

YOUTH

Sounds like teen spirit

Instead of lazily whiling away her last summer before heading off to university, Zhang Yuqi embarked on a journey of musical discovery, **Xing Wen** reports.

For high school graduates about to embark on their university studies, after the intense preparation for exams and applications that pave the way to the venerable institutes of higher learning, that last, long, languid summer holiday is about taking a much-deserved rest.

It's a time to chill out with friends and enjoy as many favorite home-cooked meals as possible, before traveling across the country (and in some cases, to a different one) for that first semester of wall-to-wall lectures and reams of essays.

However, for Zhang Yuqi, an 18-year-old soon-to-be freshman at the highly-regarded Berklee College of Music in Boston, the United States, there was no slacking off over the past three, sun-filled months.

Instead she chose to embrace the pressure of participating in an online talent show, titled *The Coming One*, where over 50 female contestants compete for a chance to launch a solo music career.

Zhang says she entered the competition because she had written several songs and felt an eagerness to sing them out loud on a stage to see whether these original tracks would strike a chord in people's hearts.

Judging by the resounding response, it seems that was indeed the case.

On Aug 24, after three rounds of breathtaking finals, the teen singer, with a bashful smile, held aloft the big crystal-embedded compact-disc-shaped trophy after garnering the highest number of votes — over 4 million — from viewers.

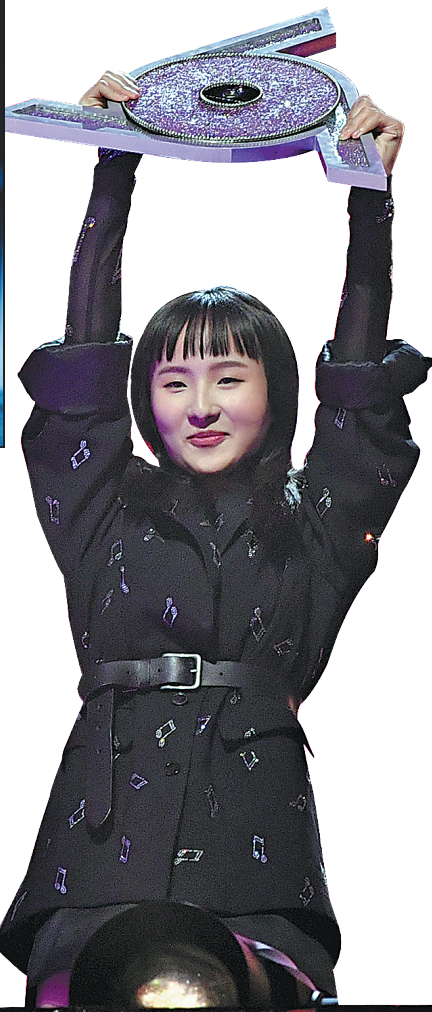
Blessed with an intoxicating voice that has an enigmatic quality to reach deep into the soul of listeners, she is also sensitive enough to compose expressive songs about both real life and fantasy with poetic lyrics.

Mao Buyi, one of the coaches on the show, says that he expected Zhang's victory because of her unique voice, high-quality original songs and the aura of confidence she always displays on stage.

"The show highlights originality in contestants' performances by encouraging them to adapt or write songs, which helps add sparkle to China's music industry," says the 25-year-old coach, who is himself



Above: Winner Zhang Yuqi (third from left) stands shoulder to shoulder with coaches of the talent show, *The Coming One*.
Left: Zhang expresses herself through music.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



a singer-songwriter.

Born in a small country in Heilongjiang province, Mao Buyi knows how important it is for a singer to equip themselves with the ability to write lyrics and melodies, create instrumental hooks and produce backing tracks.

He was crowned the show's first champion back in 2017, when the field of competitors was just male artists.

He performed 14 original tracks on the show and his song *Xiaochou* (roughly translated as "getting rid of the blues") became an almost instant hit, being streamed 100 million times within a week of its debut on the show.

He was an overnight success, with the show propelling him from humble nursing intern in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, to musical stardom.

Unlike the almost immediate recognition enjoyed by the coach, Zhang was already known to the public. In 2013, a 12-year-old Zhang performed on a variety show titled *Let's Sing Kids* and impressed the judges with her massive, high-pitched voice.

Later on, she joined a junior art troupe organized by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, with which she often toured abroad.

Due to this overseas experience, the Hubei native has developed an open-mindedness and inclusiveness from listening to various music genres.

It has also made her more adept at coming up with beautiful lyrics in both Chinese and English.

Nevertheless, she admits that she still has a long way to go to write high-quality Chinese songs.

"I have to form a well-rounded worldview and enrich my knowledge of Chinese culture before I am able to produce a good Chinese song that will resonate with people from different countries," says Zhang.

"I hope one day I will write Chinese songs that can cross borders and overcome language barriers."

"But I never set these kinds of goals, such as writing hundreds of songs in the future," adds Zhang.

"My desire to express myself through music is actually the main motivation for me to write songs."

A calm mindset can help songwriters to create sincere works in a natural way, according to Zhang.

Many contestants took the show as a starting point for them to break into Chinese entertainment circles, while Zhang did not disguise her aversion to joining the media circus.

"I don't care much about entertaining others, as I just want to perform my beloved musical work on stage," she says.

Contact the writer at xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn

Zhang Yuqi, 18, lifts the trophy as the winner of this year's star selection of the talent show, *The Coming One*.

Apartment tenants go for budget renovations

BEIJING — Although he is not an interior designer, Feng Su has revamped nine apartments he has rented in Beijing over the past decade. In one instance, he repainted a wall and replaced the door handles and all the ceiling lamps.

"My parents were against the renovation and complained that I was wasting money on the properties of landlords. My landlords also raised an eyebrow and wondered why I couldn't settle for what I had," recalls Feng, CEO of Haohaozhu, an interior design ideas sharing platform.

Feng's enthusiasm for interior renovation has found him a wide audience among his young followers. An increasing amount of apartment renovation content has appeared on Chinese social media and knowledge-sharing platforms.

Chen Lu, a 26-year-old scriptwriter, was overwhelmed by inquiries about interior design after she shared her renovation experience on Haohaozhu. The platform also provides links to items related to many interior design case studies on its website.

Chen's kitchen cupboards looked like solid wood after she covered the surface with a plastic transfer. With discounts of as much as 80 percent, she purchased secondhand furniture online such as a bed and sofa. In the end, it cost her about 6,000 yuan (\$843) to renovate a two-bedroom apartment in Beijing.

Revamping rented apartments is a new trend to many Chinese. "People used to be more keen on buying rather than renting an apartment," says Liu Lu, a professor of economics at the Southwestern University of Finance and Economics.

Renting was nothing more than a matter of expediency. However, high property prices in China's major cities have forced many young people to settle for rented apartments.

According to recent statistics from Lianjia, a leading Chinese real estate agency, a Beijing apartment on average costs 61,526 yuan per square meter, which is equal to what a fresh graduate earns in a year.

According to a recent survey on China's college graduates' employment conducted by Mycos, a market research organization, a university graduate with one year's work experience earns 4,624 yuan per month on average.

As renting has become more common, more young people have started to put their personal stamp on their rented apartments.

"For the younger generation, housing not only means a place to sleep but also a place to live, which reflects their longing for a better quality of life," says Xu Hua, a sociology professor from Anhui University.

For some, it is also an economical choice to renovate a shabby, older apartment rather than rent a well-equipped suite.

Chen says: "It's better to rent an empty apartment and save money to purchase things like furniture and pay for redecoration."

The growth of online shopping platforms means there are a wide range of options for interior design lovers. "Consumers used to be in the dark when it came to home decoration in the past. But now it is easy for people to pick up some smart designs from online stores even on a tight budget," Feng says.

"Personally, interior design has brought me great pleasure, as each apartment challenged me to solve a particular problem within a certain budget."

XINHUA

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