

{NOTE: This bit of silly reportage was written for my snarky elder daughter, who at college was deprived of the wholesome entertainment of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and attendant festivities. This was my attempt to make up this significant omission in her education, particularly as relating to cultural exchanges between East and West. -- Andy Kass}

Hey, Jen,

I just realized that in the excitement of the day you probably neglected your duty as a world citizen to witness the close of the Beijing Olympics. Trust me to remedy this.

The surprise wasn't Zhang Yimou's cast of thousands of acrobats, singers, jingling dancers, flying drummers, pyrotechnics or dramatically arisen towers. It wasn't even surprising when Jackie Chan led a group of singers in what sounded like a jolly cycle of Mandarin limericks. It was Britain's uptake of the Olympic mantle. It was... how should I say this? -- well, judge for yourself, with the continuing reminder that I am not making this up.

First the Union Jack was ceremoniously raised while a British choir in mostly matching sweats sang "God Save the Queen". The Lord Mayor of London accompanied the Mayor of Beijing and Olympic poobah Jacques Rogge to receive the Olympic flag. The Lord Mayor, a capacious fellow dressed in a suit apparently donated to Goodwill by a much smaller man, saluted the crowd, the breeze ruffling his uncombed white hair, then vigorously waved the flag before handing it off to a Chinese chap wandering nearby and heading off for a pint.

And then the entertainment began....

A London double-decker bus crawled onto the field as the Las Vegas production of OLIVER! cavorted randomly about a bus stop from the outskirts of UnLunDun. The bus arrived to adulation by this mob. The door opened, and there was... a little girl. She stepped out -- not on the ground, mind you, but on the backs of supplicant dancers ("*England! We walk on people of colour!*") to a stage where another sombre child handed her a soccer ball. The British child then walked back over her homonid carpet the bus, whose door then closed.

All hope that this was it vanished when THE BUS BEGAN TO TRANSFORM. The sides folded down to black velcro, and a sort of tower came out of top with Fiona Lewis emerging from it, her gown covering the tower at the evident cost of her upper anatomy. And next to her emerged... the ancient Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin!

Hoho! says I. What are they going to play, "Whole Lotta Love"?

Uhm, yes.

Page's Gibson was cranked up enough to be audible in Taipei. Lewis at least omitted Robert Plant's vocal improvisations, but... "Whole Lotta Love"? What about "Magic Bus" -- did Peter Townshend turn them down? At least he is capable of writing new material and not retreading a 40-year-old hair metal standard at an international sports festival.

During this production, the child was elevated to the top of the bus with David Beckham, representing British Sport. Beckham, waving in an embarrassed kind of way, took the soccer ball and kicked it off the heads of some Japanese Olympians in a show of fellowship. As the UnLunDun mob climbed the side of the bus and opened umbrellas, the noise eventually stopped.

The commercial break occurred to scattered polite applause. I am not sure whether Zhang Yimou later caused the earth to open beneath this spectacle, but, there you have it.

You are thus informed. Hope you're having a great time.

Love,

Dad