

Russian man 'trapped' on Chinese reality TV show finally voted out

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BEIJING (AFP) - The reality TV ordeal of a Russian who joined a Chinese boy band show by accident - and made it to the final despite urging fans to vote him off - has finally ended after nearly three months.

Mr Vladislav Ivanov, a 27-year-old from Vladivostok, was kicked out of Produce Camp 2021 last Saturday (April 24). Viewers had ignored his pleas to leave and backed him all the way to the final.

Mr Ivanov, who speaks fluent Mandarin, originally joined the show as a Chinese teacher.

But he said he was invited to sign on as a contestant after the directors noticed his good looks.

"They asked if I would like to try a new life," Mr Ivanov said during the show.

He appeared to regret his decision almost immediately, but could not leave without breaching his contract.

His lack of enthusiasm played out in half-hearted singing, rapping and dancing alongside the other, more eager contestants.

Performing under the stage name Lelush, he urged the public to vote him out, saying he did not want to be among the 11 winners of the show, who are contractually obliged to form a boy band.

"Don't love me, you'll get no results," he said on one episode.

But viewers took to his dour persona and kept him in the running for nearly three months.

Idol-training shows, a TV genre originating in South Korea that puts hundreds of aspiring young performers through rigorous boot camps and audience votes, have become massively popular in China.

In this one, contestants were corralled into dorm rooms on a tropical island in China's Hainan province and had their phones confiscated for most of the season.

Anyone who wanted to break their contract and leave midway through the season, which began in mid-February, had to pay a steep fine.

While critics have questioned the transparency of the voting on idol shows, Mr Ivanov appears to have struck a genuine chord as an anti-hero for Chinese audiences.

Fans, some earnest and some ironic, dubbed him "the most miserable wage slave" and celebrated him as an icon of "Sang culture", a popular concept among Chinese millennials referring to a defeatist attitude towards everyday life.

"Don't let him quit," one viewer commented on a video of a dejected-looking Mr Ivanov performing a Russian rap.

"Sisters, vote for him! Let him 996!" another fan commented, using the Chinese slang for the gruelling work schedule that afflicts many young employees, especially in digital start-ups.

The unlikely star made it to the final episode of the show on Saturday, where he failed to earn enough votes to join the boy band.

"I'm finally getting off work," a relieved Mr Ivanov said on Sunday on his Weibo account.