

SFGATE <http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/On-top-of-YouTube-Happy-Slip-Choi-KevJumba-3281760.php>

On top of YouTube: Happy Slip, Choi, KevJumba

Jeff Yang Published 4:00 am, Thursday, June 5, 2008

ADVERTISEMENT

For a generation of young artists, the existence of a never-before-seen mass audience of Asian Americans on YouTube represents an opportunity of game-changing proportions.

Christine Gambito - known to her hundreds of thousands of online fans by her YouTube handle, Happy Slip - describes her inauspicious foray into stardom like this: "All my life, my family has asked me to do these imitations of them. Whenever we all get together, after we pig out, and everyone's fat and bored, they'd say, 'Christine, get up there, do your imitation of Auntie!' So I realized that I really wanted to tell these little stories about my family, whether there was an audience for them or not. And I started shooting and editing these videos and uploading them to YouTube. Not knowing if anyone was even watching felt kind of liberating, in fact. I realized I could just do whatever I wanted."

MOST POPULAR

- 1 **Concrete wall threatening to fall from SF high-rise stabilized**
- 2 **2,000-pound concrete slab threatening to fall from SF building**
- 3 **United's 4-hour flight to nowhere**

But what she did - gently hilarious one-woman skits in which she portrays as many as a half-dozen members of her extended Filipino American family - proved to be wildly popular. So much so that, a year and a half later, her Happy Slip channel is the fifth most subscribed on YouTube.

To date, her videos have been watched more than 36 million times, with Asian Americans making up the bulk of her fan base (though she does note that people from every ethnic background write her, "saying 'That's exactly my family, and I'm not even Filipino! It's like 'My **Big Fat Greek Wedding**' - you don't have to be Greek to get it. Or fat.").

Gambito's experience is echoed by 22-year-old fellow YouTube star **David Choi**, whose popular videos feature him performing a mix of his original songs and captivatingly unlikely acoustic guitar arrangements of pop hits like **Britney Spears**' "Gimme More."

ADVERTISEMENT

What really sent Choi's visibility through the roof, however, was a goofy one-off ballad he wrote celebrating his love for and obsession with YouTube itself. As it rocketed up the viewership charts, "YouTube (A Love Song)" got picked by the service as a front-page Featured Video. The video has since been seen nearly 1.9 million times, helping make him YouTube's 16th-most subscribed musician of all time, just ahead of, ahem, Britney.

The overwhelmingly positive clamor inspired Choi to start work on an album of his own. It helps to know that he has a pre-existing consumer base of more than 40,000 subscribed fans eager to buy the end result, sight unseen.

As for Gambito, her days of late have been filled with going to network meetings and serving the role bestowed upon her by the Philippine government as an ambassador of tourism; meanwhile, Choi was hired by Warner Chappell as a staff songwriter-producer and got the chance to create a track for rising Interscope Records band Flipsyde.

ADVERTISEMENT

But perhaps the most intriguing top YouTube personality is also one of the youngest: 17-year-old **Kevin "KevJumba" Wu**, who, over the course of just months, went from obscurity to YouTube's No. 1 most subscribed comedian (and third most subscribed YouTuber of all time). Except that he's not, strictly speaking, a "comedian." In fact, most of his videos consist of nothing more than Kevin talking about stuff that Kevin finds interesting, weird or irritating.

And yet, they've received nearly 30 million views because Kevin just talking is, well, pretty hilarious. His deadpan vocal delivery, animated facial expressions and tendency toward unexpected digressions make for surprisingly mesmerizing video. But it's still hard to put a finger on just what makes him so appealing.

Until you realize: It's the confidence, exuding from every pore. Not cockiness - many of his rants, like "I need help with the Females," are drenched in self-deprecating humor - but casual ease. Comfort in his own skin.

In fact, Kevin is a little surprised to even be asked the question. "I don't feel alienated. I talk about being Asian, because

it's who I am. And the majority of my subscribers are Asian, because they relate to what I'm talking about, and they back me up."

In short, in the media that his generation cares about most, Asian Americans aren't behind the curve - they're ahead of the game. So much so that Kevin took it in stride when **Golden State Warriors** point guard **Baron Davis** reached out to him, suggesting they do some videos together - an encounter that led to Kevin and Davis exchanging a series of challenges, eventually leading up to an epic staring contest that was won not by Kevin or Davis, but by an unexpected third entrant: actress and online video junkie **Jessica Alba**.

Baron Davis? Jessica Alba? And ... Kevin Wu? Why not? On the Internet, celebrities get exposed as real people (**Lindsay Lohan** picks her nose!) and real people get the exposure needed to turn them into celebrities.

And whereas Hollywood was built around epic personalities, larger than life icons, the next generation of content is rooted in authenticity: people just being people.

"You see that young Asian Americans are gravitating to YouTube, and it's clear that they represent an underserved market that's thriving online outside the confines of Hollywood and Madison Avenue," says **Richard Frias**, co-president of **Digital Content Partners**, a management firm that recently signed on to represent Gambito and Kevin in whatever future content endeavors they might choose to pursue. "There are no more hurdles. For those who have ever said they were not given a chance or that doors were closed to them for whatever reason - those days are over."

This is a condensed version of Jeff Yang's Asian Pop column on SFGate.com. To read more, go to sfgate.com/ZDPB.

Happy Slip podcast: For Pinoy Pod's interview with Christine Gambito, including video links, go to sfgate.com/ZDPA.

-- **Readers' Platform:** See an excerpt of SFGate comments from Part 1 of Jeff Yang's Asian Pop column on Asian American identity. **E6**

© 2017 Hearst Communications, Inc.

H E A R S T