

## Londoners see more ups than downs in hosting Games

By MU QIAN  
muqian@chinadaily.com.cn

Mark Johnson-Brown became a volunteer performer at the London 2012 Olympic Games because he wanted to do what he saw in the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.

"I would have died to be one of the 2,008 drummers in Beijing," says Johnson-Brown, 49, a professional drummer in London. "The kind of magic in their performance inspired me."

Last year Johnson-Brown applied to work for the Olympic Games, and he got offers for three paid jobs including managing work for the medal ceremonies. But when the chance to perform at the opening and closing ceremonies as a volunteer drummer came, he took that instead without hesitation.

"I have watched and loved the Olympic Games since I was a child," he says. "I was determined to get involved when the Games were coming to London, and to be involved as a performer would be my dream."

By the time he performs at the closing ceremony, he will have spent 200 hours in rehearsing for the shows.

"There is no question that we could ever compete with the drummers in Beijing, who were just perfect. My intention has been to be involved and to be part of a huge team," he says. "It's about community. The process has been enjoyable and almost spiritual, and has become more important than the goal."

He's not the only Londoner smiling this weekend.

"I'm happy the Olympic Games are taking place in London. It has certainly made London more colorful," jazz singer Alice Grace says.

Grace has taken part in Gigs, London's biggest street music competition presented by the mayor of London, in which some 200 acts will perform at more than 35 locations around the city through Aug 25.

The prizes for winners of the competition will include a license to busk on London Underground, a free place on the Higher Diploma Scholarship of The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, and studio time to record an EP.

"I hope that Londoners and visitors to London will enjoy my performance in the street, and I'm hoping that I can get the prizes, so please vote for me!" she says.

But not every Londoner is happy with the 2012 Games. There have been complaints about the disruption of normal lives, about the prices of tickets, and doubt over the economic benefits of the Games. Many Londoners chose to leave London for holidays during this period of time to avoid the chaos.

"I am delighted to be avoiding the Olympic Games. I was already sick of all the hype and fuss back in June," says Rachel Harris, a senior lecturer with the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, who is currently on holiday with her family in China. "I've never been a sports fan, nor much of a patriot, so the only thing of interest to me really was the opening ceremony."

Vacating Londoners like Harris — and tourists who skip London during the Olympic period to avoid inflated hotel rates — have made central London quieter in August, usually the peak time of London's tourism.

Robin Haller, a 33-year-old investor who works in the financial district of London, says the city has been very nice in the last few weeks, despite disruption in central London before the Games. That includes roadwork which made some parts of the city noisy, and a lane on all major roads reserved for Games participants that sometimes confused people.

"I think people were a little worried that everyday life would be affected in a big way, but as soon as the games started it was clear that there wasn't a big traffic which the authorities had worried about, so a lot of the restrictions were eased," Haller says. "As a Londoner, I think there has been a fantastic atmosphere in the city, and I like the way that the Games have been spread out over the city."

When London bid for the 2012 Olympic Games, the city hoped that the Games would boost its eastern part, a run-down area that has been neglected for decades.

Johnson-Brown lives in Greenwich in southeastern London, where three Olympic venues are located. He says that the Games have uplifted east London in many ways.

New train lines now take people easily from the Stratford station to places not only in the UK but also the whole Europe. The newly built Westfield shopping center provides jobs to a lot of local people. Johnson-Brown also expects that the value of his property will increase.

Haller sees more of the legacy of London 2012 Games in the promotion of sports which UK people didn't pay as much attention to in the past, like cycling and swimming.

"You can waste huge amount of money on things that have no impact on normal people, so why not spend a little money on things that bring people some joy?" he says.

As for the economic benefits, the investor is more skeptical.

"When cities are rewarded with the Olympic Games, they always talk about studies that show what economic benefits the Games bring. I doubt it," he says. "But it's too late to talk about that. All the money has been spent already, so why not just enjoy the Games?"



MU QIAN / CHINA DAILY

About 200 acts will perform at more than 35 locations in London.



MIKE GROLL / ASSOCIATED PRESS

British volunteer Eloise Paterson (center) poses for a photo with members of the Coldstream Guards regiment, the oldest in the British Army.

# NO BORDERS

Olympic volunteers find that the world is in their grasp, Li Xiang and Qiu Bo discover in London.

For Gemma Herens, a 23-year-old volunteer of the London Olympics, the Games is truly an international and borderless event.

Herens, who has just graduated from the University of London with a bachelor's degree in Chinese and economics, considers herself a Londoner because she was born and raised here.

But she comes from an international family — her mother is a Beijinger and her father is a French sports journalist with the BBC in London.

So when there are Chinese, French and British teams competing, the family will cheer for all the athletes.

"I'm mixed and the Olympic Games is also an event that gathers people from different countries with different racial and cultural backgrounds," she says.

The ability to speak English, Chinese and French fluently gave her an extra advantage during the volunteer selection process.

Her daily job is to help sponsors of the London Olympic Games arrange their activities in the Olympic Park and receive guests invited by the sponsors to the Games.

But this is not Herens' first Olympic experience; she also volunteered at the Beijing Olympics in 2008. She still keeps the pin of the Beijing Games on her backpack, and can still recall the impressive opening ceremony in Beijing.

Herens says that the London opening ceremony was not as delicate and glamorous as the Beijing one, but it was more modest and more down-to-earth.

"It was like London Mayor Boris Johnson, who always has a cheerful spirit with his signature haircut," she says.

"The most rewarding thing of being an Olympic volunteer, among other things, is that young people can work together and celebrate the sports spirit no matter which country you come from or what degrees or backgrounds you have," she says.

Among the 70,000 volunteers are Chinese students in London who have actively participated in the event.

Li Qian, a 29-year-old student from Nanjing, Jiangsu province, worked at the volleyball stadium. Her job included ticket checking, providing transport information to spectators, and helping with security checks.

Although volunteers are unpaid and usually work up to nine hours a day, Li and her colleagues are upbeat as they consider themselves lucky to be part of the event.

Li says she had worked with volunteers from Malaysia, South Korea and Singapore.

"The job can be tough because we are usually the earliest to arrive in the stadium and the last ones to leave. But still, it is a very enjoyable experience as I get to work with people from all over the world, and being



Volunteers take a time out during a break.

JULIE JACOBSON / ASSOCIATED PRESS

**The most rewarding thing of being an Olympic volunteer, among other things, is that young people can work together and celebrate the sport spirit no matter which country you come from or what degrees or backgrounds you have."**

GEMMA HERENS  
VOLUNTEER AT LONDON'S OLYMPIC GAMES

helpful is a very happy feeling," she says.

Li says she is most impressed by spectators from Brazil and Poland.

"They were always hugging and cheering with each other. Their excitement literally turned the volleyball match into a football game as they made the large human waves on the seats."

Volunteer Liu Xiaoshuang, a 28-year-old Chinese, says that her 10th summer in London has turned out to be a unique one because of her participation in the London Games.

"We also play other roles," she says. "We are being more like the 'imagine ambassador' of the city and a

supporter of the 'Green Olympics' idea."

She works at transport junctions, and public zones near the stadiums. Her job is giving directions and guiding foreign tourists in the downtown area with the highest flow of tourists.

Liu says the volunteers were told to encourage people to walk rather than drive or take the public transport.

"It only takes about 20 minutes to walk from Leicester Square to Big Ben," she says. "It's a convenient way to take a tour here."

To provide sufficient information to the tourists, Liu, a foreigner herself, has to be quite familiar with every road and path that may guide the tourists efficiently.

"Almost every Chinese student chose to stay in London this summer," says Pei Tingting, an official from London-based South Bank University. "They are either working as volunteers or watching the Games." In previous years, two-thirds of them would spend their summer vacation back in China, Pei adds.

"Our brilliant volunteers seem to be having an extraordinary impact on every one they get to meet," says Paul Deighton, chief executive of the London organizing committee.

Contact the writers at lixiang@chinadaily.com.cn and qiubo@chinadaily.com.cn.