

ENTERTAINMENT

FUNNY GUY HAS A LINE IN STRAIGHT TALKING

The crowd-pleasing, plain-spoken Canadian comic is returning to Hong Kong, bringing non-PC routines that lampoon stereotypes

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Since performing his first Hong Kong stand-up show in the late 1990s, Russell Peters has played the city more times than he can remember. But his 2013 gig stands out in his memory – for all the wrong reasons.

“Out of our crew of 11, nine of us got extremely ill, including me. One of our security guards got so sick he ended up staying in a Hong Kong hospital for three weeks. His kidneys failed, he almost died. That’s one of our more crazy experiences,” the Canadian says, adding with a chuckle. “He’s great now but he’s not on tour with us any more because he doesn’t want to chance it.”



those insecurities remind you you’re human and the audience feels a little bit more at ease with you because it reminds them that I’m just like them. You never want to be above your audience.”

When it comes to his signature crowd banter, where he picks an audience member and ribs them based on their appearance or ethnicity, Peters says he doesn’t plan ahead before foreign shows, preferring instead to arrive in a country and scope out the locals to “figure out the common ground” before deciding what he’s going to make fun of. When in doubt, he looks to his own ethnic group, and says with a laugh: “I always try to find the local Indians and see how people feel about them, then work from that angle.”

At a time of heightened debate surrounding gender and racial equality, Peters’ approach, virtually unchanged for 29 years, can make some feel uncomfortable. Much of Peters’ racial material goes for the low-hanging fruit: the Indian parents who want their child to become a doctor, Asians who work with computers, Thai “ladyboys” and chain-smoking Arabs – predictable stereotypes that nevertheless go down well with the lampooned group, who see Peters as an insider rather than a stranger looking in.

Ever-larger stadium tours have made him one of the world’s highest-earning comedians, suggesting that, for all the consternation over whether his gags are off-colour, he doesn’t have to worry about whether he’ll get booked.

The comedian insists his observations are true to life, and that those who take umbrage are being oversensitive. “I’m not really making anything up in my act, so if people do get offended, they’re getting mad at reality,” he says. Being asked whether he gets more people taking offence at his material nowadays than in the past seems to strike a nerve.

“We live in a society of professional offence-takers now. If people were offended they wouldn’t come to the show, so whoever’s offended isn’t in my audience. The people who are offended are offended on the sidelines and haven’t been really paying attention to what I’m saying,” he says, incensed. “Half the time people weren’t even offended – they were just told they should be and their pea brains go: ‘If that guy’s offended then I’m sure it affects me on some level.’”

On the flip side, Peters feels he is doing a service to those who don’t want their comedians to toe the line when it comes to political correctness.

“For as many people that are offended, there are people desiring, wanting and expecting the truth from comedians, because we’re the last truth-tellers in the world. That’s what scares people – we speak the truth, we don’t hide it, and that freaks them out because they’re so coddled by the media and political correctness that they’re not used to people giving it to them straight.”

Russell Peters, Tuesday, March 13, 8pm, Convention and Exhibition Centre, 1 Expo Drive, Wan Chai. HK\$480-HK\$1,280, hkticketing.com

HEALTH



Raymond Lo shopping at Tai Wai wet market. The 70-year-old does 15 hours of cooking, dishwashing, sweeping, mopping and laundry every week. Photo: Jonathan Wong

How housework can be a wise choice for elderly

Research suggests those over the age of 65 can benefit from just the right amount of domestic toil

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Seventy-year-old Raymond Lo enjoys an active lifestyle and says that, compared to other senior citizens his age, he is in excellent physical shape.

Lo, who lives alone in Tai Wai in the New Territories, hikes, runs, and does tai chi, push-ups and sit-ups regularly. Sometimes, he cycles and sails.

“I’m generally in good health, thanks to my exercise routine and a wholesome diet,” he says.

“Sometimes, after I’ve completed a race, or if I’ve been training for an extended period of time, I might experience some soreness in my muscles and joints, but that doesn’t usually last beyond a few days.”

“I have no major physical issues, except that I can’t bend down to touch my toes, but that is probably because, over the last 10 years, I neglected to stretch properly after running and hiking.”

Lo’s other “secret weapon” to better health is housework – 15 hours of cooking, dishwashing, sweeping, mopping and laundry per week, to be precise.

“Housework is therapeutic,” he says. “I find that it relaxes me, and that, in turn, helps a lot with my mood and temperament. Maybe it also has something to do with the fact that I’m still healthy and active at this age.”

Lo might be on to something. In a recent study, German researchers at the Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epi-

demology found that men and women aged 65 years and older who did housework reported better health.

But – and perhaps not surprisingly – it revealed that elderly men spend less time on housework than elderly women. On average, elderly women spend 4.7 hours daily on housework, whereas elderly men do 3.1 hours of housework a day.

The study, which was published in January in the journal *BMC Public Health*, used self-reported data from 15,333 men and 20,907 women aged 65 and older, in the US and several European countries.

It was designed to gain an insight into how people spend the latter part of their life and find out how certain daily activities affect their health. When looking at the effects of housework on health, the researchers found that elderly folks who spent three to six hours on housework a day were 25 per cent more likely to report good health, compared with those who did just one to two hours of housework a day.

However, the researchers said that long periods of housework combined with too little or too much sleep was also associated with poor health among elderly women.

The results come as no surprise to Gwyneth Hung, senior physiotherapist at Matilda International Hospital, who agrees that elderly men would be better off doing extra housework daily – not just to take the load off their partners, but also to improve their

own health. “Housework can be considered a form of light or moderate exercise, so provided they are generally healthy and mobile, elderly men would benefit from doing more around the house, especially if they don’t do much to begin with,” she said.

The German study pointed out that elderly women spent more time cooking, cleaning and shopping, whereas elderly men did more gardening and household maintenance tasks.

“This makes sense,” says Hung. “Cooking, cleaning and shopping are light duties, and because women do them frequently during the week, their bodies are more flexible. Men do heavier work, but only occasionally, so they would be less flexible. To improve their flexibility and range of movement, it would be a good idea for elderly men to do light household chores more often.”

Hung says that light duties such as cleaning, sweeping, mopping, vacuuming and changing sheets usually involve movements such as bending or rotating the body, squatting, swinging the arms and so on. These movements are ideal for keeping the body supple and toned.

Tasks that require you to lift your arms, such as cleaning the mirror or windows, are also ideal, but avoid slouching to protect your back and spine.

“Of course, if you’re not used to doing such chores, start slow and build your stamina up to the point where you’re comfortable doing those duties regularly,” Hung says. “And, while it is OK to

While it’s OK to challenge yourself, try not to push your body too hard

PHYSIOTHERAPIST GWYNETH HUNG, MATILDA INTERNATIONAL HOSPITAL

25%
Elderly folk who spent three to six hours on housework daily were this much more likely to enjoy good health

challenge yourself, try not to push your body too hard, because there’s always a risk of muscle strain or injury.

“I suggest building up to about two to four hours a day, but remember to take a break after every 20 to 30 minutes of physical activity. And pay attention to how you feel when doing these chores and be aware of any soreness or pain.”

Grocery shopping is also an excellent way to improve your health, Hung continues. Carrying shopping bags strengthens your arms and upper body, while getting out of the house and interacting with others is good for your emotional well-being, too, as it prevents feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Are there any household chores that Hung would not advise elderly men and women to undertake?

“I don’t recommend anything that involves climbing a ladder or standing on a chair or stool, like cleaning the ceiling fan or lights,” she says. “The same goes for tasks that require you to stick part of your body out the window, such as hanging out the clothes. These duties are dangerous because you can lose your grip or balance and fall.”

“I also don’t recommend anything that involves squatting for too long because this strains the hips – if you have to be in a squatting position for a while, it makes more sense to sit on a low stool.”

As with any other type of physical activity, it’s important to discuss the pros and cons with your doctor first, especially if you suffer from any serious or chronic health conditions or mobility issues.

TRAVEL

Wanted: candidates for French polar expeditions – preferably female

Agence France-Presse

Fancy a job at the North or South Pole? A French research institute is looking for you.

The Paul-Emile Victor Polar Institute in northwest France has launched a public appeal to recruit around 40 French-speaking people for a wide variety of jobs at its six bases in the Arctic and Antarctica.

From chemists and carpenters to bakers and pastry chefs, the institute is stepping up its efforts to reach potential candidates for 12- to 14-month stints at its bases with endless summer days and winter nights.

“We get lots of interest from

the biology fields but not enough mechanics or tool operators, because these people don’t know about us,” says Laurence Andre Le Marec, hiring director at the institute, which is named after a



A king penguin colony on the island of South Georgia in Antarctica; and surveying another species at Petermann Island in Antarctica. Photos: Alamy

French polar explorer and pioneer. It operates at the Spitzberg base in the Arctic and the Dumont d’Urville and Concordia bases in Antarctica, as well as three bases on France’s sub-

Antarctic islands of Amsterdam, Crozet and Kerguelen.

Women in particular are being sought in this year’s recruitment drive, which includes six testimonial videos from female alumni.



At the Dumont d’Urville station there are just six women compared to 24 men. “I haven’t been able to get balance [between the sexes],” Andre Le Marec says. The 40 successful candidates –

30 of whom are reserved for France’s corps of Civic Service volunteers – will have to pass a medical exam that includes psychological evaluations.

“We make sure they are physically fit for this type of mission, and psychologically ready to live in a small group on an isolated site under conditions that can at times be extreme,” says Andre Le Marec.

The mechanic being sought for the Concordia station, for example, will have to mesh with a group of about 60 people in summer and just 14 in winter – when temperatures can plunge to minus 80 degrees Celsius.

“There’s no going back over winter,” the job posting on the institute’s website warns. Concor-

dia, which houses a French-Italian team, is one of three permanent bases in Antarctica.

“Not all the bases have temperatures this extreme,” says Andre Le Marec, adding that a biologist sought on the island of Amsterdam, in the southern Indian Ocean, would be able to work “in a T-shirt.”

“It was incredible,” says Claire Le Calvez, who spent time at Dumont d’Urville as a chemist and glaciologist in 2003 and eventually joined the roughly 50 permanent employees at the institute.

“What you discover in the natural world of Antarctica is amazing, she says. “These are memories that last a lifetime.”