

Edited by Ginny Wong

# young post

Did you love the Olympic ceremonies in Rio? Marco Balich designed and produced them

## Is this the ultimate dream job?

If you've ever felt moved or awed by the dazzling displays at the Olympic ceremonies, then it has probably been down to the work of Marco Balich, writes **Young Wang**

**M**arco Balich has one of the best jobs in the world. He gets to travel, brings smiles to faces wherever he goes, learns something new every day, and spends other people's money. How? He designs events like the opening and closing ceremonies for the Olympics.

For such a globe-trotter, though, Balich – who produced the gala opening for the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy, and the ceremonies for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, and the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil – remains very much in touch with his Italian roots.

"I'm Italian. I'm passionate," he tells *Young Post*. "I like emotions, I like tears and laughter. I design my shows to impress, move, and touch the hearts of people."

### Curiosity drives the director

Balich was in Hong Kong in December last year for Business of Design Week 2017, an annual showcase of design and innovation hosted in Asia. The designer of emotions, as he is known, said that he felt like an intruder at the event, because he's more of a producer and creative director than a designer.

He says he is driven by curiosity, and the desire to try something different. That's when inspiration strikes, usually.

"Go to an art show, go to a concert," he suggests. "Every time you expose yourself [to something new], you create something in your head. Everything is an experience."

### I'm passionate. I design my shows to impress, move, and touch the hearts of people

That's why the Business of Design Week was so interesting for Balich. He was able to listen to and learn from the other speakers at the event, and what inspires them.

### Learning about culture

One of the best things about his job, Balich says, is that he gets to learn a lot about a country's culture. While he was in Asia, for example, he checked out shows in Macau, and talked to people about their big dreams.

"You have to be very humble and [follow] the local culture," he says. "Always be in the position [where you're] learning, not [making statements]. [My job is] about giving support to something more than me and my name."

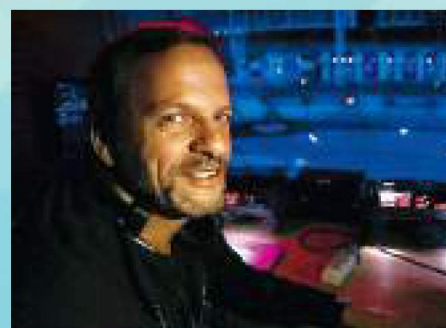
Although it's a huge challenge, Balich says that putting together a show for the Olympics, such as the ceremonies he did for Rio 2016, is one of the best parts of his job.

"You can do everything you want. You can [ask] Nasa to develop special effects, and you can create the weirdest costumes."

### It's like making a Hollywood film

An Olympic ceremony takes, on average, two years to plan. It's like directing a Hollywood feature film, he tells us, and has the same sort of budget – around US\$200 million.

Balich says he normally breaks down those years to four stages. The first six months are dedicated to gathering a creative team that will come up with a narrative; the six months after that are about budget and finding ways to make their ideas a reality; the first half of the second year is spent testing costumes, music, the special effects, and props; and rehearsals take place during the final six months.



Go to an art show, urges Balich

"The Olympics has its ups and downs," Balich says.

"Overall, though, the youthful energy of an athlete trying to win a medal is the perfect metaphor for what we love about life. It's not some rich kid on Instagram, it's someone who may be suffering to achieve something, and [win] a medal.

"That's what gives you goosebumps, not [owning] a Ferrari, or partying."

### What's next for Balich

The Olympics is the best sort of celebration, Balich says, because it's an event that's open to everybody.

"There is no difference between the rich and the poor," he says, likening the Games to a cake of which everyone gets a piece, and calls it a privilege to be able to work on something on such a global scale.

"People get baby blues, but I get ceremony blues," he jokes.

Balich's already looking ahead to the next venture – he and his team are presenting a show, *Universal Judgment: Michelangelo and the Secrets of the Sistine Chapel*, in Rome, in Italy, next month.

The hour-long production, to be held at an auditorium near the Vatican, will examine the Italian artist and the mysteries of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City.

Balich hopes that the US\$10 million production, which involves 10 actors, will be his next big success.