

YOUTH

Westlife is used to adulation. The Irish pop band is a global phenomenon and sells out concert venues the world over. But even the band members were surprised at the enthusiastic reception they got in Shanghai on Aug 16.

Arriving at the city's National Exhibition and Convention Center for an afternoon rehearsal they were warmly welcomed by more than 5,000 waiting fans.

"When they cheered and sang our song, *My Love*, we were so touched and amazed," recalls singer-songwriter Shane Filan, a member of Westlife, in an interview with China Daily.

They also performed in the first Tencent Music Entertainment Awards, which was held in Macao on Dec 8.

The star-studded gala also gathered Chinese pop stars such as Zhang Yixing and TF Boys.

During the gala, Westlife performed three songs, *My Love*, *Better Man* and *Hello My Love*, featuring the band's trademark vocal harmonies.

Westlife's performance received fantastic feedback from fans in the arena and fans who watched the livestreaming elsewhere. The band is no stranger to Macao, after playing two shows there in July.

"We came all the way from across the world and saw the joy on the fans' faces, that's what it's all about," Filan says, adding that their fans in China are very passionate and the songs mean something special to them.

"They (our fans) tell us stories and share their memories, which make us proud."

The performance in Shanghai was part of the group's reunion tour titled *The Twenty Tour*, which, in celebration of their 20th anniversary, began on May 22, 2018, in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

They also did a performance in Beijing on Aug 13 as part of the tour.

The group will announce a new global tour in January, says Markus Feehily, one of the lead singers of Westlife, though he didn't give details of dates or cities.



Westlife in tune with their fans

Irish band overwhelmed by rapturous welcome they receive in China. **Chen Nan** reports.

"We want to return to more Chinese cities to meet more fans. They know us so well. They even know our children's and pets' names," Feehily adds.

"For the fans, they have a lot to choose from and they chose us, which is very special for us."

To better interact with their fans, Westlife launched their official account on Sina Weibo in 2012, and toured seven Chinese cities that year during their *The Greatest Hits Tour*.

The coming tour is good news to their fans.

One of the fans, who attended the Aug 16 Shanghai concert, wrote on the same platform: "I went to their show in Shanghai and I sang along with them all night. There are lots of



Top: Irish pop band Westlife performs at a music awards ceremony in Macao on Dec 8. **PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY** **Above:** The band sings during a concert, as part of *The Twenty Tour* celebrating its 20th anniversary and reunion, in Beijing on Aug 13. LIU JIAHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

memories and I cried."

Another internet user writes: "I am a fan who has loved you for seven years. I am so glad that you can come to China. I am very happy that you can return to the stage again and I hope you can bring us more music."

Feehily says: "My dream is to record a song in Chinese. This time we met some Chinese singers and it's possible that we could collaborate."

He mentions Chen Li-nong, a 19-year-old Taiwan singer-actor, who started his career a year ago by participating in a Chinese reality show, *Idol Producer*, created by iQiyi, and stood out as a member of the boy group, Nine Percent.

With Kian Egan, Nicky Byrne,

Feehily, Filan and former member Bryan McFadden, who departed the lineup in 2004, Westlife was formed in 1998 and their self-titled debut album, which was released in the United Kingdom in November 1999, was a smash hit.

With their records selling over 55 million worldwide, the then-boy group achieved 14 UK No 1 singles, including *Flying Without Wings* and *You Raise Me Up*, and their version of Phil Collins' *Against All Odds*, recorded with pop diva Mariah Carey.

On Nov 15, their new album, titled *Spectrum*, was released, which was their first since the 2010 album, *Gravity*. The band disbanded in 2012 and reunited in 2018.

Recorded in Dublin, Los Angeles and London, the 11-song new album features collaborations with Ed Sheeran and James Bay, among others.

Byrne says of the ideas behind the album: "We are very picky this time and we want to make sure what we have on this album is still Westlife but also works for the current music industry because it has moved on a lot."

"It was an enjoyable process, recording the album. We even recorded three songs in Macao and we had never recorded in Asia before."

Filan adds: "The album has everything that we love in music, heartfelt emotional songs, which are full of energy and are colorful. We will perform more shows for the overseas fan base to get our music out there."

The four members are all fathers, and Feehily recently welcomed his daughter Layla. They have paid touching tributes to their children as they perform the song titled *My Blood* from the new album.

Their children are their fans too, says Byrne.

"Our children sing our songs at home and they watch our shows," he says, adding that being good fathers, they "try to find a balance between a normal family life and touring life".

Contact the writer at chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

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