

YOUTH



Henan beauty

A dance production set in Tang era makes waves online at a Spring Festival gala, **Chen Nan** reports.

A dance starts with a scene where a group of young women are on their way to attend a banquet, with clothes and hairdo inspired by royal court style from some 1,300 years ago.

The women act like they are playing musical instruments such as the bamboo flute, hand drum and pipa (four-stringed lute) as they walk through a garden, laughing along the way.

The piece, titled *A Tang Dynasty Banquet*, which is less than six minutes long, was staged during a gala aired on Henan TV Station on Feb 13 marking Spring Festival, and has since gone viral on social media, viewed more than 500 million times.

Other than the performances of the 14 dancers, viewers are attracted by the combination of live dance with technology like 5G and augmented reality, which supported the display of national treasures such as *Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk* by Tang Dynasty (618-907) painter Zhang Xuan and a bone flute with a history of over 8,000 years.

"The performance brings us back to the Tang Dynasty, which is beautiful and amazing. The dancers portray the maids so vividly that it feels as if they are real Tang Dynasty maids from the painting," one viewer writes on Sina Weibo.

"Supported by technology, the show is like the movie, *Night at the Museum*, which enables viewers to appreciate great cultural relics in a fresh way," another viewer writes.

Besides positive comments, some viewers also interpreted the dance piece with cartoon drawings and animation, which garnered attention on social media.

A Tang Dynasty Banquet, formerly titled *Tang Yong* ("Tang Dynasty pottery figurines"), was performed and choreographed by artists of Zhengzhou Song and Dance Theater. It premiered during the 12th Lotus Awards, the highest dance awards in China, in Luoyang, Central China's Henan province, on Oct 16.

According to the dance's choreographer, Chen Lin, the production was inspired by the *tangsancai*, or tricolored glazed pottery, displayed



Top: Dancers perform their acclaimed interpretation of *A Tang Dynasty Banquet* as part of Henan TV's Spring Festival gala.

Above: Two of the dancers fully made up and dressed like the women in the original painting. PHOTOS BY XINHUA

at a museum in Luoyang, especially the figurines of instrument-players and dancers.

"We thought it would be interesting to bring the Tang Dynasty pottery figurines to life and tell their

stories onstage, which would also be a creative approach to showcase the treasures. That's how we started to create the dance piece," says Chen.

"The women portrayed in Tang Dynasty paintings are full-figured,

which indicates good living conditions and wealth. We want to showcase the aesthetic vision of the Tang Dynasty, so we got the dancers to put on makeup and clothes just like the women in the painting.

"I think it stood out because, unlike the traditional beauties we portray in dance pieces, who are surreal, these Tang Dynasty maids we put on stage are closer to real life."

The dancers put cotton balls in their mouths and wore padded clothes to look as full-figured as the ancient women.

Besides the beautiful movements of traditional Chinese dance, the choreographer also designed some moves with a sense of humor, which received positive feedback from viewers.

"We worked very hard on the looks because it's crucial for bringing the characters to life onstage. It was uncomfortable to perform with cotton balls in our mouths in the beginning, but we soon got used to it," says the principal dancer Yi Xingyan of Zhengzhou Song and Dance Theater, who performed in the dance piece.

"From the clothes, headwear and makeup to our dance movements and facial expressions, all the details made our performance successful."

Chen Lei, director of Henan TV Station's Spring Festival gala, says: "It came as a surprise when we learned that the dance won lots of attention and praise. Our goal was to present a show which is fun and warm, and we are glad that we achieved that."

The award-winning choreographer, Chen Lin, who was born and grew up in Zhengzhou, graduated from Beijing Dance Academy and has been working with Zhengzhou Song and Dance Theater since 2009. Her work is inspired by her hometown's folk tales, historic heroes and the iconic Shaolin Temple, the birthplace of Chinese kung fu.

"I like to visit museums in my hometown as many cultural relics, unearthed in Henan, are exhibited there, which also make me imagine the stories behind them," says Chen Lin.

Contact the writer at chenman@chinadaily.com.cn

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