



INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

NAME

TIM MCCARTHY

FROM

USA

TO

CHINA

DURATION

1 MONTH



0123456789



Theatre Art Creates Common Ground

If you've ever traveled to another country without knowing the language, chances are you've entered into an impromptu game of charades with local people at some point, using colorful gestures to find your way back to the hostel or to seek out the best fruit stand.

Quest Visual Theatre takes the concept of using movement and visual interpretation to cross cultures one step – or make that several steps and a leap – further.

The majority of this company's theater performances include no spoken or signed language, which also levels out communication between Deaf and hearing actors and audiences. Tim McCarthy, who is hard of hearing, is the U.S. theater group's President and Artistic Director.

“Our work attracts people who are interested in challenging themselves, working in inclusive environments, and valuing difference and other cultures.”

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Arts Envoy exchange program, Tim and other members of the company traveled to Hong Kong and mainland China for theater workshops and performances with the Arts for the Disabled Hong Kong (ADHK), and local schools for Deaf, hearing, and blind students. U.S. embassy and consulate staff planning the programs searched for local schools or non-governmental organizations that serve people with disabilities in order to reach these communities.

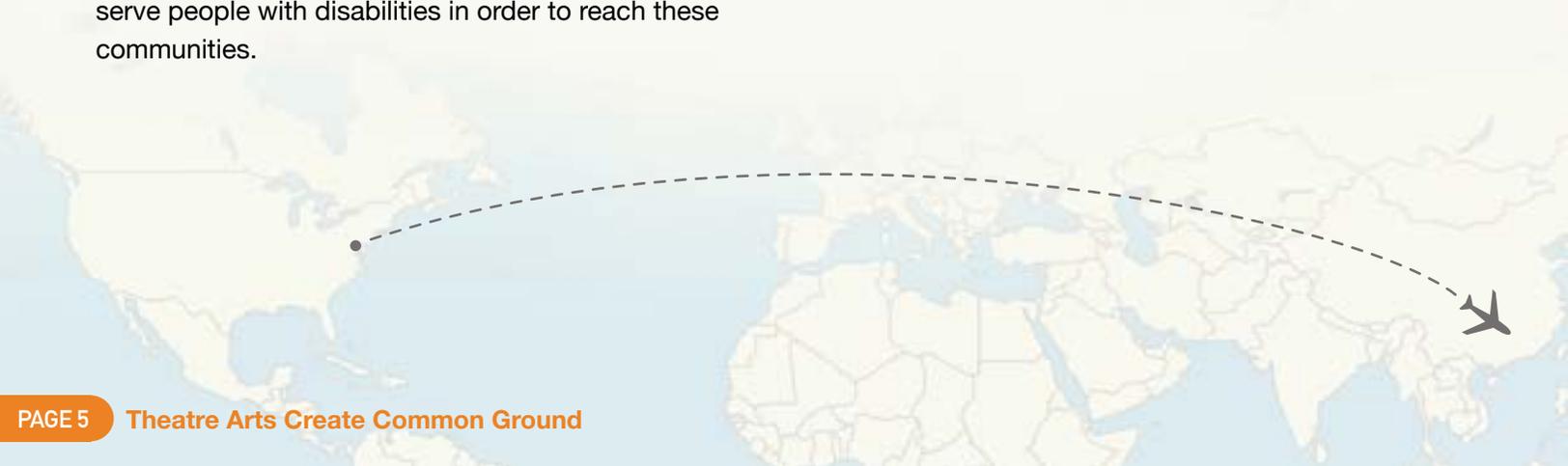
Through a month-long community engagement with the school for the Deaf and an afterschool program for hearing students, they performed *Liang and the Magic Paintbrush*, a traditional Chinese story. Alice, their other show based on *Alice in Wonderland*, sold out four performances. The audience often has no idea who is Deaf and who is hearing among the actors.

“One of the neat things about visual theater is that Deaf and hearing people, no matter what language they speak, can work together to create a piece. We talk a lot about creating common ground.”

To teach blind students the piece, the person who is interpreting in Mandarin Chinese describes the movement out loud while staff, assistants, and other participants facilitate the physical movements with blind participants.

With Deaf and hearing groups, the American Sign Language interpreters that travel with the group often hold dual positions; for example one interpreter may be a set designer while another is a workshop leader. They also offer trainings in sign language interpretation to help increase the number of Chinese sign language interpreters with professional level skills.

“There are a wide range of skill levels among interpreters in China. When we had top notch Hong Kong sign language interpreters, we were just flowing, moving, and there were no hang ups or gaps.”





Another purpose of the exchanges, which is a key role Tim plays, is to provide trainings on arts integration in the curriculum. Both the high quality of Quest Visual Theatre's work and the presence of professional artists and educators who are Deaf and hard of hearing, helps to spark discussions with government officials, educators, and artists in Hong Kong and mainland China about educational excellence and career opportunities for all.

"Ours is an open-ended exploratory approach to learning, which is very different than the Chinese approach. Our initial engagement can be a bit frustrating for our partners. There's a lot of skepticism and doubt. However, once we are there, there's a real transformation."

Quest Visual Theatre has also formed partnerships with groups in Austria, India, Mexico, Romania, and South Africa. Additionally, international actors have been part of this U.S.-based troupe through the years.

"Our experiences internationally definitely influence the work we do. Acting and dance styles are very different, so you have to borrow from one another. We are always paying attention to who is there and what they bring to the process."



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