

If these streets could talk: Manchester audio walk offers a little Too Much Information

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Secrets and intimate moments – everybody has their own stories to tell about the paths they've chosen, the encounters they have shared.

We've all had key defining moments, events which have shaped who we are as people and the eyes through which we see the world.

So as a tribute to those personal memories, and to recognise the wonderful, varied makeup of Manchester, a new audio walk through Manchester has arrived, to offer you insight into the tales of its people, while you walk in their very footsteps.

The project is called Too Much Information and it is the brainchild of Blast Theory, a group of interactive storytellers based in Brighton, who have teamed up with the Royal Exchange Theatre.

Each audience member will be given a 45 minute snapshot into the lives of a group of intergenerational individuals from across Greater Manchester, using a mobile phone map and a pair of headphones.

MM spoke to Ju Row Farr, 50, one of the co-founders and artists of Blast Theory, to find out more.

"It's partly about the presumptions that we make about other types of people – older people, younger people, and different races. I think we are often too quick to judge", said Ms Farr.

"There are a lot of similarities and overlaps, but we often see differences before we see similarities.

"I think we are all curious about what really goes on in somebody's life and somebody's head, maybe even what really goes on in somebody's bedroom, and we can't ever really know.

"To probe at those things is exciting and interesting. Both are sometimes very funny and sometimes very dark.

"We share a lot between us as people, which we don't really discuss as much as we should."

On exiting the theatre, each audience member should use the map to find and reach the various locations where the voice recordings will play.

There is no set order and you are encouraged to float wherever your whims may take you.

The narrators, who serenade your journey, come from across the region, including Bury, Salford, Stockport, Rochdale and Trafford, and range from 18 to 77-years-old.

You'll be able to hear some of their most intimate, funny and frank stories and secrets, set to an original score composed by Martyn Ware of The Human League and Heaven 17 fame.

Ms Farr added: “Hopefully, it will be something which people will reflect on. It’s got that social documentary quality about it.

“It’s about real people and their real lives. It’s very real and it is a journey and a moment of reflection or consideration for other people and other things that can happen in your life.

“We aren’t trying to make some big point about if only we gave each other a bit of time, it would all be very fun and wonderful.

“But the experience of working with this group of people is that we started off with a selection of individuals so diverse in their age, and we ended up with a piece of work about a group of people.

“Age and difference became irrelevant and in the process, that’s what came out for us.

“I imagine the public will be interested in what the people are talking about and won’t think ‘oh was that a 70-year-old or an 18-year-old?’.”

Taking place in the midst of Manchester’s bustling city centre and all its fanfare, Ms Farr indicated that there could be a few daydream moments, whilst listening to the symphony of secrets and stories.

“You may look at others and think ‘we could have been brothers’, or perhaps in another life ‘we could have almost been lovers”, she said.

“But because we are all so busy rushing around doing things, it just sort of slows us down and pulls focus on some of those things.”

The project has been created in partnership with the Royal Exchange’s Truth about Youth – an activity programme for 14 to 21-year-olds- and Future Everything- an award winning innovation lab for digital culture, which also hosts an annual festival.

Supported by The Co-operative Foundation, three intensive workshops over three consecutive weekends brought together the faces behind the voices.

The technology which is being used was created about two years ago, but the actual project itself was cobbled together in the last month.

Ms Farr said: “The things that people are saying don’t relate to the specific places on the map, but chosen places which are more conducive to hear certain things.

“We did that deliberately. To use the exact locations wouldn’t have been appropriate, so we have tried to find a better place to listen to that account- a quieter place or a busier place, a doorway, something which helps your experience of hearing that, and to paint a better picture.”

Having worked in the arts for over 20 years, she emphasised the important role of projects like this within society.

“The role of art is to make people think, to ask difficult questions, to take risks in a way that it is very hard to do in other aspects of life”, said Ms Farr.

“That is the role that artists and artwork play, and hopefully it can evoke change, whether it’s change of thought or change of behaviour.

“It is a moment where you have an experience where you’re involved in this big participatory project and you feel like you’re immersed in something.

“It’s got a mobility to be able to shift us for a moment, or for longer, in a group or by ourselves.

“Nothing else can quite do that. Across the spectrum, it’s trying to do a job that nothing else does.”

If you can’t make it along to this project, there will be a website launch very soon to offer members of the public other ways to hear some of the material.

Tickets are available for Too Much Information [here](#).