

A Tiger in the Museum

Visiting the Museum in May musician Victor Gama unveiled the extraordinary musical instruments that will be a focal point for visitors in the new *Performance & Lives* gallery.

Victor Gama is a unique artist – a composer, performer and designer of innovative musical instruments created from a variety of materials. He was born in Angola of Portuguese descent and has exhibited and performed with his sound installations and instruments throughout Africa, Latin America, USA, Canada and Europe.

As the first museum to commission him, we asked Victor Gama to create four contemporary musical instruments, inspired by the museum collections, for the public to play. The result is a great success. As Dr Henrietta Lidchi, Keeper of World Cultures, says, “They are wonderful, beautiful and quite compelling. You just look at them and you want to work out how to play them, to make them sing.”

Each instrument has its own name and story. For example, Tipaw, takes its name from its resemblance to a tiger’s paw and was inspired by Gama’s visits to Edinburgh: “every time I visited the museum, “ he says, “I would pass Edinburgh zoo on the way from the airport. So I thought about a tiger escaping from the zoo and hiding overnight in the museum. It prowls around the halls until the morning, when it leaps upon a visitor, leaving these paw prints behind.” The

musical function is provided by the paw pads which are inverted Tibetan ringing bowls from Bengal, home to the famous tigers.

It is easy to imagine how these instruments will encourage visitors to participate creatively in the new gallery and engage with the elements of music and performance which are so central to people’s lives all over the world. Each instrument is designed to be communal, sounding more harmonious when played by more than one person, and so will spontaneously bring visitors together in informal ways.

The use of materials to create these instruments, including wood and metal, evokes connections with instruments in the Jean Jenkins collection that will be displayed alongside them. The Jenkins collection is one of the world’s most significant ethnomusicology collections and a selection of its instruments and recordings will showcase the variety of musical instruments and music traditions found throughout the world.

If you can’t wait until we reopen then you can see and learn more about the man and his work at www.victorgama.org



Victor Gama demonstrating the new Tipaw instrument

Detecting Darwin's Scottish roots

As the world celebrates the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection*, Principal Curator Geoff Swinney, offers us an insight into Darwin's personal connection to the National Museum of Scotland.

Two striking images of Charles Darwin gaze in opposite directions from the Royal Museum building, each revealing a different image and perspective of this celebrated scientist. From the north, above the main entrance, an elderly, bald and bearded Darwin gazes eastwards along Chambers Street. Just seven years after his death in 1882, Darwin's intellectual stature was widely renowned and thus commemorated by adorning the façade of a museum dedicated to the arts and sciences.

On the south, Darwin as a young medical student looks out over Lothian Street where he once resided. The image, which appears on a plaque by Vincent Butler, was unveiled in 2002 on the site of the student digs where Darwin lived for two years with his elder brother Erasmus. These lodgings on Lothian Street, long-since demolished to make way for a southern extension to the Museum, were convenient for both the Royal Infirmary on Drummond Street and the University of Edinburgh where he studied medicine.



In his second year, his interest in medicine waning, Darwin registered for only one course – Professor Robert Jameson's course in Natural History. It was Jameson who provided an environment in which the young Darwin was disciplined as a naturalist and imbued with the practices and practicalities of studying natural history.

Surrounded by a wealth of specimens, Darwin learned how to observe, dissect and prepare specimens and how to record his findings. Here, among the collections, he was transformed from a mere collector into an investigator. It was through Jameson and the Natural History Museum at the College of Edinburgh, which became known as the Royal Museum, that Darwin met significant peers who assisted him in acquiring and developing his skills as a scientific naturalist.

Jameson's curriculum included 'instructions and demonstrations as to the mode of collecting, preserving, transporting and arranging objects of Natural History' – knowledge and skills which Darwin would apply on the Beagle voyage and in his later research. It is pleasingly appropriate that the finches he collected on that famous journey will return to the institution where he learned his taxidermy skills. These will be displayed in the new *Discoveries* gallery alongside a first edition of Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species* originally published in Edinburgh by John Murray.

Darwin's experiences of Edinburgh were undoubtedly formative ones to his notable career. In honour of Darwin's bi-centenary National Museums Scotland is staging an exhibition titled *Garden Detectives* which opened on 25 June 2009. *Garden Detectives* takes a larger-than-life approach to plants and flowers in a real garden setting, inspiring family visitors to learn fascinating facts and experience the sounds and smells without getting their hands dirty.



Spandrel by John Rhind on the northern façade of the former Royal Museum

Spotlight Object

Intricacy, patience and extravagance



One of the most stunning objects on display in *Treasured: Wonderful Things, Amazing Stories* is the Chinese Ivory Lantern. In 1798, this lantern was presented to the Honourable William Fullerton Elphinstone, Director of the East India Company, by the company's board of directors. This extravagant gift not only expresses the artistry of the Chinese craftsmen but also demonstrates the wealth of the company, who were able to afford such a lavish gift.

The panel carvings are extraordinarily fine. Each depicts a unique scene of oriental figures, buildings, birds and floral motifs set in a relief against a background forming a fine grille of ivory. The intricately-carved dragons, which climb each side of the lantern forming the feet and handle, are chasing a flaming pearl. These dragons denote longevity and prosperity, thus making it an appropriate symbol to use on a gift for a man who held such a prestigious position with the East India Company.

The Museum acquired the lantern on long-term loan in the mid-1950s, though it showed clear evidence of damage and older conservation treatments in the form of adhesive bonding and repairs. Meticulous conservation work has been carried out by our Artefact Conservator Charles Stable to address the long-term damage and fragment loss. The effort to repair the broken panel and missing fragments took careful planning to work out how best to preserve the object.

"My heart goes out to the original carver of this piece", said Charles upon first examination of the lantern. "It is clear when you see the lantern up close that a tremendous amount of effort went into its original creation. It would be impossible to guess the total number of hours spent making this piece but we know that for every mistake or accident that was made during the carving process, the artist would have to start over from the very beginning."

When the Museum reopens in 2011 the Ivory Lantern will be found proudly on display in the *Inspired by Nature* gallery.



Above: the damage to the central tier.
Right: painstaking reconstruction work and the final completed lantern



Feature Interview

3 minute interview with Ian Rankin



Ian Rankin, crime writer
and Patron of National
Museums Scotland



In your Inspector Rebus novels, you often couple the most recognisable and celebrated parts of Edinburgh with a hidden darker side; do you think the National Museum of Scotland and its collections reflect this contrast too?

The National Museum of Scotland is full of grisly artefacts! I suppose my favourites are the Arthur's Seat coffins, which I used as the basis for my novel *The Falls*. It was thrilling to find out about them, then to be able to use them in a story, and then hear that visitors were coming to the museum to seek them out.

I also had an American friend's teenage son come to visit, and he wanted to see all the swords and the 'guillotine' and such like. We were not always as civilised as we are now, and it is good to be reminded of the many changes for the better that have taken place in Scotland down the centuries!

As a public space, how important do you feel the National Museum of Scotland is to Edinburgh and its people?

The National Museum of Scotland is a terrific public space. There's so much variety on offer. You'll see toddlers running around, gawping at one exhibit after another; school parties; tourists; locals coming in for a gossip and a cup of tea. And all for free! As you grow, so the museum changes to fit your interests – what you found difficult or 'boring' as a child may fascinate you as an adult. So it's a space for all your life.

What are you anticipating the most from the transformation of the museum with the Royal Museum Project?

Many visitors to the National Museum of Scotland never get beyond the ground floor. There is so much to see, so the chance to make new displays and get people moving around the building from the new entrance level to the upper floors is really exciting. It will just open up the whole building!

Looking back over your Rebus books, how do you feel the city has developed and grown alongside your main character – and what will be the impact of the redevelopment of the Museum on the city?

Edinburgh can seem preserved in aspic to the casual visitor, yet the city has been evolving throughout the ages and will continue to evolve – it needs to evolve. I'm hoping that the changes to the National Museum of Scotland will create a museum space for the 21st century and reflect a country that has a clear sense of its identity and its links with the past, but is also vibrant, innovative and forward-looking.

As a father raising a family in Edinburgh, does the Museum hold a special place for you?

I was brought to the Museum as a child. I came to the Museum as a student. Later on, I started bringing my children to the Museum. It has definitely been a special place, and will always be a special place.

Explore: Adventure Planet

Boasting large and lively wall graphics, high impact displays and stimulating interactive exhibits, *Adventure Planet* will be an exciting new gallery for families and children, opening on the top floor of the transformed museum in 2011.

Stepping into this new gallery the visitor instantly becomes a 'Nature Explorer', encouraged to engage and interact with real specimens from our natural world collections. Children can partake in the 'dino dig' to unveil a buried dinosaur skeleton or dress up to explore the extreme environments inside a volcano or underneath the arctic ice.

The gallery is divided into three themes all focusing on activity and experience. *Investigate* will encourage visitors to make their own discoveries as 'science detectives'. By handling objects and using simple equipment, such as magnifying and measuring tools, visitors will be able to examine and explore specimens from the natural world in this colourful and vibrant area.

Encounter introduces visitors to unexpected, rare or unfamiliar specimens from the natural world. They can get nose-to-nose with a Siberian tiger, marvel at the quartz and amethyst crystals inside a geode, measure themselves against an allosaurus and place their hands into the tracks of a dinosaur from Skye. These specimens will be on open display explained by graphics and fascinating facts which provide visitors with new knowledge – and terrific photo opportunities!

Challenges and problem-solving activities are at the heart of *Explore* with a series of interactive exhibits.

Highlights include the identification of mystery animals from tracks, smells and other clues, 'rock popping' – opening up rocks to discover fossils – and a live animal community in the ant colony.

Fun interactives combined with exciting and engaging displays will each contribute to the highly enjoyable learning experience of *Adventure Planet*.



With your support, the Royal Museum Project will transform a much loved national landmark into a museum fit for the 21st century and beyond.

Having received nearly £34 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Scottish Government and £8.5 million in gifts from many generous private donors to date, we now seek a final £3.5 million to reach our funding target.

We invite your support to complete this exciting project and ensure that the lives of future generations of visitors will be enriched through their own personal voyages of discovery through the National Collections.

There are many ways you can make a difference.

Donations

We welcome either one-off cash gifts or regular gifts throughout the life of the Campaign. If you are a UK taxpayer you can increase your gift at no extra cost, and make your donation tax efficient, by filling in a Gift Aid declaration. Gift Aid enables us to reclaim tax from the Inland Revenue, so for every £1 you give, we can claim an additional 28p.

A Gift of Shares

A gift of shares can bring tremendous benefit both to you and the Royal Museum Project thanks to valuable tax relief. If you would like further information about Share Giving please contact the Campaign Team.

Legacies

A legacy or bequest can make a lasting contribution to the Museum and help to bring inspiration and pleasure to our visitors for many years to come. Gifts to charities are also exempt from inheritance tax, helping relieve some of the tax burden from your estate.

Recognition

We would welcome the opportunity to talk to you about ways in which you would like to support the Royal Museum Campaign, and how we may recognise your contribution.

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