



Members of National Youth Theatre perform during the Olympic Team Welcome Ceremony at the Olympic Village for the 2012 Summer Olympics in London on July 17.

JAE C. HONG / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Olympics 2012: London limbers up

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This year, however, has been particularly rain-swept. April was, for example, the wettest month in the UK for more than 100 years, according to figures from the Met Office, the country's national weather service.

Met Office experts said there is little chance of hot spells in the weeks running up to August 7, just five days before the end of the Games.

Amid fears of the wettest Olympics ever, the events most at risk of being affected include tennis at Wimbledon, BMX biking in Stratford, rowing at Eton Dorney, evening at Greenwich Park, sailing at Weymouth and beach volleyball in Horse Guards Parade.

Around 40 percent of the seats in the Olympic Stadium are uncovered, including some very expensive spaces closest to the track. In light of this, the Games' organizers — the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, or LOCOG — have ordered 250,000 ponchos to sell to spectators.

Music strikes a chord

Forget about the awful weather, great music may be what people most expect from London.

When Beatles' legend Paul McCartney asks the 60,000 spectators to sing *Hey Jude* along with him, the Games will really get under way.

But McCartney's performance, which will conclude the opening ceremony on Friday, will not be the only cultural highlight that London will showcase to its 5.3 million visitors this summer.

The three-hour opening ceremony, "Isles of Wonder", directed by the Oscar-winning filmmaker Danny Boyle of *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Trainspotting* fame, will showcase the "green and pleasant land" to celebrate Britain's rolling fields and rural heritage. The ceremony will also include a "History Parade" focusing on, among other

things, the National Health Service, immigration and protest movements.

The green set will be transformed into a bleak industrial landscape as the performers recreate the Jarrow March of October 1936, when 200 men from the northeast of England walked to London to protest about the poverty and unemployment in the country's former industrial heartland.

The best of British music will be showcased by a program called "Rock the Games", which will include five songs written especially for the event, led by *Survival* by the British rock trio Muse.

The song, almost five and a half minutes long, opens with a lengthy instrumental sequence, followed by crunching guitar riffs, booming drums and a wailing crescendo.

"It's a race/And I'm gonna win," intones Muse frontman Matt Bellamy as the song reaches its climax, before pledging to "reveal my strength to the whole human race".

Bellamy said the song was written with the Olympics in mind and "expresses a sense of conviction and determination to win".

The four other official songs are by Elton John vs Pnau, Delpic, the Chemical Brothers and London rapper Dizzee Rascal.

Elsewhere, Scissor Sisters and Rizzle Kicks are just two of the outfits set to play surprise gigs at Olympic venues. Although the public knows which bands will perform, they won't know which band will be at which venue — hence, the "surprise" element. In addition, there will be performances from military marching bands and dance troupes, including the English National Ballet, plus sports demonstrations.

Moreover, a music library of 2,012 songs built around five themes — energy, primetime, extreme, heritage and world stage — will be used as background music during the Games.

The closing ceremony on



Two police officers stand on duty on the footbridge to the shopping center adjacent to the Olympic Park in Stratford, the location of the London 2012 Olympic Games, in east London, on July 15.

ANDREW WINNING / REUTERS

August 12, will involve the country's "most globally successful musicians", including The Who, Take That and George Michael, as well as rising stars, according to artistic director Kim Gavin.

"We want to celebrate where we are and who we are — and one of our strongest exports is music. Our want to showcase British creativity and imagination," said Gavin.

'Greenest-ever' Olympics

Aside from presenting great music, the organizers believe they are on track to win a gold medal for delivering the "greenest-ever" Olympics too.

Recycled steel and gas pipes, timber walkways and lavatories flushed with water reclaimed from local sewers are just some of the features that have guided the ambition to deliver a "sustainable" Games.

"This was a dumping ground for waste, some of it highly contaminated," said John Armit, chairman of the Olympic Delivery Authority, referring to the site of the Olympic Park.

In the future, the Olympic area in Stratford, east London, will be a place where Londoners

can go to "work and play".

"The venues that will be seen in billions of homes across the world this summer were completed on time and firmly within our overall budget. They were built with long-term use and sustainability in mind," said Armit.

In creating Europe's largest new urban park, the organizers claim to have set a bewildering number of records.

They maintain that in creating a park the size of 357 football pitches, 98 percent of the materials used were reclaimed from the demolition of 200 largely derelict buildings.

Millions of metric tons of soil were removed from the previously largely contaminated industrial site, cleaned and (mostly) returned to the site. None of the waste has gone to landfills.

There are more than 130 venues, including competition, training venues, and uniform distribution and all of them have "some temporary elements", according to Steve Cardwell, project manager at WS Atkins PLC, the official provider of engineering design services for the Games.

Cardwell said the Velodrome, the 6,000-capacity track cycling

arena, is his personal favorite. The track is made from "sustainably sourced" Siberian pine, while external timber cladding will allow natural ventilation. Meanwhile, the "inside ceiling", covered with a lightweight cable-net roof, is "really fantastic", he enthused.

The Copper Box, the venue earmarked for handball and fencing, is wrapped in 3,000 square meters of copper with a high recycled content, plus energy-saving features, natural light and rainwater harvesting. After the Games, it will become a 7,500-capacity multi sports area for the community.

"When you look at what London has been doing, a lot of that has been focused on sustainability. That is a key part of why London won the 2012 Games. The very principle we are talking about here — that a large number of the venues are temporary — is a fundamental part of that," said Cardwell.

Many of the facilities at the venues were already in the market before the Games, he said, noting, for example, that temporary seats and seating stands may have already been used at Grand Prix or golf tournaments. "So you are actually rent-

ing this equipment," according to Cardwell.

Transport headaches

Apart from the awful weather, London's transport system may be another headache for visitors.

Recent delays on the capital's underground rail system, coupled with breakdowns, have fueled concerns about the impact the 3 million daily journeys could have on the roads and the "Tube", as the underground railway is known to locals.

On July 15, a coach carrying US Olympic athletes took four hours for the journey from Heathrow airport to the Olympic village in east London's Stratford. Then on July 17, a fire alarm at Charing Cross station caused the complete breakdown of one underground line and severe delays on all other lines.

Adding to the inconvenience, members of the rail union Aslef will go on strike between August 6 and 8, in a dispute over pensions. The industrial action is likely to affect those traveling into London from places such as Sheffield, Wolverhampton and Derby.

London's bus drivers had also threatened to strike because of the increased workload engendered by the Games, but the situation was resolved when the drivers accepted a bonus of 27.50 pounds (\$43) per shift for the duration of the event.

A day after that agreement was struck, Danny Boyle was told to shorten his 27-million-pound opening ceremony, as the organizers fretted about spectators being left without transport home if the event were to run too long.

During the years leading up to the Games, Transport for London has extended London Overground's East London Line and upgraded facilities on the Docklands Light Railway and the North London Line.

High-speed Javelin trains have been added to carry passengers from St Pancras and Ebbfleet to Stratford station, which is situated within the Olympic Park.

Cable cars have been added between the O2 Arena on the banks of the Thames and the ExCel Exhibition Center in east London, linking two Olympic hot spots. Traveling 160 feet above the river, the cars are expected to carry 2,500 passengers an hour.

One pledge made in London's Olympic bid was that most of the competitors would be based within 20 minutes traveling time of their events. To fulfill that promise, some lanes on selected roads will be barred to all but athletes, officials and VIPs. Meanwhile, traffic lights on 13,000 streets have been reprogrammed to speed up the vehicle flow.

However, 200 taxis clogged Parliament Square in protest at the Olympic lanes last week, and angry motorists in Wandsworth in the southwest of the city, reported that the reprogramming of the lights has caused massive delays.

Even if no transport dramas occur, the Games will certainly bring a high level of inconvenience to London's commuters. In response, Transport for London has encouraged people to work from home and hold discussions by video conference instead of traveling to meetings.

LOCOG has also invested more than 10 million pounds to improve a network of eight pedestrian and cycling routes that link different parts of the capital with the Olympic Park.

Mayor Boris Johnson said at a news briefing on July 16 that the media headlines about traffic chaos have been greatly exaggerated and that London is ready for the Games.

"BoJo", as the mayor is known, has carefully cultivated a buffoonish persona and can always be relied upon to make light of difficult situations. However, he is clued up enough to realize that he and LOCOG must get it right to prevent the "Greenest Olympics" from leaving a lot of red faces.

Contact the writers at zhang-haizhou@chinadaily.com.cn, cecily.liu@chinadaily.com.cn