

What it's like to be a... Teenage crosstalk performer



Get up, stand up Performing in a second language hasn't stopped this teenage comic

Simon Fowler talks to American teen Peter Vanderslice, who performs Chinese *xiangsheng* comedy (aka crosstalk)

First off, how did you start studying Chinese?

I started studying Chinese in third grade at my school in the US and then, in the sixth grade, I came to China for a five-week summer camp. But, while visiting, I decided that I wanted to stay on for another five months at the Beijing New Talent Academy so that I could improve my Chinese.

What do local Chinese people think when they hear you speaking Chinese?

They're usually very surprised that a foreigner was able to come to China and learn Chinese. They're like: 'How did you learn such good Chinese?' And then I have to go through the whole process. They're usually pretty shocked that I would come to Beijing simply to learn Chinese.

So when did you start performing *xiangsheng*?

Crosstalk was just something that my school encouraged me to get into. I ended up doing a lot of performances and competitions against kids from other nations

around the world. After that, I started to get invited to do more things and I eventually ended up on Beijing Television and then CCTV.

How does it feel to do jokes in another language?

Sometimes, where a translation is really black and white, jokes don't often work. There's one joke I do in a routine that is a pun on *laowai* (老外, meaning 'foreigner'). The other person in the sketch refers to me as *laowai*, but I interpret it as meaning 'old Wai', where *wai* is

'At first, I didn't even know what I was saying'

a surname. So I respond by saying, 'My name's not Wai and I'm not old - I'm only 13.' That's a joke that's really hard to translate into English, so you really need to know Chinese to make it work.

How did people react when you first performed that one?

I felt like I'd broken through the cultural barrier because everyone laughed when they were supposed to and everyone got the joke. I felt like that was really a moment of breaking through and understanding. Even as

a foreigner, I felt like there wasn't any awkwardness. For me, that's the beauty of cultural relations.

Would you like to continue doing crosstalk?

Yeah, I'm trying to at the moment. I'm really interested in doing that. There is a great sound and drama coach at the academy where I studied and he has a whole book of routines that I can work through. There is one for every situation. The drama coach at the school said that, if I were to stay in Beijing, I could perhaps become famous, which is pretty cool.

How long does it take you to learn a crosstalk routine?

I had one that was three pages long that was really hard to learn. At first, I didn't even know what I was saying. But then I went through and learned it. I practised for three hours a day for five days. It wasn't like it was work for me because I kind of felt like it was a game and I enjoyed doing it. But it's really tough to get all the tones right and master the whole thing. If you don't know what you're saying then you don't know how to act it out and make the gestures at the right time.

Beijing New Talent Academy
9 Anhua Jie, Shunyi district (8041 3036; www.bjnewtalent.com). 北京市顺义区天竺开发区安华9号

Taxi talk

How would you feel if a blanket ban on smoking in all public places came into force across Beijing?



It's a good move actually; it's for the good of everyone's well-being. I know that smoking is really

bad for my health but I still keep doing it. I reckon there is nothing else I can do, other than to smoke less and gradually kick the habit.

But wait, is a blanket ban even possible? Everyone smokes now! Personally, it's going to be very inconvenient for me, especially since I have a kid at home and I can only smoke outside. But I cannot possibly move out of Beijing just to smoke; that's ridiculous!

Maybe I will need to have more self-control about these things. Yeah, that's right, I should try and take control of what I am doing more. Take it easy. Most importantly, I really hope they don't bring in a ban very soon. I've got to have some time to try and quit first!

READERS' POLL

Which do you prefer – Yanjing or Tsingtao?



In declarative unison and as loud as a gong, Beijingers have spoken. It appears taste presides over local pride as the 50 people we asked around Dongzhimen overwhelmingly chose Tsingtao, popular across China, over local brew Yanjing. However, interestingly, Yanjing remained the *pifu* of choice among the elderly. Perhaps price is a greater motivator among this group – Yanjing is usually the cheaper of the two beers and is more widely available in the city.

FACT BANK

The number of students attending university in China rose from 1.08 million in 1998 to over 17 million in 2003.

TimeOut

Beijing

Being Frank!

Frank Gehry on why he *isn't* the saviour of architecture

新旅行

KNOW MORE. DO MORE.
WWW.TIMEOUT.COM/BEIJING
November 2010 • NO. 73 • FREE 免费赠送

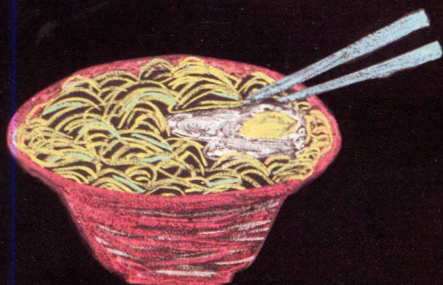


Menu



EAT BEIJING!

40 dishes to try before you die



Edinburgh Fringe | Jia Zhangke | Burlesque cabaret
Queen Sea Big Shark | Singles Day | The Raveonettes