

# Social media plays a role in promoting classical music among savvy youngsters

Yao Minji

When Feng Jianpeng started out as a music vlogger in April 2020, he never imagined that he would have 300,000 subscribers. The Connecticut-based percussionist and music educator took to vlogging when the pandemic forced the cancellation of performances and classes went online.

His “daodaoFeng on Music” channel on the streaming platform Bilibili reached 300,000 subscribers last week, with a total of over 16 million views from over 190 videos. His YouTube channel, “Feng’s Music Channel,” with the same Chinese-language content, has more than 120,000 followers and has clocked up nearly 8 million views.

“This is way beyond my highest expectations,” the 33-year-old musician told Shanghai Daily over the phone shortly after a performance. “I was only expecting a few thousand views. The idea was to keep myself motivated and make sure that my contents were not dull.”

Feng’s success highlights a global trend that has emerged in the last three years amid the pandemic: Classical music is becoming increasingly popular on social media platforms, and primarily watched by the younger generations.

In fact, TikTok and Warner Classics are collaborating on an album, “TikTok Classics — memes & viral hits,” which isn’t your standard classical music album title. But it comprises orchestral arrangements of 18

most popular tunes from the social media app.

## Classical music elements

One classical music challenge on TikTok last year received nearly 740 million views, while musical vloggers like Feng, whose videos contain classical music elements, swiftly gained popularity on social media sites all over the world.

On his Bilibili channel, Feng describes himself as the first native Chinese person to serve as a main percussionist in Broadway productions. He holds a doctorate in musical arts from the University of Hartford’s Hartt School.

His music talk shows, which primarily dissect songs technically to explain why they are



Shanghai Symphony Orchestra started working more closely with vloggers since 2020, including the project “SSO Observer.” — Ti Gong

musically great or horrible, have been described as “hilarious,” according to a comment that has received the most “thumbs-up” on Bilibili.

One recent video involved Feng collaborating with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. In it, Feng introduces the highlights of the orchestra’s summer music festival and digs into the tradition of broadcasting live concerts — from earlier radio concerts to more recent Vienna New Year’s concerts. For years, the concerts were broadcast on China’s national television, CCTV.

As luck would have it, the orchestra’s 13th Music in the Summer Air (MISA) festival was forced to go online just days before it was launched, due to pandemic restrictions. It went back offline on July 21, just one day after the festival started.

The orchestra has a history of streaming some of its performances live since 2018 and began to attract a bigger audience since 2020, thanks to COVID-19 restrictions.

As early as March 2020, it was one of the first to try a cloud concert series, which received more than 5 million views on various social media platforms.

“We’ve explored different forms of online content during the last three years,” said the orchestra’s head Zhou Ping.

“If you look at MISA this year, it has got a lot more online content, from copyrighted concerts of internationally renowned orchestras to virtual classes and late-night podcasts. It is

actually a lot more workload for all of us with more content, both online and offline, for viewers.”

The orchestra started working more closely with vloggers since 2020. The first collaboration involved getting a vlogger to stand in for Zhou as the orchestra head for one day.

Other experiments include stop motion animation, online rock classical music theater, and classical re-arrangement of pop songs, among others.

Boundary-breaking is somewhat natural for young vloggers like Feng, who do not hold back from any genres or fear any challenges. His most-viewed videos are all different from each other.

One shows him technically analyzing the top 10 hottest songs on Chinese social media. Another one shows him playing different rhythms simultaneously with his left and right hands. A top-viewed video shows Feng, the professional percussionist, acing the game Taiko Web after just five hours of practicing.

“I know now how I can garner even more views. I can touch a bit on celebrity gossip or things like that, but I have my principles,” he said.

“Ultimately, I want to popularize music and show you why and how a piece of music is good or bad apart from the lyrics. But I don’t discriminate against any genres of music.

“I don’t automatically judge a song badly just because it’s hot on social media, or a piece of classic music great just because it’s classic music.”



Feng Jianpeng, also known as “daodaoFeng,” became a music vlogger in 2020. He now has over 300,000 subscribers on Bilibili and over 120,000 on YouTube. — Judi Zhang / Ti Gong