

JACK JONES'S ASIA TOUR BLOG: Shanghai *Tues 30 August*

This entry for Shanghai has come a little later than anticipated, largely due to the fact that the internet hardly lasts long enough to send an email larger than a full stop, but also due to other factors that will become clear soon.



This week we have been performing in the theatre at the Shanghai Cultural Square (see above for a shot from the outside). The theatre itself is quite unusually shaped. The stage itself is huge and could easily hold our set three times over within its backstage environs. The auditorium is equally as large, luckily we've been well sold here as otherwise it could have ended up looking fairly barren out there. The audience have seemed to be laughing more during the show here than other Asian venues. They have even laughed a few times at the moment Bertie kicks the gramophone to get it working again which so far has usually been a painfully endured silence. Sometimes with the occasional cough just to highlight how quiet it really is.

The most unusual thing about the audiences here however, is that during the bows about half of them whip out their phones and start filming us. This leaves half of the audiences' hands otherwise incapacitated, leaving the applause a little thin. It's not because they haven't enjoyed it of course, but for some reason they all want to be able to relive the glory of our bows for ever more. I've even seen an eager few watching the video they just filmed of us bowing whilst we are still bowing. The language barrier has been more difficult here than in other venues as the majority of the staff don't speak any English at all whilst most of our Cantonese consists of "Hello" and "Thank you". Whilst this doesn't really make much of a difference to the cast it has been more challenging for the people working backstage. The wardrobe department in particular have had to be on their toes as instructions can often be misunderstood resulting in someone's costume ending up on the other side of the building. They do all have scooters though so can scoot around fairly quickly if something has gone amiss.

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It's been quite a hectic two weeks in terms of performances. There have been a lot of cast changes due to sickness and injury, with most of the men not taking a show off for the first week. We even performed one show where one of the male servant characters Archie was performed by a woman, as we had no more men left to play that part. It turned out to be really fun despite the last minute rehearsals before the show to get everything together. This is one of the reasons why this blog is later than usual, as I usually write it on my show off.

Shanghai is quite different as a city to anywhere we have been before. The roads can be quite a dangerous place. I'm not entirely sure I've managed to figure out when cars can pass a crossing and when they can't, it seems like sometimes they all just go no matter what the lights say. They even have a countdown for when the green light changes to red, which might sound like a good idea, however all it seems to do is to encourage drivers to speed up when they see the countdown start. I've also had at least three Moped's stop beside me at a crossing trying to get me to climb onto the back. I'm assuming that they are some form of loosely self-employed taxi drivers rather than men looking to have a temporary travel buddy, however I wasn't inclined to find out. Unfortunately, due to our schedule I haven't had much time to actually go out and see much of Shanghai. I did however go to the newly opened Disneyland before our season here started. It is absolutely enormous. And face meltingly hot. How any of the people inside the character costumes lasted more than ten minutes outside I'll never know. Perhaps they keep them in freezers for half an hour before hand and then slowly thaw as they walk around outside. I was literally jumping from shadow to shadow to avoid walking in direct sunlight. Aside from Hong Kong, which is its own state anyway, it's the first Disneyland to open in China. It certainly seems as though it's as popular here as it is anywhere else. The queue times for rides could easily reach three hours.



My favourite was probably the Pirates of the Caribbean, the animatronics on it were brilliant. They had a full size Davy Jones complete with moist, squirming tentacles on his face along with huge screens that made you feel like you were under the water. Alas there was no "It's a small world" ride. So the ritual torture that you have to endure that is just a part of visiting Disneyland wasn't available.

After this we are off to Beijing. I've heard that Shanghai is more western than Beijing so I'm not quite sure what to expect. However, I will be going to the Great Wall before we start work so will let you know if it lives up to its fairly self-confident name!