

YOUTH

CULTURAL TRIP

Members of a boy band join a documentary to explore arts and crafts in three cities, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

From the hustle and bustle of cities, to the vast desert of Northwest China, and the exuberance of performing at festivals to the serenity of dancing in the wilderness — the recent documentary *Into Miles* portrays Chinese culture from the eyes of young people at home and overseas.

In the four-episode program aired on Tencent Video, members of the boy group INTO1 explore cultural projects, both traditional and contemporary, and create music and art pieces that incorporate elements from them.

According to Wei Mengjiao, the producer, the documentary focuses on folk artists, with stories about their experiences in art and life. The band members are divided into three teams, each accompanied by a music producer, going respectively to the cities of Foshan in Guangdong province, Zhongwei in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region and Chongqing, during which they gather inspiration from local culture, before finally returning to Beijing for a collective brainstorming and music creation.

“From the start of INTO1, people have had expectations of this group, with its members coming from diverse cultural backgrounds, hoping they can help promote Chinese traditional culture,” Wei says.

“With this documentary, we want to showcase the diverse culture of China, and the perseverance and cordiality of Chinese people. We will feel happy if more people see this through the eyes of our members.”

The first episode sees band members Uno Santa, Bo Yuan and Liu Zhang going to Foshan, where they get to know about the southern-style lion dance, a national intangible cultural heritage.

Their trip started with a spot of Guangdong-style breakfast, before going to a lion dance and martial arts performance given by a local troupe, amid drum beats, the crackle of firecrackers and cheering of the crowd.

“The rhythm of the lion’s blinking eyes, the lovely swaying of its tail and the ease with which it switches between the four states of happiness, anger, sadness and joy, brought me face-to-face with the unique charm of the lion dance culture that has been passed down from ancient times,” a band member says.

The next day, the team arrived at a lion dance training base for teenagers, met with He Diqiang, a provincial-level inheritor of the art form, and started learning lion dance from the teachers there.

The operation of a lion usually involves two dancers, one acting as the front legs of the lion, also responsible for controlling the lion head and facial expressions, and the other acting as the hind legs and supporting his teammate to realize difficult moves, such as jumping.

Apart from practicing the lion dance, the team also learned how to beat the drums that accompanied the performance, which also became an inspiration for their final music creation.

Different from the exhilaration of the lion dance performance, the second team of band members, comprising Liu Yu, Kornchid Boonsathitpakdee (better known as

Nine), Lin Mo and Zhang Jiayuan, went on a journey to find “the tears of Western Xia”. The search began in the tranquil desert of Ningxia, where local people have been making ceramics for centuries.

According to Yang An, an inheritor of the northwestern region’s ceramic art, shards of ceramics can still be found in the ground there, and when the sun shines, they reflect the light, hence the expression.

Yang says he started learning ceramic craft from his father, who told him about the worrying trend that the number of inheritors is shrinking. He says he hopes that more young people will get to know about local ceramics. In his workshop, the team members learned to make a piece of ceramic vessel from scratch, including shaping the clay with a pottery wheel into shapes of their liking.

Under the instructions of another intangible cultural heritage inheritor Yangda Wude, the team also learned how to turn clay into *nivawu*, a regional vessel flute that gives out melodious notes.

“It is because of these practitioners who have a profound influence in the art forms that traditional culture can be passed down from generation to generation, from the past to the present. As young people of the new era, we should maintain a respect for traditional culture and an attention to the history of our nation,” a member says.

The Chongqing trip was slightly more unconventional, with another team of three, comprising Hashizume Mika, Patrick Nattawat Finkler and Zhou Keyu, playing American football and going on a scavenger hunt for art materials. Led by visual artist known as Sac Zheng, the team went on an urban exploration in the southwestern city, on the way taking photographs and encountering abandoned objects that would once again realize their worth in the form of a rooftop contemporary art exhibition.

As the city has a niche group of American football enthusiasts, the team participated in a friendly match with local players. The cultural projects chosen for Chongqing helped to supplement the tradition with modern, in order to present a comprehensive image of Chinese culture.

“Apart from traditional culture, we wanted to portray modern China, including traditions that people follow in everyday life and contemporary culture rooted in today’s China,” says Zhu Wei, director of the program. “We also wanted to show the ebullience of Chinese cities, a sense of vibrancy, and the integration of traditional and modern culture.”

According to the production crew, the show’s aim is to get young people to learn traditional arts and crafts, experience modern city life more, and tell stories about Chinese culture in their chosen art forms, and INTO1, with its members from diverse cultural backgrounds, helps to add a sense of novelty to these experiences.

Apart from senior representatives in each cultural project, the program selected young practitioners of art forms to spend time and communicate with the band members.

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Members of the boy band INTO1 visit Chongqing (top), Foshan (above) in Guangdong province and Zhongwei (left) in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, getting a close look at city lives and traditional cultural heritage like lion dance. The documentary *Into Miles* reveals how these young people view the diversity of Chinese culture and get inspiration from tradition.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



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Wei Mengjiao, producer of *Into Miles*

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