

Your Show Must Go On

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Forty years ago, a group of BYU students—members of the Young Ambassadors and the Lamanite Generation (now known as Living Legends)—were invited to perform in China. This past May, students from eight different BYU performing groups traveled to China to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of BYU’s first and subsequent performance trips to China. Kevin and I had the opportunity to travel with the more than 200 students, technical crew, and staff for what was known as the BYU Spectacular in China.

As you can imagine, a production of this scale is a huge undertaking. Preparations for the spectacular began more than two years ago. It required a great deal of cooperation from many different groups. The performances took place in Beijing, Xi’an, and Shanghai—two performances in each city. Kevin and I were able to attend all six of the performances, and they were certainly all spectacular. I could easily end here by saying that all the groups involved cooperated very well and that the trip was a great success. But, like most

successful endeavors or performances, there are behind-the-scene stories of which the beneficiary or audience is unaware. And the BYU Spectacular in China was no exception.

Making It Work

Upon arriving at the airport in Beijing, we were made aware that much of what was called the “nonessential” stage equipment had not yet arrived. As the day unfolded, we learned that the equipment—which had been trucked from Provo to Los Angeles, though it was supposed to have been shipped directly to Beijing in time for the performance—was delayed and would not make it to China in time for the performance if shipped from Los Angeles. It was then determined that shipping it to New Jersey and then to Beijing was going to be the quickest option. In any event, it became clear that none of the equipment would arrive in China soon. This meant that much of the performance would quickly have to be revised and adjusted. And it had to be done in a setting

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in which both the language and the manner of doing theater business were unfamiliar.

Included in the equipment that did not arrive was the intricate lighting equipment, which included specialty lights, light boards, and panels. The BYU crew had to rent lighting equipment and then make it compatible with the systems in the performance venues. I can only imagine how challenging it would be to work with something so unfamiliar, technical, and intricate—with some instructions being in Mandarin.

Also missing were the large puppets—similar to those used in the Broadway production of *The Lion King*—that were to be part of Vocal Point’s performance. The production team and performers had to quickly come up with new ways to convey the presence of animals in the routine.

The mini trampolines and crash pads used by the Dunk Team did not arrive either. Through some difficulty, they were able to rent trampolines and crash pads. Then the Dunk Team had the challenge of adjusting to the unfamiliar rented equipment, such as trampolines that were a different size and at a different angle than the ones with which they were familiar.

Although the challenges were unexpected and difficult, no one involved seemed to have any doubt that they could make it work. Even though much of the nonessential equipment was not available for use in the first four performances, the most essential components—the students, the technical crew, and the staff—were. And the show went on.

Because Kevin and I had not seen the dress rehearsals prior to the trip to China, we didn’t know what we were missing. We thought the performances in Beijing and Xi’an were excellent. But it must have been a little frustrating for those involved in the performances to know that what was being shown in the first two cities was not as good as it could have been. The equipment finally arrived for the shows in Shanghai. The challenge now was to adjust once more. As the original equipment was reincorporated into the show, we were able to see in Shanghai what everyone involved knew the performance could be. And it was more than spectacular.

Following Three Principles

As I watched in amazement at the cheerful optimism with which the group met these and other challenges, I wondered what characteristics and experiences had prepared them to deal with unexpected difficulties in such a remarkable manner. What allowed them to succeed at such a high level despite the considerable adversity they faced?

The traits and thinking that permit success under such circumstances were described in *The Lion’s Gate: On the Front Lines of the Six Day War*, a book describing some of the events in the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict.¹ In the book, Lieutenant Giora Romm, a young Israeli fighter pilot, explained the remarkable success of his squadron:

We were unbelievably strong physically. But what [made us] even more powerful were the principles that . . . [had been] hammered into our skulls.

First: Complete the mission.

The phrase in Hebrew is Dvekut baMesima [which can be literally translated as “glued to the mission”].

. . . The mission is everything. At all costs, it must be carried through to completion. . . .

Second: Whatever you do, do it to your utmost. . . .

Third: En Brera. [Meaning] “No alternative.”²

The same can be said of those involved in the spectacular performed in China. The performers, crew, and staff were all exceptionally gifted—strong, if you will—in the particular skills they had developed over years and years of practice. But, like Lieutenant Romm and his squadron, they also followed three principles.

First, they focused on the mission—the desired end—above all else. Some crew members traveled more than three hours in a taxi to reach a store in which they hoped to find some of what they were missing—wondering at times with the language barrier whether the driver really knew what they were looking for. Others had to figure out how to explain what they needed and that they needed it now, even though none of them spoke Mandarin. Thank goodness for Google Translate! They were laser-focused, glued to the mission.

Second, they did their utmost to make the necessary adjustments. One crew member worked nearly all night to rewire and configure electronic equipment to make it compatible with the system in the theater in Beijing.

And, finally, the students simply acted as if there were no alternative. They believed the show had to go on no matter what. And so it did.

Facing Unexpected Challenges with Ultimate Success

As I thought about the new semester you are facing, I reflected on the mini-miracle we saw unfold in China. Sooner or later you will all face unexpected challenges: your academic endeavors, your social life, your physical health, or any other number of things may go off track. You may find that key parts of your life seem to be in New Jersey or California when they should be in China, so to speak. In such situations, remain glued to the mission, to your “quest for perfection and eternal life.”³ Remember why you came to BYU and, more important, why you came to earth. Do your utmost. Do the best you can.

And then act as if there is no alternative but to succeed. This may seem to be the hardest step of all. And it would be if you were entirely dependent on your own efforts. But with the light of the restored gospel, you will come to see that because of Christ, there is no need for an alternative. Ultimate success is guaranteed because of Him. Because of His atoning sacrifice, He has the power to help you overcome whatever you face. You simply need to stay glued to the mission He has outlined for you, do what you can do, and then act as if He will make up the difference—and He will. I hope that you will face this new semester with that firm faith in your heart. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Steven Pressfield, *The Lion's Gate: On the Front Lines of the Six Day War* (New York: Sentinel, 2014).

2. Pressfield, *Lion's Gate*, 15. Thanks go to Dean Brent L. Top for pointing out these principles in his annual address to the BYU Religious Education faculty on August 26, 2015.

3. The Mission of Brigham Young University (4 November 1981).