

In the loop - Glasgow Subway Festival

Source: The List ([Issue 629](#))

Date: 14 May 2009

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Kirstin Innes finds out about the surprises in store for underground passengers – from Elvis impersonators to showgirls and 24-minute plays – during the second Glasgow Subway Festival

It's every commuter's nightmare, being stuck in a carriage with a talker. The sort of person who simply won't respect your need to privacy in a public place; who wants to ask you questions, or worse, tell you all about their life. Or worse. Try and dance with you.

It's a nightmare that'll become all too real for passengers on Glasgow's Clockwork Orange this fortnight, with the return of the Glasgow Subway Festival, two days of frenetic underground on-train activity where the performers take over public transport.

'They're very small, the carriages. You go leg to leg with complete strangers, and because of the way they're laid out, you're facing each other across an aisle, too,' says Martin O'Connor, whose one-man play, *Inner Circle*, will happen in subway carriages across the festival. 'But you don't look at each other. In fact, you try and avoid each other's eyes; you look at shoes or points on the roof. There's all this unspoken etiquette about personal space that happens when you're travelling.'

Inner Circle is a Glasgowed adaptation of the third part of Italian playwright Renato Gabrielli's trilogy *Death in the City* (the first part, *Mobile Thriller*, which happens in a car driving across a city, was a hit in the 2004 Edinburgh Festival Fringe). 'Renato's piece, *Number 90's Child*, was designed to be performed on public transport, and was written for the circular train in Milan. I've created a Glaswegian version, with localised language and references, that lasts 24 minutes, which is exactly the length of one loop of the *Inner Circle*. I think a lot of people, once they get over the strangeness of someone performing in the carriage with them, will be able to relate to the character. He's a very normal man, works hard, has a family, but is stuck in a commuter rut and has just begun to go through the motions. There's a very particular rhythm to the script. It mimics the motion of the carriage and at first there's a lot of repetition in the language that mimics the day to day pace of someone's life.'

Although it's possible to catch specific performances of *Inner Circle* by buying an individual ticket through the Arches box office, passengers can also trust to luck just by hopping in the last carriage of every train during the festival.

'We're going to have a performer on every train of the network throughout the weekend,' says programmer Phyllis Martin. 'As well as *Inner Circle*, there's an ongoing soap opera, with different instalments in different carriages across the network; we've got Elvis impersonators, tigers playing saxophones, miniature Shakespearean plays, French showgirls, performance interventions, stand up

comedy, on-train karaoke, classical music and acrobats, and we've managed to squeeze bands in, holding tiny, tiny gigs in the bottom of the carriage.'

If the underground activity gets a bit much for passengers, Martin is hoping they'll pop their heads up and take part in the activities happening overground too. 'The idea behind the festival was to show people all the amazing places across the city they can get to using the subway.'

Stop off at Shields Road for Victorian school-day workshops at Scotland Street School Museum; jump out at Hillhead for the farmer's market at Dowanhill Primary School; and alight at Kelvinhall for breakdance and urban art workshops at Mansfield Park. St Enoch passengers can pick up two-for-one tickets for events at Sloane's, the Arches and the Sharmanka Gallery. And Sharmanka has created a kinetic sculpture of Sputnik that will be on show at Partick, where there will be performances by the Glasgow Gospel Choir and aerial performers Spinal Chord.

'We're hoping that people will pay £3.50 for a Discovery day pass, and spend the day rediscovering their city,' says Martin.

As O'Connor sees it, the festival is an opportunity to get people to think differently: 'It is trying to show them the world's not going to end if someone starts talking to you on the subway.'