

more from stuff



How a quake-born Canterbury brewery beat Guinness - twice

paid content

about this content



4 Top Indulgent Gift Ideas For The Person Who Has Everything

Peter Alexander



Worried your child has fallen behind? Try this new 1-1 tutoring

Cluey Learning

Recommended by

ADVERTISEMENT

Advertise with Stuff

Creative thinkers engage with real-world problems

RYAN REYNOLDS, GEORGE PARKER and PETER FALKENBERG · 07:50, Nov 18 2013

ADVERTISEMENT



WILL HARVIE

LOOKS FAMILIAR: One of the puppets from Canterbury Tales.

The recent Canterbury Tales event shows RYAN REYNOLDS, GEORGE PARKER and PETER FALKENBERG that public shares their desire to make the post-quake city into an innovative playground.

Free Theatre Christchurch's Canterbury Tales for Festa 2013, saw what police estimate to be over 15,000 people return to the inner city over Labour Weekend. Numbers aside, it was the atmosphere that was truly spectacular, with a diversity of ages reclaiming the city and participating in a weekend of celebration and reflection, colour, light and sound.

Canterbury Tales was more than a year in the making. Free Theatre, a small but prolific professional theatre company, worked with a huge number of volunteers to [the press](#) participation of professional arts organisations, artists, architecture and design schools and businesses, each of which had the chance to develop their own creative

Advertise with Stuff

most popular

- 1 ['Sounded like massive truck': Magnitude 5.8 earthquake hits North Island](#)
- 2 [Covid-19: Stay-home orders, school closures possible if Omicron spreads](#)
- 3 [Stabbing 'the last straw' for resident who fled Wellington social housing](#)
- 4 [Nests abandoned after quad bikers rip up protected beach](#)
- 5 [Christchurch takes out 'unwanted' 2021 property title](#)
- 6 [English teacher one of more than a hundred Kiwis in Vietnam country](#)

Log in

responses to the venture.

Could Canterbury Tales be a model for ongoing collaborative projects that can revitalise inner city Christchurch?

While the scale of the project was beyond what Free Theatre has produced before, the collaborative, interdisciplinary ethos at the heart of the project is in keeping with Free Theatre's body of work that spans more than three decades in this city.

It should not be surprising then that Free Theatre company members have not only been involved in creating performance projects like Canterbury Tales, but have also been responsible for initiating "flaxroots" projects that have gained considerable attention for their experiments in creative urban renewal post-earthquakes: Gap Filler, Life in Vacant Spaces, FESTA, Arts Voice, Arts Circus and the River of Arts.

ADVERTISEMENT

Advertise with Stuff

A recent symposium organised by Te Puna Toi (Performance Research Project) used Canterbury Tales as a platform to raise questions about how small organisations such as Free Theatre and the flaxroot projects mentioned above might relate, or respond to, the plans of the government and large organisations.

Related to this question is that of the role of the university, and especially the arts, in contributing to the emergence of a new vibrant city. As stated in the recent Press editorial (Nov 2), while UC's massive cash injection from the government is tagged for Science and Engineering, to neglect the Arts would be to significantly limit the possibility for a more vital participatory city that the community has called for through Share an Idea and multiple forums.

In many ways, Free Theatre itself can be considered a

- 7 [Unusual number of cluster earthquakes beneath Ruapehu's summit, but no change to alert level, scientists say](#)
- 8 [Prince Andrew fails in bid to have sexual assault civil case dismissed](#)
- 9 [Auckland water park closes as lifeguard 'bashed', partying hundreds risk safety](#)
- 10 [Quiz: Morning trivia challenge: January 13, 2021](#)

top stories in your community

Event

Hi I am a huge Novak djokovic fan so since I can't join the Australian protest I am organizing a Novak djokovic protest this

Hi I was sent a expensive item via.

Nzpost track and trace from nelson the tracking said it was delivered today at 348pm ,but nothing was delivered ,I chkd my

Free fitness in Auckland Domain...



If getting fit is on your 2022 'to do' list, join Froot Camp! Froot Camp is a completely

Happy Holidays Everyone!

May your year come joyfully and prosperously to an end, and may we start wonderful New Year with you. Merry

Crime & Safety updates

[Find out more](#)

historical example of a local ground-up initiative and a big institution working hand-in-hand toward a mutually beneficial collaborative model for the city. Free Theatre emerged as an independent entity in 1979 from the desire of staff and students at the University of Canterbury for an alternative to the Court Theatre: a place not only for entertainment but also for questioning the culture in which we live, in keeping, then, with the university's role as a critic and conscience of society.

The success of Free Theatre gave birth to a dedicated drama programme outside of the usual literary English courses and eventually to the Theatre and Film Studies Department. In little over a decade, Theatre and Film Studies established itself as the most successful research department of its kind in the country with the highest ratio of thesis students to staff.

Over the years, the university leveraged a public profile through the time, energy and passion of Free Theatre members towards creating new boundary-breaking work, and received kudos for its diverse community engagement.

In return, Free Theatre, continuing as an independent legal entity, gained institutional support in the form of rehearsal and performance space, facilities and technical support.

The value of such research is evident not only in the ongoing award-winning work of Free Theatre but the contribution of its members (mostly Theatre and Film Studies graduates) to the revitalisation of the city. These projects are - or are striving to be - more than just escapist entertainment.

The aim is to contribute to the recovery through questioning, providing examples of alternatives, provoking and re-imagining through collaborative projects.

By being deeply engaged in our city, Free Theatre and its members are almost inadvertently at the cutting edge of new creative disciplines in Christchurch where arts, performance and creative practice intermingle with urban design, planning, architecture and hi-tech industries.

The speakers at the recent Canterbury Tales symposium observed that it is this kind of interdisciplinary practice that is driving international best-

Advertise with Stuff

practice, moving beyond the traditional notion of distinct subjects as is being promoted via the government cash-injection for UC. Certainly, the idea of the arts and artists as rarefied, segregated creative beings is a thing of the past - it is the conversation between creative thinkers from diverse disciplines engaging with real-world problems that is required at this time.

ADVERTISEMENT

Advertise with Stuff

(Besides Canterbury Tales, an example of the potential for this kind of inter-disciplinary conversation is Free Theatre's I Sing the Body Electric, a hi-tech collaboration with UC's Human Interface Technology Lab, which led to a popular performance that was named Best Theatre of 2012 by The Press.)

Staff, students and alumni of Theatre and Film Studies are being called upon to present at conferences on disaster resilience, landscape architecture, architecture, social entrepreneurship and more, and to publish their work in international and popular journals across many fields. We are, to use recent UC advertising, prepared to make a difference - and attempting to do so.

We truly do not understand why UC does not attempt to leverage the success of this small department and the many projects it helped fund in the city - and instead actively distances itself from them.

In 2016, UC will disestablish Theatre and Film Studies. As many will know, the university has been endlessly restructured over a number of years, preceding and following the earthquakes. The latest round sees around 15 jobs in the College of Arts cut, with Theatre and Film Studies the sole department to be axed.

This caught us by surprise. Following the UC council

decision in 2012 to retain Theatre and Film Studies based on its extensive community profile, we had thought that we could move forward confidently. Specifically, the Theatre and Film Studies Department and Free Theatre embarked on the large-scale Canterbury Tales project. We took for granted that this kind of activity would push home the benefits of our department to provide unique ways for the university to engage with the city.

Instead of backing the project, the new Pro Vice Chancellor of Arts, Jonathan LeCocq, informed us of another proposal to close Theatre and Film Studies. Citing a report by a visiting US academic, LeCocq said that this was not a financial issue but that the department was not "strategically- aligned" with the university. What was incomprehensible about this thinking was that the cited report stated that the Theatre and Film Studies Department would be the "jewel in the crown of any research university in the US". It's clear, then, that UC's strategy does not involve being a top research university in the creative arts, nor a force in the revitalisation of the central city through the arts.

In 2012, many of our colleagues congratulated us for standing up to, and defeating, what was seen as a pernicious management proposal. This time around, amongst rumours that Vice Chancellor Rod Carr was essentially threatening to dismantle the entire College of Arts, leaving only a few "core" subjects such as English, History and Philosophy, it's no wonder the cuts were widely supported on the back of promises that there would be no further cuts to the Arts until 2017.

In relation to the Theatre and Film Studies Department, it seems that many staff thought the proposal was acceptable because they thought "Theatre" would be saved, albeit as a new minor within the English Department.

But this is a misunderstanding. Under the restructuring, Theatre and Film Studies staff will lose their jobs and an entire culture that has been created over three decades will be lost to the university.

The creation of a minor in English means that theatre will revert back to being a "traditional" subject", where theatre is considered from an outdated English literary point of view.

ADVERTISEMENT

Advertise with Stuff

In this, the university is following the lead of the current National Government.

The tertiary education policy of Minister Steven Joyce treats the university as a job training facility rather than a place to develop free- thinking and interdisciplinary innovation. But in times of crisis training for the status quo is increasingly useless.

We have seen crisis in terms of earthquakes, but there are multiple social, economic and environmental problems on our doorstep.

There needs to be a change of thinking beyond the "business as usual" approach in tertiary education.

Free Theatre's Canterbury Tales, Gap Filler, Life in Vacant Spaces, Rekindle, FESTA, Student Volunteer Army, Ministry of Awesome, Greening the Rubble and other such projects and businesses are providing jobs that did not exist before the earthquakes.

They are jobs - and whole organisations and events - that people forged because they saw a need and had the broad perspective and critical faculties to respond, experiment, and create anew.

In this spirit, Free Theatre Christchurch is proposing to develop an independent venue and practice within the inner city, to undertake more collaborative projects like Canterbury Tales in and for the city.

We will conduct regular interdisciplinary workshops, continue to foster boundary- pushing research, explore new creative and academic disciplines, draw international partnerships, and exploit to the utmost the positive opportunity to critique and re-imagine this place without the support of the currently myopic university.

The new city council, on the other hand, has shown

that it is determined to champion this kind of activity and we look forward to working with them to contribute to the new city emerging.

The experience of Canterbury Tales has given us the confidence that the public also shares our desire to make our post-quake city into an innovative work and playground where it is exciting to live.

ADVERTISEMENT

Advertise with Stuff

Dr Ryan Reynolds, Dr George Parker and Associate Professor Peter Falkenberg are members of Free Theatre Christchurch, staff of the University of Canterbury's Theatre and Film Studies Department and researchers in the department's Te Puna Toi (Performance Research Project).

THE PRESS | **TE MATATIKA**

Ad



Roland I
High Fidelity



Discover
Take a walk.
through the r