

## JACK JONES'S ASIA TOUR BLOG: Beijing *Tues 5 September*

I'm currently sitting on flight CA167 waiting for lift off from Beijing airport writing this in the notes app of my iPhone. Well, technically by the time you read this I will be somewhere in Kyoto gorging on the best sushi in the world or wandering a Zen garden. Not yet however, I'm currently struggling to figure out why the chairs on airplanes are all so needlessly uncomfortable. You'd think that humanity would, after thousands of years of experience of making seats, be able to fashion something that doesn't give you simultaneous neck, back and leg cramp. But never fear, I have the indestructible, fabric waist seatbelt to protect my life in case of emergency.



As I mentioned last week we had a day off when first arriving in Beijing so a group of company cast and crew headed out to visit the Great Wall of China. It's a very strange feeling to actually stand on it. It has grown to have an almost mythical status across the world, with many people claiming you can see it from space (unfortunately a myth, unless you had a telescope in space to look back on the earth with). We took a ski lift up to the wall itself as the majority of it is built along the ridges of hills and mountains, and after haggling a can of coke down from £5 to £2 (he claimed he carried all the cans up himself but I think it more likely they were brought up by the ski lift in boxes), we started along the wall. There were quite a few steep stairs along the way as it rose over the mountains, but after having climbed Mt. Kinabalu in Borneo, which consisted of climbing near endless stairs for two days up 4096 meters, this didn't feel particularly taxing.

# NEW/ADVENTURES RE;BOURNE



As great as the Great Wall is, I have to admit that whoever thought of installing a toboggan ride back down the hill was a genius. If more hills had toboggan rides back down the world would be a happier place. As long as you don't get stuck behind someone slow on the way down. I'm mentioning no names.

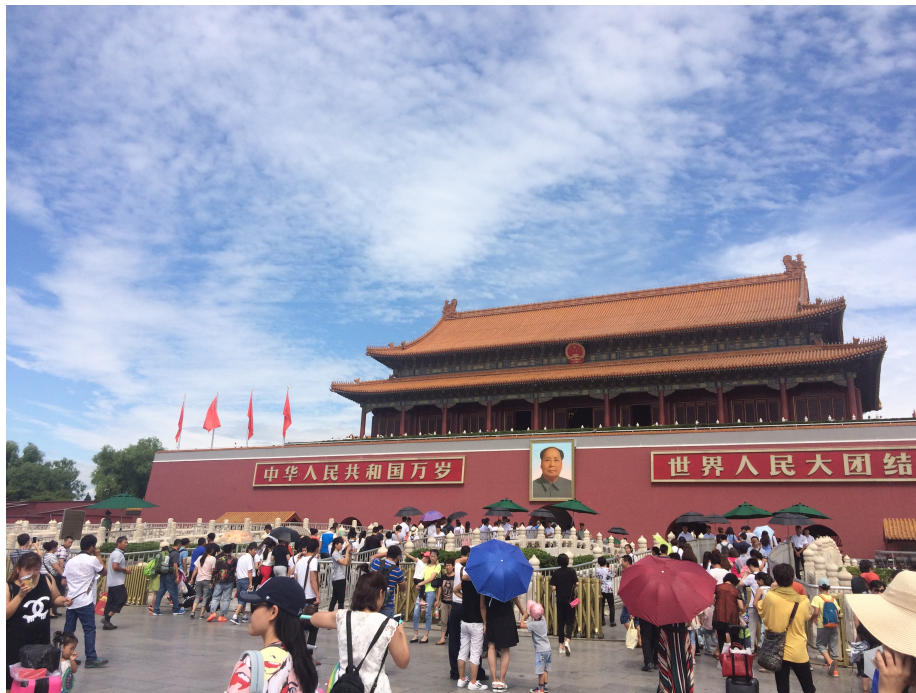
I'm going to have to take a break from writing this for a while as we are being serenaded by the majestic wailings of a four-year-old child and I don't think my brain can cope with the ear splitting decibels. To be fair to the child we have been delayed for an hour, waiting for seven people who are late, and he really doesn't like his seat belt. That all important, indestructible, fabric seat belt.

An hour later and he has tired himself out. I tried pulling faces at him at one point but I think it just made it worse. Then I stumbled across a very unexpected way of getting him to be quiet. I managed to distract him for a moment by performing a section of the ever popular camp 1970's hit by the Village people, the YMCA. Who could have guessed that would be his weakness? I think he particularly enjoyed the shape of the A. But back to last week. Our hotel had an unusual design. They had gone for a Tuscan like vibe where all the rooms were laid out in a square block around a giant, indoor central plaza. So when walking down the corridor, or looking out the window, you could watch people having breakfast, or see other nosey people poking their heads out from behind their curtains. It had a slightly "on show" vibe, as even the lifts were made of glass and everyone from the rooms and in the plaza could watch the people riding inside them. A little awkward if you are trying to sneak out without anyone noticing you.



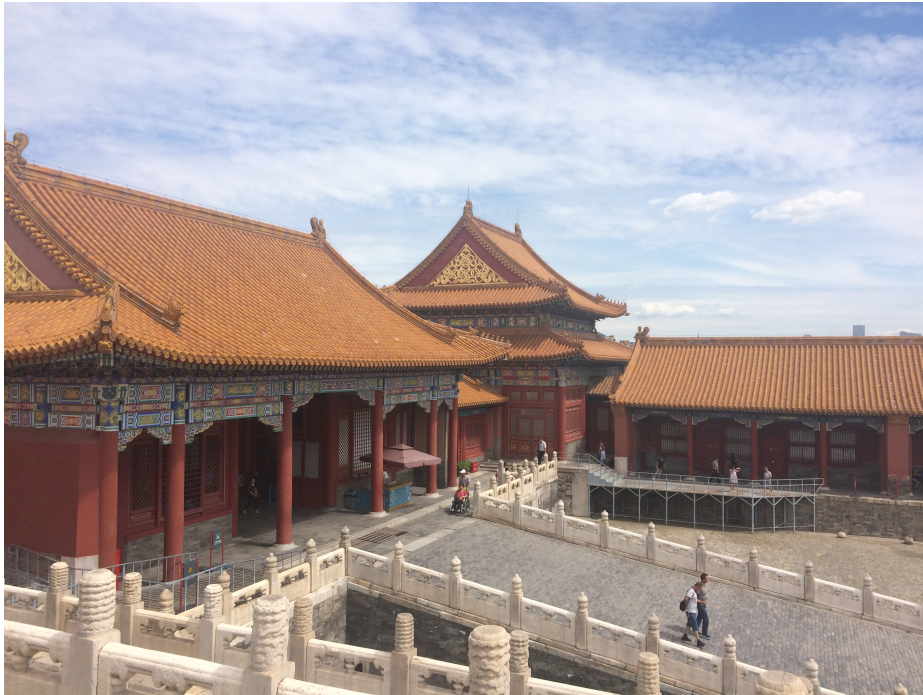
# NEW/ADVENTURES RE;BOURNE

We have been performing at Tianqiao Performing Arts Centre which like last week, in Shanghai, has a quite massive backstage area. I happened to have a more unusual week as I was playing Count Lilac every show apart from one (no shows off again hence why I'm writing this on the plane). I hadn't performed that role since back in March some time so was a little apprehensive. It was great to do so many back to back though as by the end of the week I was much more comfortable with the material and stamina. We also welcomed back Danny Collins this week, who has come to play Archie and help alleviate the work load for the boys after the recent injuries. He just finished a successful run with *Showboat* on the west end, and if you're in London you likely saw him on the side of a bus or on the tube promoting the show on the poster!



I also managed to go to the Forbidden City one morning, which is opposite the famous Tienemen Square. The gateway entrance is huge and extremely lavish. There is also a giant portrait of Chairman Mao hanging over the entrance to the gate. I did find myself wondering what the prevalent view of Chairman Mao is in modern China. He is still on all the bank notes I noticed. Obviously it's not something to go around asking people as it was a controversial period of history, which I'm sure many people have strong views regarding either way. However, I was pleasantly surprised that there is a working Tibetan Monastery in Beijing, after the turmoil of the past few decades this would seem to indicate a step forward. They have sniffer dogs at the security check in for the Forbidden City, which was opened to the public in the 1980's and became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It seems to be a very popular tourist spot for thousands of Chinese and the occasional westerner, even given the vast size of the palace grounds (and when I say vast I mean gargantuanly vast) there are still throngs of people everywhere. There are giant brass vats dotted along every walkway and plaza where water used to be kept in case a fire broke out. As the structure used a lot of wood a fire could have been disastrous, resulting in something comparable to the great fire of London had it spread across the entire complex. It was hard to imagine how a royal family, even with all of their servants, their servants' families, the guests, foreign diplomats, a sizeable guard and their dog could have inhabited even half of the buildings there. The buildings do have wonderfully romantic names, like The Hall of Heavenly Transcendence, The Hall of Supreme Tranquility, and the not so well named Temple of Extensive Moisture. I'm not making that up, there is genuinely a temple by that name.

# NEW/ADVENTURES RE;BOURNE



So now we are heading off to Japan for the final venue of the *Sleeping Beauty* tour, one year after we started rehearsals in Three Mills. We have one week off until we start though so I am heading over to Japan early to do some travelling and sight-seeing. I've been to Japan before and it is one of my favourite places to go. The natural beauty there is just incredible and the food is fantastic.

I don't want to jinx it but the child is still silent and comfy opposite me on the plane. He seems to be fascinated with the emergency exit information. He's likely the only one who's read it so I know who I'm following should a crisis arise.