

and happening with the 'amateur arts scene,' says Low, who also writes for and directs theatre productions at The Oral Stage.

Low and Priya use the gig to raise awareness and funds for Project Connect. They also threw a special edition of Project OMG featuring the British participants, who are performers from the York Theatre Royal and Soho Theatre, London during their two-week visit here.

Participants are fully involved in the running of Project Connect and the hands-on experience helps them to learn along the way.

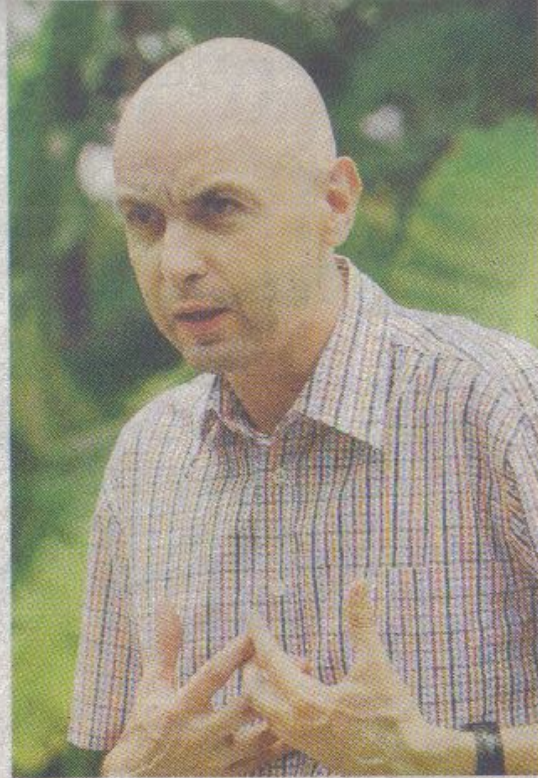
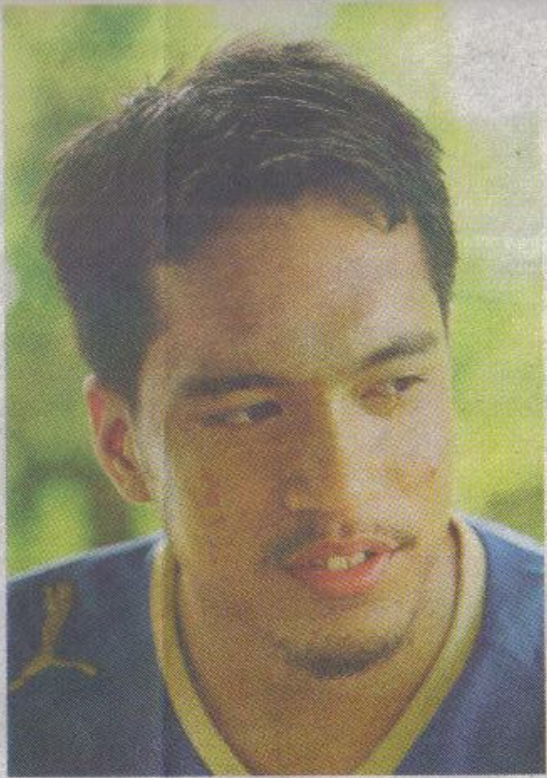
"We learned how to apply for art grants. Writing *surat rasmi* (formal letters) is not how you do it," says Adam Khairul Huri, 18.

The participants have to do everything from creating publicity to raising RM265,000 for the whole year's activities and to host the British participants. Earlier, youths from each country created a box with items that tell stories about themselves, their culture or country, and sent it to their counterparts overseas.

"Our idea is to celebrate what makes us 'us' and investigate who we are using art, culture and heritage," says Cloudbreak co-founder Brian Jones, who used to be an actor and theatre director in Britain. The youth participants also took the initiative to drive the project with their suggestions and plans.

"It is also our aim to not spoon-feed them but to challenge them to own the project. A lot of them are great people but they are not used to being given a wide brief. It is a big learning curve for them," adds Jones.

They put up a performance based on the



Brian Jones (pic right) says that Project Connect celebrates who we are through art; while Adam Khairul Huri picked up new experiences in Project Connect.

boxes' contents last Saturday with the 10 participants from York and two from London. The locals brought their foreign friends to colourful places in Kuala Lumpur such as the Pekeliling flats and Temple of Fine Arts in Brickfields, as well as Malacca and Kota Baru.

By the way, it was also the first visit to Kelantan for some of the KL city youths who realised that they do take our local history and culture for granted. In different ways, the programme is aptly named because participants are presented with the opportunity to connect with one another, and with the community at a deeper level.

The Malaysian participants spent some time working on a play with members of the Welcome Community Home, which runs a hospice and drop-in centre for those living

with HIV and AIDS in Batu Arang, Selangor.

The work of Project Connect is just at its infancy in terms of effecting change and bringing awareness to the community but the organisers and pioneers are seeding work for the future.

Their future plans include conducting arts workshops in welfare organisations like Welcome Community Home, Ti-Ratana Welfare Society Malaysia and Rumah Hosanna.

"The real work begins after the exchange proper where we go out to our respective communities to give back using the arts," said Low.

Seeking funding has been an uphill task for the group and Jones says that they are still looking for local sponsors. So far, they have

received funds from the Commonwealth Foundation, groups from Britain and the Kelantan Government.

If you wish to support the project, contact Jade at 012-330 2600 or Dianne at 03-6201 7701. You can also suggest an organisation to benefit from the arts-in-community projects.

Find out more about Project Connect at www.project-connect.blogspot.com.

