

Around The World In 80 Days



Photo by Douglas
Jones

Some readers may remember [our February interview](#) with Michael Fraser, the Managing Director of [Lung Ha's Theatre Company](#). At the time, rehearsals were underway for Around the World in 80 Days, the first fully text-based play the group of actors with additional support needs has undertaken. We went along to the Edinburgh opening of the production at [The Traverse Theatre](#).

The play begins in London's Reform Club, where Phileas Fogg ([Stephan Tait](#)) makes a bet with his peers that he can travel around the world in 80 days. When they bring up the many pitfalls that could befall him on this journey, he confidently responds:

"There are no surprises for a man who reads The Daily Telegraph!"

He then sets off from the train station, whereon his longsuffering manservant Passepartout (Mark Howie) realises he has left the gas on.

"That's coming out of your wages," Fogg informs him cheerfully. "ONWARDS!"

This becomes a popular refrain throughout the rest of the show.

There is a lot for the cast to pack in to an hour long performance, but they do it with gusto. The sense of adventure that director Maria Ollers wanted to create is there in spades, supported by choreography that transports us from busy train station to rough sea crossing to Wild West. There are

also plenty of comic moments, and all of the actors have great timing – particularly Nicola Tuxworth and Lindsay King.

After the performance there was a Q&A session with Artistic Director Maria Ollers, Assistant Director Ben Winger, Choreographer Christine Devaney, and actors Douglas Briglmen, Robert Bell and Lindsay King.

“We started preparing for the show in autumn, meeting once a week to do improvisation sessions on things like travel, what it was like to live in Victorian times, and the culture of the different countries they visit in their journey,” explains Ollers.

“This gave the actors the opportunity to try different roles, which helped us decide who would play each part. It’s very important to get that right.

Then in January we got the finished script, and started rehearsing two or three times a week. Usually the company does shows which are at least partly devised for the actors, but this is the first time we’ve done one from the script. ”

She turns to the actors.

“Was it very different, this time?”

King considers for a moment.

“No,” she says, “not that different. But it was brilliant!”

Audience members were also interested in the set, and the role that music played in the production.

“We were looking for a style that was Victorian, but also quite clean,” Ollers tells us, “and we came across the steampunk style. So our designer, Becky Minto, used that, and also a black and white theme.”

“Pete Vilck, the musician who did the sound, was there very

early on,” Devaney says of the music used. “In fact there were just two weeks of workshops where he wasn’t, and after that he played live at every rehearsal. The difference was amazing – playing live completely changes the energy in the room and people responded to it really well.”

Douglas Briglmen, who is performing with Lung Ha’s for the first time, adds:

“Music is also really good for giving you a cue, so it’s useful for us actors to have it.”

Some audience members seem quite choked up by what they have just witnessed, and they speak not to ask questions, but really just to say well done.

“I have to tell you, I had a lot of emotions when I was watching that,” says one lady, “and I want to thank you.”

Lung Ha’s mission to change public expectations of what people with additional support needs can achieve really seemed to hit home at the Traverse tonight.

They will be back again at Festival time, with a production of Medea’s Children in association with Sweden’s Unga Klara Theatre Company.