

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

# Singer displays Chinese affinity

By Jae-Ha Kim  
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Singer, cellist and beatboxer Kevin Olusola is famous for being one-fifth of the three-time Grammy Award-winning a cappella group Pentatonix. But this May, he makes his debut as a solo artist with his album "Dawn of a Misfit."

"The idea for this album actually came from my Hollywood Bowl performance in 2022," Olusola told me in a Zoom interview from his Los Angeles home. "I did a version of 'Beethoven's 5th Symphony' that I called 'Kevin's 5th.' It was something that I'd been working on for fun on my own, and it took off from there."

This interview with Olusola has been edited for clarity and length.

**Q: Most people wouldn't think of you as a misfit. What can you share about yourself that we may not know?**

**A:** Most of my life, I have felt extremely misunderstood. I'm not Black enough for the Black kids. I'm too Black for the white kids. I'm not African enough (like my dad). I'm not Caribbean enough (like my mom). I'm not academic enough. I'm not hip-hop enough. I'm not classical enough. But I finally did enough self-discovery to realize I know what I want to say and how I want to say it. And I finally feel like I have a message, which is that our uniqueness, our weirdness, our quirks — the things that maybe you were bullied for as a kid — are actually our unique super-



Pentatonix's Kevin Olusola says he likes meeting people from other cultures when touring. **XAVIER SOTOMAYOR**

**Q: I understand that you practice Sabbath. How does that work when you are on tour or have a schedule to main with Pentatonix?**

**A:** Sabbath is an important part of my life, where from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday, I don't do any work — nothing with the band, nothing for myself. When I rest on that day, I feel like I have the capacity to do more work on other days. In the first year of the band, I said, "This is something that I have to do. It's a practice that is extremely important to me as a Christian. So I can't do Friday night shows. If this is something that can't be worked out, I understand that you will need to find another beatboxer." I was scared that I might get kicked out. But they were very very understanding, and it hasn't really been an issue.

**Q: What was your most recent trip?**

**A:** I went to South Africa. I was actually there for a funeral, and then after the funeral, my cousins and I went around and had a bit of fun seeing the sights. It's funny to me because the terrain in a lot of ways was very reminiscent to me of Los Angeles. There were lots of beautiful, rolling hills. I want to visit Africa more. I haven't been back to Nigeria since 2010.

**Q: I know that you studied abroad in China when you were in college at Yale. And I recently saw a few videos of you speaking Chinese. As a native English speaker, how do you maintain your Chinese language skills?**

**A:** That's a good question! Funny enough, my daughter is interested in Chinese. She goes to a Montessori preschool and has Chinese classes. And we'll watch this show called "Little Fox Chinese," which is a really amazing show for kids. It's simple Chinese, but I think even that gets her interested. So that's one way. Some of her friends in preschool are Chinese, and they're always so surprised that I speak Chinese. It's just super fun.

**Q: When was the last time you were in China?**

**A:** I haven't been back in recent years, but there was a time when (Pentatonix) went in 2012 for the Chinese version of "The Sing-Off" and I spoke in Chinese the whole time. (Laughs.) The judges were so impressed because I used some pretty high-level Chinese. I'd love to go back, especially with the classical angle that I bring into my solo album because I know how much classical music is a big part of Chinese culture.

For more from the reporter, visit [www.jaehakim.com](http://www.jaehakim.com).

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