

A nearly fictitious account of an imagined, real conversation.

Sometime in October.....

Ring ring.... Ring ring.....Its the phone ringing in Richmond Virginia. It was one of the directors from 1000000 mph. "Mark, this is Kate. You've won the raffle. You've got the gallery for the months of November and December!" "Wow that's great! I'll get back when I have clarified some ideas, this is fantastic!" Or is it?

Mark puts the phone down and looks at his diary. Fuck, I'd better get thinking what can I do when I'm committed to being here in the States. He sits and thinks. A list of possibilities float though his head. Mmmmm... A list of things to do in a London gallery with a month to get the show ready while you're stuck in America.

Pretend it isn't happening

Is there anything around I haven't shown before? (desperate)

Plan your retrospective (premature)

Consider an installation (really desperate)

Leave it empty (yawn)

Have a painting exhibition (still yawning)

Make a big sculpture (too hard)

Give the slot to some other artist (too generous)

Hang out in bars searching for musicians (too dubious)

Give it to a heavy metal band to rehearse in...Mmmmm...maybe.....

I know! I'll get in touch with....

The phone rings again, this time, it was Mark calling from Richmond, USA. "Pete, It's about the exhibition, it's for real. This is serious! What shall we do? I've suggested to Kate that maybe we give it over to a heavy metal band to rehearse in for the duration. It would be open to the public of course".

"Come on Mark, Heavy Metal, everybody's using it!"...pause..."Why don't we think of something that's got more of an edge? I saw this busker over the summer playing Fleetwood Mac songs. When was the last time that you listened to them? Now that is a challenge!"

What about asking them to play Billy Joel songs? Kate likes them. A metal band playing Uptown Girl?"

"Look, let's think about it a bit more, I'll get back to you...."

Two weeks went by, Pete running around like crazy with a project he's already committed to and Kate ringing up asking what's going on we've got to move on this one and Mark in Richmond wondering what the hells happening in London, why isn't anybody doing anything! Dallas the other Director of 1000000 mph is just busy being busy.

Then they get a breakthrough, another phone call.....

"Mark, wait! Do you remember 'Streets of London' by Ralph McTell? It was ubiquitous years ago, there was even a punk version! We could frame the exhibition around that song. It was the classic, busking song. It sort of

sums up London from a time gone by, no one will know it. We could use buskers not heavy metallers.

“Hey, that might work! We could advertise for musicians and buskers to come into the gallery for an audition. The auditions can be held during gallery open hours and the public can come in for the experience. We’ll first get the musicians to play a song of their choice, then a song that represents London to them, and then we’ll ask them to play a version of Ralph McTell’s Streets of London. Maybe also The Clash’s London Calling. Great! We can then give the most interesting buskers a stint in the gallery—they can use it to busk in, have a party, come and get the money, lock up and go home...whatever they want! All the auditions will be filmed and shot and in the third week we’ll play the videos en masse. It will be like a choir, only noisier. It can be happening in both the US and UK at the same time. In the final week we’ll play all the videos and invite some of the musicians back to play live for the final party!”

“Can you get any recording done in Richmond?” “Yeah. There seem to be loads of musicians around. I’m sure I can convince them to come in for a session. I thought I’d give them the lyrics but not the music. They probably don’t know the McTell song. Could get some strange versions...”

Here’s the installation. We kept changing the placing of the videos so that everybody got a chance at performing on the biggest monitor. Sometimes we had all the monitors playing at full volume, other times we turned three of them down and had the one playing to the miming of the others. In this picture Richmond is on the right, London on the left.

Stuart, he’s from the art group 'aas'. He’d driven down from Birmingham on his way to visit his parents-in-law. He came in, set his computer up and Kate offered him a cushion to sit on the cement floor. He drove down again with Ana for the closing party, hung about for a few minutes and said, “Where can I get something to eat?” Somebody gave him the directions and off they went. They never came back!

Anita had come up from South London. Kate had found her singing on the underground. It was pissing down and they’d closed the local tube station because of flooding. She said it had taken her 2 years to get the courage up to sing in public. She sang a Dido song and Waterloo Sunset by the Kinks. Kate had never heard it before and cried. Afterwards Anita said what a weird experience it had been singing in the gallery on her day because when she busks nobody looked at her in the eyes in case they’d have to give her money but being in the gallery meant that everybody passing stared directly at her through the safety of the gallery window.

Serge had come from Eastern Europe where he’d been a professor of music at a University. For his song about London he’d played Petit Fleur. London’s getting more like Paris everyday!

HK119. The door opened and in came these two people, “Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!” Said the first—they’d had lot of hassle with the cab driver. “Hi I’m Heidi, can I get somewhere to change?” “Sure” we said, “You can go into the office”. When she came out she was dressed in cling film and had painted her face half red. Her partner was in speedos and wore a welding helmet. It was a shock—we’d expected her to sing folk songs! They’d never heard of the McTell but went behind a screen to rehearse. When they came out they drank from a bottle of vodka and mimed over a couple of verses of the recording before they couldn’t take it anymore.

The night before the auditions Pete found Pevin (real name Kevin!) playing a guitar in the rain in Covent Garden. He went up to talk to him and explained what the project was about and asked if he’d come along with his guitar. “I’m a Human Beatbox” he said, “I’ll come as that tomorrow”. He explained that the best site for busking was outside Tottenham Court Road Dominion, playing Queen songs.

It was amazing how the studio set up retained the presence of the musicians after they left.

Tony was from the English Folk Society. He sang a song called Welcome to Wonderland that he’d written himself and also recited a poem called Rubbish. A big hit on the closing night. At the audition, when we played him

the McTell song he asked if he could wear his coat. "Of course you can". He went and got it, then sat on the floor. As the music played he started to beg for money, "Spare us a shilling Guv? Spare us a shilling Guv?" It was Sunday, it was cold, it was raining. We all nearly cried.

Xavier was from Spain and had a backing track of rock classics that he performed his lounge heavy metal to. When we asked him to play his song about London he played Stairway to Heaven, saying it was one of his most popular numbers when he played in Oxford Circus Tube Station.

Xenon was a professional musician. He'd never heard of the song Streets of London and wanted to rehearse first. While it was playing he slowly he tuned his violin and began to play. It was amazing. When it finished he asked if we'd been recording? We said we had. 'Please don't use it', he said.

Sarah and Olly had seen the advertisement on the board in Tin Pan Alley. They were on their way home from a gig. Sarah came back to play on the final party, she blew the place apart with her trained voice and cabaret style. Mike came in and we chatted. He said "I really like to play stuff like the Pogues. I'm not into that Streets of London shit!" During his time in the gallery he busked the street outside or stood directly behind the window to have a connection with the public as they passed by.

Nobody knew what to expect when Guiseppe arrived. He was from Sardinia and played the Didgeridoo. He explained that it was a pity the gallery didn't have marble walls and ceiling for without them we'd never experience the sound at its fullest impact. We looked up at the wood lath showing through the crumbling plasterboard ceiling and thought "Yes, marble would be nice". Guiseppe continued, "First though I want you to close your eyes, breathe deeply and empty your chackra". We explained that we had to keep them open as we were videoing him. "I hope that you enjoyed that as much as I did" he remarked once he'd finished.

The photos from the auditions spread out across the wall from the monitors. Apart from this is was only the musicians.

Maryanne had come all the way down from Swiss Cottage. "I've been up all night sewing sequins on my outfit. She played the Victorian String Harp and had composed a song called Watching the Air. "I want to be on Top of the Pops by Christmas!" she said.

Mendicant were the first to arrive. We were nervous as we didn't know what to expect. They'd traveled up from South London and were really up for the idea. When they did their stint in the gallery they brought another member. They made the afternoon into a party.

Richard couldn't come on the weekend so we auditioned him on the Monday. He was classically trained and had worked as a bookbinder. He played Classical Gas. It was.

In Richmond, because the weather's good into December, you hear music being played all over the town. There aren't any buskers but the parties, bars and gallery openings often had musicians playing. The open mic sessions in bars initially seemed the best place to find musicians though in the end only Ian came through from this kind of venue. He'd been singing Mack The Knife in the bar and was practising for his second shot at getting into music school and was pretty much up for anything. In Richmond it turned out that none of the musicians knew Streets of London or London Calling. They read from lyrics written out large and placed on the ground in front of them and had to make up the melody. Ian, Mike and Clark were recorded in a large emptied out studio. The acoustics were poor, so after these initial sessions the musicians were filmed in their own live/work spaces. Mark used to hear Mike playing the guitar on his balcony across from his apartment. Mike came to the recording with his girlfriend and kept to a bluegrass groove for the two songs. Clark was from Backstage, the shop where Mark rented the sound equipment. As a classical guitarist he wasn't used to singing and took some persuading to try. His carefully picked out melodies ended up having this beautiful insecurity about them.

Molly could whistle any song, note perfect, but wasn't so comfortable singing. She was the only Richmond musician who got to hear the originals before performing. She wanted to play the clarinet as well so we have this weird version of London Calling sounding like part of a wind quartet.

Someone Mark met socially offered Miles's number saying he'd be willing to play. Miles was a mathematician

with a Jacques Brel approach to the songs. He decided to play the accordion for this session and belted out these powerful versions, half chanting, half reciting. He was filmed in his living room.

Rasul rewrote the lyrics of both Streets of London and London Calling to fit his rap rhythms: "Have you seen the old bag in London, her clothes rags, no time for mumbling, she's stumbling home, with the carrier bag". He had a tiny recording studio in his basement.

Ryan was an MFA student where Mark was teaching. His artwork involved music and performance. Strange and interesting songs, including a poignant homage to his friend the fly. Behind him are lists of films he watched as a kid.

The next day we went back to the gallery to clear up. The place was littered with empty beer bottles and cigarette ends.....