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THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN TOUCH

奧運典禮大師

Orchestrating an Olympic ceremony

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Ahead of the winter PyeongChang 2018 Olympics, Angel Tang speaks to Marco Balich – one of the top Olympic ceremony executives in the world – on how to elevate experiences at events.

在2018年平昌冬奧前夕，被喻為世上最頂尖奧運開幕典禮執行長之一的Marco Balich，與Angel Tang暢談如何提升活動體驗。



Marco Balich cannot pick his favourite event that he has produced in his life – not a huge surprise considering the number of events he has been involved in.

With more than 30 years in television shows, music videos and events production, he has served as the executive producer for three Olympic ceremonies, and participated in an additional three, including the 2002 Salt Lake City Flag Handover; the Torino 2006 Olympic ceremony, the Rio Flag Handover in London 2012; and the Sochi 2014 production; not to mention serving as the artistic director of the Italian Pavilion and creator of the iconic *Albero della Vita – Tree of Life*.

A glimpse at the stunning work he has directed makes it understandable that choosing one as his favourite is no easy task.

"Of course, an Olympic ceremony is one of the most complex and most articulated and important events you can do in my field of business, also because you cannot make mistakes. Otherwise, there's too much reputation behind this," he says.

"But, if I must say, every event has its own story, its own creativity, its own integration; so there's no perfect event."

But one event that is on the top of his wish list may come as a bit of a surprise.

"My desire would be to be asked to design the light show of Hong Kong (A Symphony of Lights). I watched it last night and ... I would love to contribute," he says with a grin.

The 56-year-old Milanese entrepreneur, owner of the five-year-old agency Balich Worldwide Shows, is not only considered one of the top Olympic ceremony executives, but he is often referred to as the "designer of emotions" given his dazzling, award-filled career background and presentations.

Marketers increasingly see the need to shift from crafting a message to creating engaging customer experiences, and Balich recognised this early on, and started integrating empathy in design and delivery years ago.

"Sometimes in the corporate world, people are too concerned about how big the logo is, rather than thinking: 'What is experience like, and how can the experience connect with the customer, the clients, and the people participating?'" he says.

His advice, in a nutshell, to entrepreneurs and companies doing conventional big events is to shift perspective from promoting the brand for itself to putting together the brand with an emotional experience: "One that takes the name of the brand to a moment people will preserve in their heart."

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"By that, I mean you have to find the soul of the event in every event you do. If you don't find the soul, you just execute, and it becomes dry," he says.

If you want to create an experience, find the soul of something

And while the advice is sound, it begs the question – what is "the soul of something"? His latest event produced for an automotive brand, for example, focused on the sound of its engine, "dramatic, full of passion and heartbeat," he says.

"Through the sound of engines, the history and passion of racing, there was nourishment for us to perform something very strong, very wild, which we can use to touch consumers with passion, with speed, with adrenaline," he says.

"You catch something that is straight forward, but deliver it in a grand and beautiful

way." Another example, in a somewhat rare occasion, was the show Balich and his team produced for the National day of Abu Dhabi, Emirates, in 2016.

It was a military parade so it was kind of odd for us, but it was transformed into a celebration of life and peace, and we introduced some beautiful statements of respect, peace and acceptance that was very bold given the history of Emirates," he recalls.

The key was to identify "the half-full glass", then find the beauty from the event, which in the above case, was the celebration of the pride of a nation that had just awoken to a new era, and a new identity.

"So, you celebrate that in a positive way – not to say that they are one of the richest countries in the world, but to say what can they achieve with their wealth in order to have a better humanity afterwards."

He says that history and industry are always "blossoming or booming in something".

If he were to plan a show for the social media industry or technology industry, for example, he would probably focus on the story of a very strong technological company, where there was a genius engineer with a dream, and his search to find that perfect algorithm – it's about the power of stories. "If

you nail that part, and celebrate that, rather than focusing on the turnover or the billions of people involved, you do something good – you showcase an example of good practice."

It's certainly possible to engage every participant in one gigantic show. But, mind the pace

At the Olympics, Balich says the focus is always on respect, peace and equality – no boundaries.

As the most watched event in the world, with at least 3.5 billion viewers watching live broadcasting, it may seem difficult for the show to touch every heart.

Yet, he says, it's made possible by celebrating the simplest virtue – beauty and goodness – as human beings are all the same despite cultural differences.

"Whether you are living in Antarctica or in a village in Africa, you can still relate to good, to pride, something related to heroes," he says.

"And, of course, in sporty events the athletes sometimes represent them."

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這位56歲的米蘭企業家，五年前創辦代理公司 Balich Worldwide Shows。他不僅被視為最頂尖的奧運開幕典禮執行長之一，更憑藉其屢獲殊榮的輝煌業績，而被譽為「情感設計師」。

現時愈來愈多市場推廣人員明白到，市場推廣不僅在於製作訊息，更要創造引人入勝的客戶體驗。Balich卻早在多年前，開始將情感融入活動設計及執行之中。

Balich坦言：「有時在商業世界中，人們太在意品牌標誌的大小，而沒有考慮到——『品牌應創造怎樣的體驗？以及如何透過體驗聯繫顧客、客戶及參與者？』」

簡而言之，對於籌辦傳統大型活動的企業及公司，他給予的建議是：將焦點從宣傳品牌，轉移到結合品牌與情感體驗之上，因為「這樣才能令人將品牌的名字銘記於心」。

他說：「（設計活動的人）要找到每個活動的靈魂。如果你只是在執行活動，便會使其變得枯燥乏味。」

活動的靈魂

這個建議很合理，但何謂「靈魂」？

Balich舉例，他最近一個為汽車品牌製作的活動，就將重點放於車的引擎聲上，以表現出「激烈、充滿熱情、令人心跳的加速」等情感。

Balich說：「以引擎的聲音、賽車的歷史及對賽車的熱情作為養分，能製作出一些非常具感染力、狂野的東西。我們以熱情、速度去刺激（消費者的）腎上腺素。」

「這就是以一種宏偉而美麗的方式，來表達一樣很直接的東西。」

另一個比較罕見例子是在2016年，Balich與其團隊為阿聯酋阿布扎比國慶日製作的匯演。





IF YOU NAIL [SOMETHING THAT IS BLOSSOMING OR BOOMING IN THE INDUSTRY], AND CELEBRATE THAT RATHER THAN FOCUSING ON THE TURNOVER OR THE BILLIONS OF PEOPLE INVOLVED WHATEVER, YOU DO SOMETHING GOOD.

如能找出(行業中正蓬勃發展或興盛的元素)並發揚光大,而不是把重點放在營業額或數十億員工上,就是好的做法。

"Beauty is the essential part of our process of creation because beauty is contained in every aspect of life." On the other hand, execution and delivery revolves more around the rhythm of a show.

Taking movies as an example, he has witnessed a pronounced difference in the pace of storytelling now compared with 20 years ago.

"The way of delivering things is more grand, more involving, more immersive," he says.

When you earn a like, it doesn't necessarily transform into a smile

However, Balich says it is more to do with personal intuition than anything else when he is deciding the pace. Similarly, he needs to "feel it [the show]" to understand if it has turned out successful.

"When you see people moving emotionally, and feeling very proud about the company, that is a good reference," he says.

"It's not something that you can create a marketing manual about, but you see people react, embrace each other; you feel it when they are bored, or when they are witnessing something that they don't care for."

Nowadays, good events are often also the ones that have a big impact on social media.

Taking a particularly beautiful sunset in Milan in November last year as an example, he said he found more than 25,000 pictures of that sunset filling every newsfeed on Instagram and Facebook that night.

"That is a collective moment of emotion and you can feel it."

But he regards social media as a tool to involve people, not one that can measure the success of a show.

"I think you have to measure that with the smile you see after the show, not before," he says.

"Happiness is not something that can be measured – it's at the core of us as human beings. We should never forget that." M

他憶述:「那是一場閱兵典禮,我們對籌辦這類活動有點陌生,但最終將它變成一場慶祝生命與和平的慶典。我們在當中加入一些表達尊重、和平與包容的美麗元素。考慮到阿聯酋的歷史,此舉的確非常大膽。」

關鍵是從正面的角度,發掘活動的箇中之美。在上述的例子中,Balich將重點放於慶祝一個剛迎接新時代及新身份的國家的榮耀。

「我們不是要歌頌阿聯酋是世界上最富有的國家之一,而是要強調他們可如何運用自己的財富,為人民帶來更美好的生活。」

Balich表示,歷史及行業總是「有些正蓬勃發展或興盛的元素」。例如,若要以社交媒體行業或科技行業製作一個演出,他會專注介紹一家科企巨頭的故事,講述該公司一位有抱負的天才工程師,以及他尋找完美算法的過程。他直言,一切都從故事而來。

「如能找出這一點並發揚光大,而不是把重點放在營業額或數十億員工上,就是好的做法。」

留意活動的節奏

Balich表示,奧運會一向著重宣揚尊重、和平與平等,打破界限。作為全球最矚目的盛事,至少有35億觀眾收看直播節目,要令演出觸動到每一個人的心靈,似乎並不容易。

不過,他認為即使有文化差異,所有人類仍有一樣的本質,通過宣揚簡單的美德——美麗與善良,就能感動人心。

他解釋:「無論是生活在南極洲,還是非洲的一個村落,仍會對善良、光榮這些與英雄相關的元素產生共鳴。在體育活動中,運動員有時會扮演英雄的角色。他們代表著努力、犧牲、以善良的心及誠意實現目標,這是我們都可以產生共鳴的好例子。」

「美是我們創作過程中不可缺少的一部分,因為美包含在生命的各個方面。」

另一方面,執行與表現方式則更著重配合演出的節奏。以電影為例,Balich見目前的講故事節奏,跟20年前大相逕庭。

他說:「表達的方式更具規模、更令人投入、更如臨其境。」

讚好不一定代表微笑

但Balich表示,在考慮演出節奏時,他更重視個人的直覺。同樣地,他需要「感受(演出)」來確定它是否成功。

他說:「看到人們情緒激動,就是一個很好的證明。這些沒有市場推廣手冊供你參考,而要靠你直接看人們的反應、看他們相互擁抱。當他們感到無聊、或對表演漠不關心,你會感覺得到。」

如今,好的活動往往能在社交媒體上產生很大迴響。Balich以去年11月在米蘭出現異常美麗的晚霞為例,說當晚在Instagram及Facebook上,出現了超過2萬5千張晚霞的照片。「可以感受得到,這是一個集體情感時刻。」

但Balich認為,社交媒體是與人互動的工具,而不是衡量一個演出成功與否的指標。

Balich說:「我認為要以演出之後、而不是演出之前所看到的笑容來衡量。我們永遠不能忘記,快樂不是用來衡量的,而是人類發自內心的追求。」 M