



Artists perform during the opening ceremony of the Games on Friday at the Olympic Stadium in London.

ODD ANDERSEN / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

DIFFERENT VENUES, BUT SAME PASSION

Opening ceremonies from '08 and '12 share some similarities, but are applauded for reflecting the distinctive characteristics of both cities

By **CHEN XIANGFENG**
in London
chenxiangfeng@
chinadaily.com.cn

While words used to describe the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony ranged from "spectacular" to "perfection," the big question heading into the 2012 ceremony in London was: Will it make an equally impressive impact?

But with the ringing of the largest harmonically tuned bell worldwide, the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics kicked off on Friday night with a thunderous toll and slowly unfolded as more than 10,000 athletes hailing from 204 countries and regions stepped onto their stage for the 17-day gala event.

The answer to everyone's question was a resounding "yes."

Queen Elizabeth II, accompanied by her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, and Jacques Rogge, the International Olympic Committee president presided over proceedings in a packed London Olympic Stadium. Rogge lauded the beauty and similarities of the '08 and '12 ceremonies.

"If you compare the two opening ceremonies, there was a part in the opening ceremony in Beijing, a beautiful part, about the history of the country, its long-term tradition and culture," Rogge said. "We have the same here in London. You can see something about the history, about the way of life, about what I would call the 'Britishness', the same way you had the same situation in Beijing.

"There's also something that

London can bring that no other country in the world can bring, (and it) is that Great Britain was the cradle of modern sport because you have invented modern sport in the second half of the 19th century."

Thrilling experience

Comparisons aside, many said the gala in London was a thrilling experience with celebrations taking place across the entire city.

In central London's iconic Hyde Park, hundreds of visitors and locals gathered for an open-air concert that began before the opening ceremony despite rain showers and a 65-pound (\$102) ticket for admission.

Many wore different national jerseys and held their home flags, partying outside on the vast grass to celebrate the beginning of the Olympic Games. The party atmosphere reached a peak when the Red Arrows, the aerobatics display team of the Royal Air Force, flew over the park as people hooted and hollered in support of the Games.

For those who are studying or living in London for a brief time, the opening ceremony was a special moment they were not about to miss.

Peng Xinyi, who will soon graduate from Goldsmiths, University of London, had been longing to watch the opening ceremony with her classmates. Peng is saying farewell to London after a year of studying communications and media.

"The opening ceremony is a special graduation party for us," said Peng, a Chinese national born in 1986.

Starting from noon, Peng and

her classmates moved to Hyde Park to watch the live broadcast. To avoid traffic, they arrived early at the park to have a picnic. Longer-term residents of London said the thrill was indescribable.

"It's my second Olympics and I can't wait for the two-week party ahead," said Londoner Lee Wilson, 41, who was wearing a red Beijing Olympics T-shirt. "I went to Beijing four years ago and loved the Games there. Now I can see another great Olympics unfolding in my hometown. How amazing."

Rabi Martins, 66, a retired business consultant from India who came to London in 1971, remembered the Beijing opening ceremony and said "it far exceeded my expectations."

"I was watching the Beijing Olympics on the television at home in London, and I watched at night my favorite sports — swimming and athletics — which meant that I had to stay up until about 3 am in the morning. I'm very excited that I now can watch London's Olympics without having to stay up late."

Beijing's impact

Many reflected on the Beijing opening ceremony during Friday's opening gala.

Featuring more than 15,000 performers, the Beijing opening ceremony lasted over four hours and reportedly cost over \$100 million. The ceremony was lauded by spectators and the international media as spectacular and spellbinding and by many accounts "the greatest ever."

Chinese pianist Lang Lang, who performed in the open-

ing ceremony four years ago, is now in London and shared his thoughts about the two ceremonies.

"The music of the Olympic opening ceremony in London relates to the environmental protection and focuses on British cultural," Lang said. "It was my great honor to perform in the Beijing Olympic Games. At that time, the world had their eyes on Beijing. Similarly, now London, as the host city of the Games, has attracted global attention. I still believe the Beijing Olympics, to a great extent, still can stand out as one of the notable landmarks in the history of the Olympic Games.

David G. Brook, president of Coca-Cola Greater China and Korea, looked beyond the opening ceremony and said passion for the Games is universal.

"I think that the similarities between the Beijing Games and the London Games, probably outweigh the things that are different: to have the opportunity to host the Games, to show the face of China to the rest of the world, to show the face of modern China. I think in London I can see a lot of the same things. The British people are much more reserved. Maybe they don't want to share their emotions so much but we've been surprised by the degree of engagement, and interest, and passion for the Games.

"So I think in that sense, the Olympics is a big party for everybody."

Sun Xiaochen, Diao Ying, Wang Yu, Cecily Liu, Zhang Haizhou contributed to the story.



FRANCK FIFE / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Chinese spectators pose with their national flag upon arrival for the opening ceremony.

CHINESE COMPANIES PROVIDE NUTS AND BOLTS TO LONDON GAMES

The opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics was one of — if not the best — of all-time.

From the animation of a massive Chinese painting hand roll unfolding to footprints lingering in the night sky, the event wowed the world.

Last night, billions of people saw the unfurling of a 900-meter image of the Union Jack flag at the launch of the London Olympics.

Behind those unforget-

table events was Chinese company Crystal CG, a digital media company based in Beijing. Crystal is not the only Chinese company involved at the London Olympics. If you see any athletes or officials wearing a pin during the Games, you are witnessing the work of another Chinese company, Honav.

In 2008, Honav made its claim to fame by turning the leftover steel after the construction of the Olympic Stadium (more popularly

known as the Bird's Nest) into pins, badges and mini-torches.

That led it to be approached by the organizers of the London Games for whom it made 2,012 pins, with various themes including crowns, the royal family, 10 Downing Street, umbrellas, rain boots, afternoon tea and cakes. Some were sold out even before the Games started.

CHINA DAILY