

Varsity • April 2016 PHOTO FEATURE

staff member outside Hall Two of the Asia World Expo announces: "The concert doors are now open for entry, please make your way to the arena." The long wait is finally over for the thousands of fans who turned up early for the Hong Kong concert of Lee Hong-ki, vocalist of the Korean boy band FT Island.

Tickets for K-pop shows are known for their steep price tags but two 19-year-olds, Cindy Lau and Gladys Lo, who have been Lee's fans for six years, justify the splurge to support their idol.

The event starts at 7.00 pm, but fans started arriving hours earlier. Most of them, like Lau and Lo, came early for the merchandise and souvenirs distributed by the fan clubs. Yamin, a member of the band's fan group Eggball Team, says: "We arrived at two, mainly to set up photo booths and distribute souvenirs to other Primadonnas."

Korean fan bases always refer to themselves by an official name given by their idols, such as "Primadonnas" for FT Island fans. This intimate subculture of Korean fandom gives Hong Kong fans a degree of affinity with their stars they are unlikely to experience with home-grown artists.

For K-pop fans, showing admiration for their idols is very important. All the decorations along the hallway in the concert venue, from large backdrops to small souvenirs, were designed and hand-made by fans, and they outdo the official swag. Props such as LED finger lights, paper banners and signs are handed out to ticketholders, and each prop comes with specific guidelines on how and when they should be displayed. As fan clubs prepare fan chants to cheer their idols on during concerts, lyrics sheets are also distributed. Volunteers remind concert-goers to practise them before the show.









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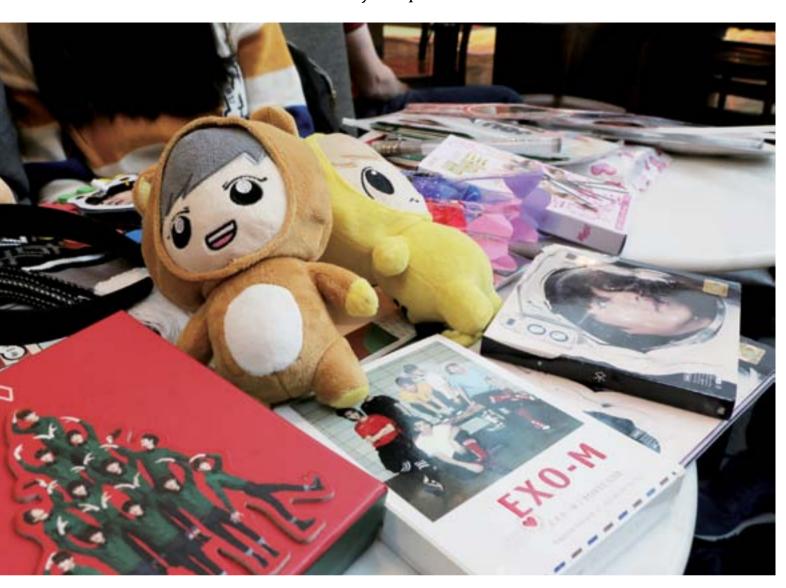
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It is at these concert events that fans can enjoy the ultimate K-pop experience. Eggball Team says such preparations can take months, two in the case of Lee's concert. They started planning and began crowdfunding shortly after Hong Kong was consinger's solo tour.

concert day, they would also order a birthday cake a month ahead to celebrate during the concert. "Each member contributes \$100 to \$200 for a cake," says Chervl Li, an administrator of a fan club dedicated to the Korean boy group BEAST. Li took a birthday

than a burden. "It is a rewarding sensation when our efforts are recognised

BEAST several years ago after pre-sales for concerts and pre-orders firmed as one of the stations in the watching a Korean TV drama featur-If their idol's birthday falls on the their music and variety show appear- seriously. ances. Eventually, she joined the fan club and is now into her fifth year as a management team member.

3.000 active members and its Facebook there is always help on hand. fan page has over 8,000 subscribed users. Li normally spends one to two team, members who are responsible cake and two suitcases of handcrafted hours daily to deal with fan club affairs for posting information updates, a decorations to the BEAST concert in and update its website and social media accounts. But when big events, and so on." Despite the time and effort such as concerts or fan meet-ups are

required, fans regard these prepara- approaching, she may spend up to six tions and activities as enjoyment rather hours a day because her main duties require communicating with management agencies and production and appreciated by our idols," Li says. companies. Since members depend She began to pay attention to on her to arrange perks such as ticket for albums and merchandise, she says ing the group and started to follow she has to take the negotiations very

As a full-time student, Li sometimes finds it hard to deal with the workload, especially during peak At the moment, the fan club has seasons for events. However, she says

> "We have an arts and graphics translating team, a production team







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what she does as managing a fan base, but rather as coordinating a group of friends who share the same interests.

club's self-made souvenirs, as well as some of the official merchandise. She has spent thousands of dollars over until they are completely proficient in the years but she thinks it is worth the performing perfectly coordinated and investment. "A few part-time jobs will

to describe irrationally fanatical supporters of celebrities, but the fans themselves say they have good reason

In fact, Li does not really consider 17-year-old administrator of the fan success can motivate their fans too. Instagram account of another Korean boy group EXO.

What impresses Tsang the most is Li shows Varsity some of the fan the attitude and professionalism of the Korean entertainment industry. Korean companies train their artists executed choreographies. They invest cover the expenses," she says.

The term "groupies" is often used

large sums of money on an album or a music video. Tsang thinks it is unlikely large sums of money on an album or a that Hong Kong companies would do the same for new idol groups.

Supporting idols from a differto support their idol and it is not just ent country can be challenging, but for their looks.

ent country can be challenging, but says Tsang, the hard work their idols "Korean celebrities have to undergo put into their career deserves appreyears of training before making their ciation and applause. The fact that debut, it could be 10 years, practismost Korean idols are in a similar age ing every day," says Ingrid Tsang, the group as their fans means the idols'

"Sometimes when I see them perform, or talk about their feelings, I will think about how much hard work they have done that brought them to today's success. Then I will use this to encourage myself in terms of academic studies," says Tsang.

Edited by Kate Kim

