

## ► Crosstalking teenager uses comedy to break barriers

By Vera Penêda

Peter Vanderslice is a 13-year-old American with a very Chinese attitude. Dressed in a *magua*, (Chinese traditional silk vest) he takes to the stage, impersonating a foreigner in Beijing who speaks fluent Chinese, but with the mannerisms of a true Beijinger. Solo or in dialogue, he performs his comic skit of *xiangsheng* – crosstalk. Absolutely resolute, the young man is firm in his desire to become a rare case of foreign talent grasping one of China's foremost performing arts. Billed by his teacher as the next Dashan [the first foreign *xiangsheng* performer] Vanderslice has already featured on CCTV, Beijing TV and in several talent competitions.

**When and why did you first come to China?**

I go to the Lycée Français in New York where I started [learning] Chinese 40 minutes a day, four days a week because I thought it'd be a very useful language to learn. I first came to China last year to attend a five-week summer camp that my Chinese teacher told us about. There I learned about this half-year program at the Beijing Talent academy. I know the only real way to learn the language is to be entirely immersed in it and having everyone speaking it around you, so I decided I had to come. I'm here for the summer so that I don't skip my French curriculum back home.

**How were you introduced to crosstalk?**

I started last year after I had enough Chinese to maintain a conversation.

**What's your comic skit about?**

I've done two types of performances, alone and in dialogue with a student who also goes to this school. The one I do by myself is mainly about me becoming a Beijing person. At one point I run into a South Korean person in the bus who asks me all these directions in Chinese and the lines revolve around the language misunderstandings and instructions.

**How did you prepare for it?**

I was given the sketch. I learned the meaning of the lines and then had to memorize them. Everything is meant to look spontaneous; that's why it takes time to learn how to perform it. It took me about a week, three hours every day to memorize it; and about one or two more weeks to learn the actions. The most difficult part is to know when exactly you're to make a certain movement and what mood to imply when you're speaking. I learned with my teacher and then practiced every day with my guardian. There's not really a technique for *xiangsheng* so I just have to practice hard.

**What is it that you like the most about crosstalk?**

I really love doing it and I'm going to try to find time to perform more and more. The most enjoyable part

Photo: Guo Yingguang



is being able to entertain Chinese people. I remember this one time I performed and that people seemed to like it. I felt like an entire cultural barrier between me and Chinese students and teachers had been broken because I was doing something related to their culture. Since then it was much easier to establish a relationship; I guess I wasn't some kind of foreigner to them anymore.

**How many times did you perform so far? Do you get nervous?**

I performed it many times but for real, like in TV and talent shows for foreigners, a bit over five times. I was nervous at first, but then I think it just started coming naturally to me. Since I like performing so much I guess I don't feel scared of the audience anymore. So far I didn't have any big mess ups.

**What other languages would you like to pick up next?**

Arabic. Lebanese is also an alternative because my family on my mother's side is Lebanese. Or maybe Spanish.

**How is it spending summer away from home?**

In the beginning I got homesick because I had to stay in dorms where all the kids and teachers were Chinese. I was the only foreigner. It wasn't that easy to fit in at first when I couldn't communicate. After one month I started getting along better. But I left boarding school and moved in with a tutor. I think that staying at a home is easier for me and I realized that spending one month with one teacher is much more challenging than spending five months here at school.

**What do you want to be when you grow up?**

My big thing is learning languages. I want to learn useful languages and don't want to stop here. I enjoy it and think it's something I'm able to do. But I think the reason why I'm doing all this is because I think that my generation needs more people that can be global citizens and know local cultures. I'd like to be some kind of expert connecting Europe, America and China.

**But I hear you also have plans to study in China.**

I want to come back here for 8th grade because the Math and the Physics are exceptional. I'm studying for the HSK (Chinese proficiency test) so that I have all my options open; I want to prove myself that I'm able to do it and find out about my true Chinese level.

**What do you enjoy doing in your free time?**

Most of the time I do homework from school and Chinese studies. But I enjoy riding my bike. I watch a bit of TV and I like American movies. I've done karate but I'm not really into sports, I play ball games just for fun.

**Do you remember your first impression of China?**

Yes, yes. I was so excited to come. I had never been to an Asian country and had no idea what to expect. I was looking out the window to see what food they have, what cars they drive. I remember going to Tiananmen Square and The Forbidden City and thinking "oh my gosh" because it's like looking at the amazing sites I'd seen in tourist advertising.

**How do you compare Beijing to New York?**

I love both of them very much because it feels like they're always moving forward and the determination of people in both cities is very similar. When I come to Beijing I don't feel like I'm coming to some awkward place, I feel at home here as much as in New York. Sometimes I find that I miss more things from Beijing when I'm in New York than the other way around. I love Chinese food, I really miss it in the US: The dumplings, the Beijing duck, the beef noodles, the hot pot, they're not the same at restaurants in New York.

**Did you travel in China?**

I've been to Hunan for five weeks with summer camp. It was a great experience because I could compare it to urban Beijing and get a different sense of China. I also went to Shanghai and Hong Kong with my parents. I prefer Beijing – it's less Westernized. If you want to learn Chinese and be immersed in true culture then I think one should come to Beijing.

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VOLUME 2 • NO. 336 • TUESDAY AUGUST 17, 2010

PRICE 2 YUAN

► **Déjà vu**

A flood-discharge ditch is dug out yesterday in Yingxiu town, Wenchuan county in Sichuan Province, which was engulfed by floods and landslides Saturday. The water level finally started dropping yesterday. Photo: Courtesy of Wu Chuanming



► **Japan loses long-held spot**

## China No. 2 in Q2 GDP

By Guo Qiang

China's economy in the second quarter overwhelmingly outperformed that of Japan, fueling a long-time expectation that China will unseat Japan as the world's second-largest economy by the end of this year, behind only the United States.

Japan's second-quarter GDP totaled nearly \$1.29 trillion, the Japanese Cabinet Office announced yesterday, lower than China's \$1.34 trillion in the same period, which was announced in July.

GDP expansion slowed to just 0.4 percent in the three months ended in June, well below a median market forecast of 2.3 percent, after a revised 4.4 percent growth in the first three months of the year, the Cabinet Office said. By comparison, official data showed that China's economy achieved a growth rate of 10.3 percent in the second quarter.

Bloomberg quoted Shen Jian-guang, a Hong Kong-based economist at Mizuho Securities Asia Ltd, as saying that "It is not likely that Japan will retake the No. 2 spot, given the

likely growth rates."

"Although China has experienced staggering economic development in the past decade, China's growth momentum won't stop, and China enjoys huge room to develop and catch up with developed nations," Wang Tao, chief economist with the United Bank of Switzerland (UBS), told the Global Times yesterday.

But China moving into the second spot is dubbed a "symbolic" milestone, as many analysts say it is per capita calculations that matter most.

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## US, S.Korea drill on

By Song Shengxia

South Korea and the United States launched a fresh round of military exercises yesterday in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula, stoking tensions with the North, which has threatened retaliation

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North