchange of culture and the number of new arts venues opened within the last 5 years – Maggie James*

There was a general perception that there is significant funding available, as well as physical spaces, in China for arts projects and that what was most needed was artistic content and ideas to fill those spaces and make use of that funding.

*The scale of China is enormous. And their wealth, compared with Wales. The Festival of Shanghai International Arts, held every October, has four million people come to the festival. More than the population of Wales! The Hong Kong Kowloon Cultural Development – built on reclaimed land from sea – has a Chinese opera theatre, music hall, exhibition spaces...Big cities spring up overnight. About half of companies are commercial and half state run. Money flows in. It feels like a different financial scene to Wales. The arts are a lot more looked after.– Wyn Mason*

### **Differing Interpretations**

An interesting discovery was that sometimes the meaning of the artistic work could be interpreted quite differently by Chinese audiences to those in the UK:

*Our work is about having a disability, specifically a learning disability, and I was unsure if the Chinese promoters would be interested in it. But what they saw in it was a connection with young men and women from the villages and provinces who gravitate towards cities, thinking that they're paved with gold, that they'll find a job, partner, prosperity. In fact, they arrive and are outsiders, don't really belong, don't know how to cope with vast city life, and feel very isolated. So when the fixer first saw Meet Fred this is what he saw in it; he wasn't even aware there were people with learning disabilities in the cast, but thought it would resonate with people in China because Fred is an outsider, not really accepted and trying to find his way in the world. – Clare Williams*

This was also commented on by Wyn Mason who said that the story of Li Bai (an 8<sup>th</sup> century Chinese poet) was seen as 'traditional' by Chinese audiences and this has in turn had an impact on his way of thinking about the story; this will be important in the next R&D phase as he develops the play with Chinese actors, director, etc.

### **Introductions to Contacts and Key Decision Makers**

Delegates were delighted with the range of contacts that they had made. These were variously described as 'invaluable', 'significant', 'very broad range', and so on. Delegates were very pleased that they had been introduced not just to a large number of people but also individuals with decision-making power for their organisations. They credited the involvement of both the British Council and the Welsh Government for opening these doors:

*It was very densely programmed; from 8am till 10pm the schedule was relentless, constant meetings, absolutely brilliantly orchestrated by the British Council in China. The purpose of the meetings was to make initial contacts. These were quite formal and it was left to us to follow them up subsequently. It was a very broad range of good contacts with real decision makers as opposed to people lower down the chain. – Clare Williams*

*At that British Consulate event in Hong Kong, I did meet a co-director of an architectural company with many international offices who I have been visiting (fruitlessly) for several years first in Dubai and now HK. He has kindly given me two direct contacts to decision makers who commission large scale public art projects in public buildings in HK. As ever, this requires, following up and more work, but may lead to my most ambitious work yet. – Julia Brooker*

*Attending alongside the Cabinet Secretary and his official was very important. Their presence opened up far more doors for useful high level conversations than I would have been able to have had I gone independently. – Michael Garvey*

### Fast Development of Projects

Delegates generally felt that the Chinese organisations and artists whom they met were very open to new ideas and keen to start projects quickly and decisively:

*They have a 'can do' mindset. They don't waste time in China. It feels like a land of opportunity compared with here in Wales. We have to struggle to get a project off the ground. It feels like in China there is more budget and more possibilities. They are open to anything. That's my general impression. They want to co-produce. They say, "it's more interesting for us if you come here with an original idea and we can develop it together from scratch." They're very open to dialogue with western countries. – Wyn Mason*

*I was surprised by how quickly the Chinese can move on making things happen. If we can get a Welsh production over to the Valley festival in May this year that would be extraordinary. – Michelle Carwardine-Palmer*

This was generally seen as very exciting by the delegates as it offers opportunities to see projects develop into realities much more quickly than they might do in other locations.

### Cultural Exchange and Creative Conversations

Conversations and meetings between artists led to various forms of cultural exchange and mutual inspiration for new ideas:

*During my visit to Hangzhou I was invited to several studios, where I was particularly interested in some monochromatic paintings, only to find out that all of them were made on rice paper, which started a number of interesting conversations about this material, and trying the paper out: a lot of technical stuff, but very interesting to me as a painter. (In the UK - not specifically Wales - we use cotton rag paper.) We discussed the idea of swapping indigenous materials and awarding the most innovative work with some kind of prize. The idea of starting an exchange of materials with about 20 artists surprised me because of its simplicity, but also its possibility of a rich cultural exchange exhibition. – Maggie James*

Some of these conversations were more likely to result in long-term creative exchanges rather than short-term commercial projects, but were equally valuable to those who took part:

*The British Council put together an appropriate timetable so I could have meetings with the right people, and also people I wouldn't ordinarily expect to meet, e.g. the man who runs the Chinese Philharmonic Orchestra, which is essentially the equivalent orchestra of NOW in China. There's no commercial gain from that relationship but it's interesting to meet equivalent companies, see if we could join up, swap musicians, work with their education team, learn from each other: in short, cultural exchange. – Michael Garvey*

The specifically Welsh experience of living in a bilingual country also had interesting implications when considering the development of the Welsh/Chinese version of Wyn Mason's play:

*The question of language is very sensitive, as in Wales, speaking a minority language, we are very sensitive to the politics of language. Which language should Li Bai speak in? That's a crucial question at the moment. The Chinese people in Wales are all Cantonese-speaking, so should we reach out to them and collaborate, get them involved in the production, or do we go*

*for Mandarin, with the Shanghai festival in mind? This is new territory for me and I have a lot to learn.*

## **British Council and Wales Arts International Support**

Many delegates mentioned the huge support they had received from the British Council and Wales Arts International, the excellent care they had experienced, and how packed and productive their schedule was, especially in Shanghai.

*The work of the British Council in both Shanghai and Hong Kong on mission's behalf made a huge positive impression. – Peryn Clement-Evans*

*British Council did a really great job in Shanghai in particular. The team were very well organised and we were very looked after. It was wonderful to meet the top people. They did that work for us really. – Wyn Mason*

*The quality of the meetings that were organised together with the efficiency of the logistics and the care of the British Council team is all to be applauded and all this made for a productive week which I very much hope will assist in turning the MOU which the Welsh Government has with the Chinese into a flourishing and practical partnership that shares our two cultures and builds our mutual respect and friendship. British Council continues to be the vital key that unlocks so much good will and actual collaboration and the UK is an immeasurably better country and world ambassador as a result of its existence. – Michael Garvey*

*I cannot speak more highly of the British Council in China, they were phenomenally helpful and efficient and brilliant. It was also terribly well run by Wales Arts International, Eluned and Elen, everyone was saying it was one of the best trade missions the Welsh Government had ever facilitated, the results were really good. – Clare Williams*

## **Other Plans**

In addition to those projects outlined above, there are other projects and aspirations under discussion. These include:

Ensemble Cymru:

- Establishment of Philanthropic base for Ensemble Cymru (3-5 years)
- Enhancing Ensemble Cymru's offer to domestic audiences, communities through collaboration with Chinese artistes (2-4 years)
- Build on initial conversations post trip with prospective regional stakeholders (e.g. Conwy County Council, North Wales Tourism Partnership and Bangor University (Development Department, Confucius Institute, School of Music)

Open Books:

- to make sure all new contacts receive e-invites to the next iteration of Open Books show curated by Yun Cheagab in Seoul, Korea April 2017
- to develop ideas with China Academy of Art and Sanshang Contemporary Gallery of Art, through Joe Zhou and Grace Wang
- to respond to China Shanghai International Festival request for more information

- to find a mentor (cultural) to help me learn about developing relationships with three identified potential Chinese investors

Asked to elaborate on this last intention, Maggie James of Open Books explained:

*During my recent EXTEND training, organised by **engage** - I worked with a cultural mentor, who was experienced in the specific skills I needed to understand at the time. **engage** selected this person to work with me. In my dreams I imagine WAI and British Council in Shanghai pinpointing a person within an arts organisation who has skilfully worked with Chinese investors - who could be based anywhere in the UK - and asking them to be a mentor. (However this person would need to be paid - so I'm not sure how that would work!)*

Julia Brooker:

*I have already followed up all contacts made with images, brochures etc. as agreed in meetings. I will continue with occasional follow up emails and /or my news; and if budget allows I will seriously consider returning in 12 months or so to renew contacts and hopefully get commission(s) next time round.*

Hijinx Theatre:

- A presentation was given by Clare Williams seeking investment for another show to be potentially taken to China in 2019
- If *Meet Fred* is successful on its initial tour, the plan is for a new production using Chinese puppeteers

Wyn Mason/Theatr Genedlaethol:

- Turning *Rhith Gân* into an internationally viable piece of theatre through the next R&D phase, to take place either in Asia (China or Hong Kong), or in Wales with Chinese actors, director etc.

National Theatre Wales:

- Continuing conversation with the British Council in Hong Kong to establish the best relationships NTW should pursue.
- Also in conversation with the Hong Kong Festival and West Kowloon Cultural District as well as Macau Festival.

## Strategies for Future Development

Several delegates felt that there was a strong argument for a number of Welsh companies acting together and touring China collectively:

*When one company goes abroad there should be a cluster of events around that one production. Wales is so small, we need strength in numbers, when we tour internationally there should be an exhibition that goes along with the show, for example. There's an opportunity to go over in October and have a Welsh evening at the Shanghai international arts festival where various companies can showcase project, might lead to a future Welsh theme night, hopefully that will happen and Wales Arts International will be central in organising that. – Wyn Mason*

Michael Garvey of the BBC NOW also felt that it was important for the orchestra to represent Wales officially and that this would fulfil an important ambassadorial and diplomatic role for the country more broadly:

*As Wales' national orchestra, I feel that we have a role to play over and above putting on concerts and looking after musicians while overseas. I had a vision of us putting on concerts at the National Centre for Performing Arts in the centre of Beijing, next to Tiananmen Square and opposite the Forbidden Palace, at which Carwyn Jones or Ken Skates attended and it felt like far more than just a concert, this was almost a government-to-government friendship or cultural exchange. This was the orchestra representing Wales, feeling proud that they can put on an international platform the best that Wales has to offer with classical music. There's a huge amount of cultural diplomacy that one can do and utilise cultural assets like an orchestra or theatre company and I would love government to recognise potential of what that could offer Welsh international trade and cultural relationships. – Michael Garvey*

Michael also emphasised how essential it is to conduct face-to-face meetings due to the way that Chinese business culture works. He described the difference in the way his meetings developed on his second visit to China within three months, as he was seen as being more serious and committed to doing business there:

*The Chinese clearly take you seriously if you're prepared to go there and do it face to face, exchange gifts; they recognise you mean business. If Wales has this MOU with China and it particularly includes culture in it, then Wales needs to be backing this for the long term to make sure it is worthwhile.*

There was general agreement on the value of the arts and culture in representing Wales and raising the profile of the country and of Welsh arts in China.

Delegates emphasised their overwhelming gratitude to the British Council, Wales Arts International, and the Welsh Government for their support, and hoped that they would continue to support the future development of these projects and the relationship between the two countries more generally.