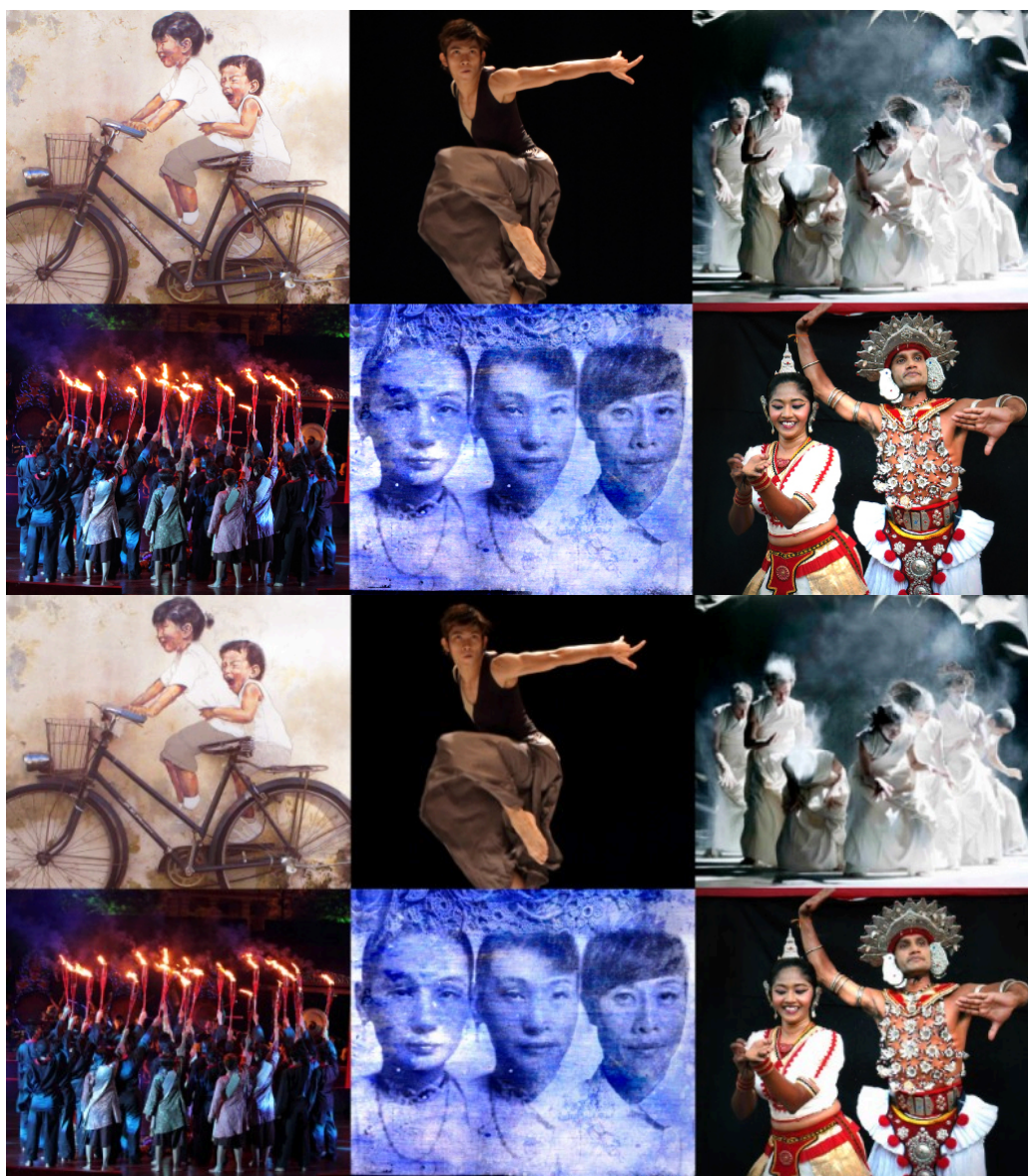


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George Town is the story | interview with Festival Director



Ken Takiguchi from **Performing Arts Network Japan** talks to **Joe Sidek**, director of the **George Town Festival** on the island of Penang in Malaysia. The Festival's inviting mix of an ambitious program featuring world-renowned artists, attractive venues and appealing local arts and culture have quickly made it one of the most talked-about festivals in Southeast Asia.

Penang, George Town has a story. Every corner of the city is a gallery. Every wall is a gallery. The festival started with this as a basis. We cannot directly compete with other festivals. Thus, we needed to find our own identity. And our identity is George Town. Although I balance the international acts with other elements, the core of the festival has always been about George Town – sharing George Town with everyone.

In 2008, George Town on the island of Penang in Malaysia was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list. In the British colonial period the island of Penang was called Prince of Wales Island and served as a trade base for the British East Indies Company and today it is one of Malaysia's prime tourist destinations. The central George Town district still retains much of the colonial period architecture and its diverse population of roughly 400,000 has many ethnic Chinese, Malays and Indians.

In this World Heritage town the **George Town Festival** was launched in 2010. Since then the festival has welcomed such internationally renowned artists as Akram Khan in 2011 and Roysten Abel in 2012 and has tied up with international programs like Tropfest, the largest short film festival that began in Australia. Another mainstay of the festival is the "Street Art Project" making use of venues on the streets and scenic places around George Town and productions based on the traditional Malay martial art of *Silat* and other arts and culture indigenous to the island of Penang that the festival actively promotes.

In the words of the festival's director, Joe Sidek, the festival aims to share the story of Penang Island and George Town with a good balance of globalization and local uniqueness. In this interview Performing Arts Network Japan spoke with Sidek in detail about this festival that is

drawing attention as one of the most vibrant in Southeast Asia.

Read the full interview on [Performing Arts Network Japan](#)

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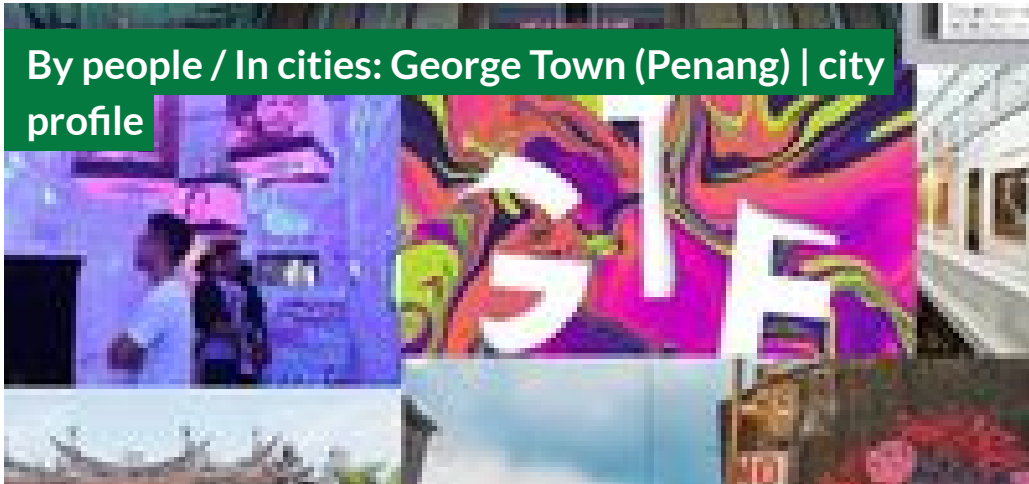
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