

MIRIAM MARGOLYES' LONDON

LONDON What's on...

When did you first perform on a London stage?

I was Barbara Windsor's understudy in Tony Richardson's *The Threepenny Opera* in 1972 at the Piccadilly Theatre. There were a lot of girls 'on the game' around the theatre at night after the show, some of whom I made friends with.

Do you have a favourite theatre?

I love the National Theatre; it is my ambition to perform there before I die. The South Bank is always buzzing with people having fun – exactly how it should be. But my favourite theatres are the smaller ones: The Gate, The Bush, The Red Lion, and particularly The Duke of York's Theatre, where I performed *Dickens' Women* in 1991.

Would you like to have lived in Dickens' London?

No. You had to be rich to have a good life in those days. Dickens' London is poor, dirty and dank, and full of cholera. Rotherhithe, where I filmed *Little Dorrit*, still looks quite Dickensian; it is very historic and beautiful.



© James Britain

TIME TRAVEL: The Dickens Room at Dennis Severs' House, Folgate Street

How do London audiences compare to other audiences?

They are wiser, more generous but also more discriminating. They certainly don't rush to their feet quite so readily as audiences in America.

Where do you go to relax?

The Clapham Manor Swimming Baths or Tooting Bec Lido. I also like to walk, usually along the Wandsworth Road to Vauxhall, and to take a boat along the Thames to Greenwich. I love London buses, and now that I've got my freedom pass I am always on them.

Do you have a favourite shop?

I collect 18th-century political cartoons and treat myself at Andrew Edmonds on Lexington Street in Soho whenever I get a job. I love secondhand bookshops, especially My Back Pages in Balham. I recommend the Chancery Lane Silver Vaults; the world's largest retail collection of fine antique silver is traded from within its vaults.

What do you miss when you are away?

The old buildings, BBC Four, Smith's crisps and Cadbury's Whole Nut. I love the way London has so many neighbourhoods that can be explored, and how it is simply overflowing with history.

In your opinion, what is London's best-kept secret?

Dennis Severs' House near Spitalfields. Severs recreated each room in a different historic style. The place feels like a time capsule. Another gem is the Charles Dickens Museum on Doughty Street. It has the pottery monkey that he always insisted was in place before he started work.

League member Miriam Margolyes is an award-winning actress and voice artist. She was awarded an OBE in 2002 for her services to drama and has recently toured internationally with her one-woman show, *Dickens' Women*. Interview by Samantha Whitaker.

Cirque du Soleil: Quidam

Royal Albert Hall
4 January–7 February



© Al Seib

Cirque de Soleil's popular show is bursting with electric energy. A young girl finds herself in the mysterious land of Quidam and is entertained by colourful characters in eccentric costumes, who perform wild juggling, trapeze and balancing acts.
Tickets: £16–£69.50. Contact: 020 7589 8212 or www.royalalberthall.com

Byzantium 330–1453

Royal Academy
Until 22 March 2009
This ambitious exhibition provides a grand survey of 1,000 years of history, incorporating more than 300 objects, some of which have never before been displayed in public.
Tickets: £12; concessions £10. Contact: 0870 848 8484 or www.royalacademy.org.uk

The Royal Opera: Rigoletto

Royal Opera House
10 February–1 March 2009
This Royal Opera revival of Verdi's great chorus opera, which features favourites such as 'La donna e mobile' and 'Caro nome', is led by the renowned conductor, Daniel Oren.
Tickets: Prices not yet available. Contact: 020 7304 4000 or www.roh.org.uk