

《李思思加盟春晚—观众反响平平》

The CCTV Spring Festival Gala announced yesterday that a young fresh celebrity, 26-year-old Li Sisi, will join its hosting team at this year ' s gala in an effort to save the event ' s waning popularity - perhaps in vain.

The gala - a four-hour live show on CCTV every Chinese New Year's eve featuring singing, dancing and comedy - has been watched as a tradition by tens of millions of Chinese viewers since it first aired 30 years ago.

However, it is gradually losing its public appeal, especially among young people who nowadays have more entertainment choices.

"A new host won't change the gala's fundamental style, which is lavishing praise on social progress and harmony, and promoting so-called mainstream values," Chen Liwei, a 30-year-old PR company employee in Beijing, told the Global Times yesterday.

"The gala is boring and it lasts too long. Every year, it tries to create a happy and lively scene, but the fundamental form of the programs is the same," Chen said.

Cui Yongyuan, a well-known TV host with CCTV who has participated in the Gala before, is also now mocking the show.

"You cannot really say anything but positive things [at the gala]. Nothing about food safety, or the economic slump..." Cui wrote on his verified Weibo account on sohu.com.

"No comedian in the gala makes me laugh, but instead I find myself cursing it," Zhang Li, another Gala antagonist, told the Global Times.

Celebrity rejection

The Spring Festival gala has long been a dream stage for performers, which can turn an unknown artist into a national sensation overnight.

That trend continued until recent years when some well-known celebrities denied requests to perform at the gala.

Song Dandan, 51, a famous actress, had performed in the gala for about 10 years by 2008, when she felt she had had enough.

Audiences are being increasingly picky as they can now fulfill their entertainment needs with jokes posted on

Internet or on their mobile phones. Getting them to laugh often in a skit that lasts only several minutes is very challenging for an actor, Song was quoted by Kunming-based Life News as saying.

She was also quoted as saying "Unless I am detained by the gala, I'm not going to join it," by the Wuhan Evening News.

Zhou Libo, another stand-up comedian from Shanghai, famous for his controversial talk show style, rejected invitations from the gala in 2010 and 2011 and has never appeared.

"I won't the join the gala in this lifetime," Zhou was quoted by the Yangtze Evening Post as saying, explaining that his rejections were because of his respect for art and audiences.

The gala targets 900 million farmers in China whose lives he is not familiar with, Zhou said, adding that if he speaks to an audience he knows little about, whatever he says may not entertain them.

"Given that the gala is worsening year by year, I suggest it be cancelled and replaced with my talk show. That way the audience will see something new," Zhou was quoted by CRI as saying.

Chen believes the gala's reflection of the diversity in Chinese culture is limited.

"The majority of characters in the gala are from the north and present northern traditions in the show. I seldom see southern traditions represented," Chen said, who is originally from Hubei Province.

On top of this, many people are also being put off by the increasing number of hidden advertisements in the show.

The cost of a hidden advertisement for an alcohol company in a short piece with famous comedian Zhao Benshan in 2010 was more than 10 million yuan (\$1.58 million), Guangzhou-based Information Times reported.

Multiple choices

"In the 1980s, especially in rural areas, people had no other choices, and watching TV was the only way for them to get information and entertainment," Zhang Yiwu, a professor in Chinese language and literature at Peking University, said to the Global Times.

"As their lives have become richer and more full of color, the gala is no longer as important," Zhang told the Global Times.

This is quite true for Chen, as she hasn't watched the gala for three years, but never felt like she was missing out. On the eve of the Spring Festival, she surfs the Internet and chooses what she would rather spend the last night of the Chinese Lunar New Year watching, she said.

Forward progress

Due to public pressure, CCTV has tried to make changes every year.

Ha Wen, chief director of the gala in 2012, called the gala a "hot potato". She announced that there will be no hidden advertisements this year, while the program selection section will be canceled, China Economic Weekly reported on Tuesday.

"The cost of the gala is paid for with CCTV funds, not with advertisement revenue," Ha was quoted as saying.

"The gala is not a commercial performance, as if it were we wouldn't be able to afford it. All the actors who participate in the gala are artists with high moral standards, and do not care about the money," Ha was quoted by Wuhan Evening News as saying.

All the negative news surrounding, and all the changes made to the gala does not stop some loyal lovers from watching it.

Zhang Yiwu said he stills like watching the gala each year.

"It's one of my Spring Festival rituals, like the festival eve dinner," Zhang told the Global Times.

Liu Dejia, a 55-year-old farmer in Longkou, Shandong Province, agreed with Zhang, saying that "without the gala, the festival does not feel like a festival."