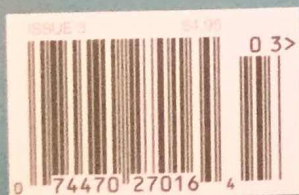


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Lost in
Paradise

Soonjin Kim



ALBUM *Reviews*

by THERESA CELEBRAN



Apollo Nove – *Rex Inexplicata Volans*

Featuring a slew of hot Brazilian vocalists, producer Apollo Nove's debut album, *Rex Inexplicata Volans*, is sublime and chill. The album is steeped in retro effects reminiscent of 60's lounge and bossanova, but the incorporation of folk, electronic, jazz, and rock elements affords *Rex Inexplicata Volans* a fresh new sound. Cibelle lends her ethereal voice on three tracks while the fresh, breathy sound of Holly is featured on three others. The shining star featured on this album, however, is soulful newcomer, Tita Lima, who steals the show on "Trae Um Alivio" and "Entre Eu U Voce." This is a great spin for late nights.



Corinne Bailey Rae – *Corinne Bailey Rae*

Corinne Bailey Rae's album is one that slowly infiltrates the senses: her voice is soft, breathy, unintrusive, intimate, transcendent and memorable. Her self-titled debut is pure and sweet, her style somewhere between Norah Jones and Erykah Badu, with poetic-yet-simple lyrics and melodies. The first single, "Like A Star," as well as "Til It Happens To You" and "Choux Pastry Heart," showcase Corinne's specialty in story telling about the subtle complexities of love. The follow-up singles, "Put Your Records On" and "Trouble Sleeping" are uplifting melodic cuts. The album is a great soundtrack for winding down and relaxing on those hot summer afternoons.



Esthero – *Wikked Lil Grrls*

On the single and opening track, "We R In Need of a Musical Revolution", Esthero boldly declares, "On MTV they only play the same thing. No matter where I go I see Ashanti in the video. I want something more!" The highly anticipated follow-up to her 1998 album, *Breath From Another*, Esthero offers just that. Her voice and style have matured since her *Breath From Another* days. The compositions are far more intricate and complex. For first time listeners, *Wikked Lil Grrls* boasts an exotic, sexy fusion of jazz, hip hop, lounge, rock and dance, making the album truly unique and accessible for listeners of all shapes and sizes. "Every Day is a Holiday (With You)" is a sugary-sweet pop collaboration with Sean Lennon, evoking images of springtime in the park. "Gone" and "My Torture" are quintessential break-up tracks, perfect for moping around. The title tracks "Wikked Lil Grrls" and "If Tha Mood" appeal to the tough, naughty side of any woman. "Blanket Me In You", "Fastlane" and "Thank Heaven 4 You" are the sexiest cuts on the album, sure to get anybody in the mood. It's hard to resist *Wikked Lil Grrls*.



Gnarls Barkley – *St. Elsewhere*

This collaboration project between rising hip hop producer, Dangermouse, and founding member of Goodie Mob, Cee-Lo, is at once both dark and fun. Cee-Lo's powerful, uniquely throaty, gospel-influenced vocal presence is the perfect complement to Dangermouse's gloomy and unforgettable beats, giving the album a more polished sound than Dangermouse's earlier collaboration with MF Doom entitled *Dangerdoom: The Mouse and the Mask*. While both artists have distinct styles and sounds, their elements seem to blend perfectly and harmoniously, with neither one overpowering the other. With the help of an aggressive online guerilla marketing campaign, this duo is sure to explode and get the recognition they deserve. The first single "Crazy" has already blown up the charts both stateside and overseas. Cuts like "Transformer", "Go Go Gadget Gospel" and "Just A Thought" are darker, more complex compositions. Cee-Lo's voice adds the soulful, inviting element to complete the songs. "Smiley Faces" is both upbeat and haunting, with its sweet and poppy tempo calmed by the mysteriously sinister background vocals. *St. Elsewhere* is a fabulous listen for long trips or just lounging with friends.



Zero 7 – *The Garden*

Slightly more uptempo than their previous releases, *Simple Things* and *When It Falls*, *The Garden* still stays true to Zero 7's signature chill-out sound. The group keeps each track fresh by featuring different vocalists: the exotically deep-yet-nasal sound of Zero 7 regular, Sia Furler, as well as Jose Gonzalez and Henry Binns. The beats are lighter and quicker this time around. The album coincides perfectly with the summery images it conjures up.



SUNG KANG

When Preparation Meets Determination

BY TERESA CELEBRAN

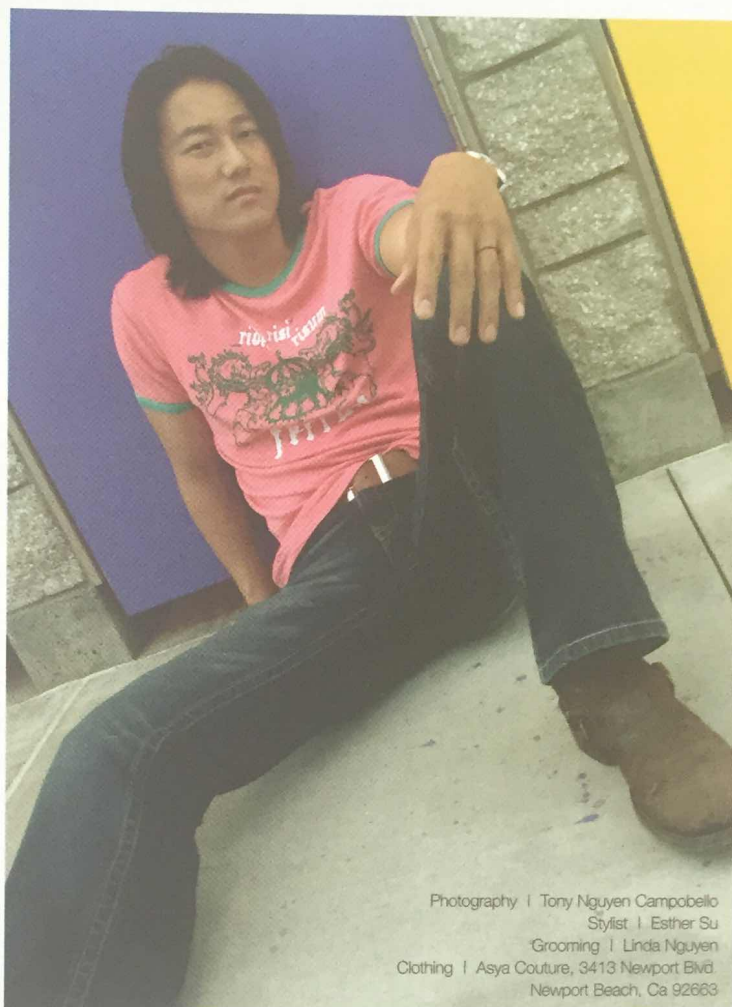
We're sitting at a dive at the Santa Monica Pier, telling stories of how our families used to scrape by: saving tubs of butter and plastic tofu containers to use as makeshift lunch boxes, hiding Mom in the trunk of the car through the gate of the drive-in theater, sneaking sandwich bags into all-you-can-eat buffets. After realizing how much time we have left on our parking meters, Quinn reminds us of the business we have to get out of the way. "This is weird," Sung says to me, gamering control of his laughter. We're constantly veering off-track today, going off into tangents about interesting names of pho restaurants (or lack thereof), getting beat up in elementary school, our parents pinching us when misbehaving in public. One minute we're laughing hysterically over the kinds of things that used to embarrass us as kids, the next minute we're back on the serious questions: how he built his incredible body of work, the differences between working on an indie versus a big budget film, how he feels about being considered a sex symbol.

We can be a goofy bunch to work with, and I'll admit that as soon as I saw Sung Kang walking down Wilshire, I was a little worried that he wouldn't be able to handle spending the day with us. He has a naturally serious look about him. He's a bit of a workhorse, after all: he's starring in three movies this summer alone (*The Motel*, *Undoing*, and of course, *Tokyo Drift*), filming another in August (Justin Lin's next project, *Finishing the Game*), and still managing his own restaurant, *Saketini*. And at first glance he comes off just as mysterious and reserved as he does in his films, but the moment he opens his mouth to say hello he becomes a completely different person. He's honest, open, true to his word, and he sincerely cares about the people he works with. And by the end of the day, we learn he can be just as goofy as we are.

Building real connections with the people he works with is important to Kang. He runs *Saketini*, his cozy restaurant in Los Angeles, with a hands-on approach, treating his team members like his own family. He schedules his meetings around the time he spends at the restaurant and makes it a point to get to know every member of the team, not merely run the business from the sidelines. "In every career, the relationships are what really matters, your word matters. And then people will fight for you, they'll work hard for you," he explains. He applies a similar strategy in acting, which could account for the unique brand of success he's experienced.

An impressive career like Kang's is hard to come by. With lead roles in *Better Luck Tomorrow*, *The Motel*, and *Tokyo Drift* under his belt, it's clear that he is an actor of principle, doing only the roles he loves in films he believes in and doing everything in his power to get a good film made. As a by-product of his work ethic, Kang's resume reads like a roster of some of the best Asian American characters ever put on film. He admits, "I don't think that resume came easy. I think you have to be picky, you have to be selective on what you want and what you want to achieve in your career." Much of his success in fighting for good roles had to do with the relationships he's built throughout his career. He adds, "[You] can't really control the jobs that you get in this town but I think you can be proactive about it, I think you can seek it out. You can look for other good people that are in this business for the right reasons."

His favorite project of his career thus far is *Better Luck Tomorrow*, for that exact reason. He tells us, "When we shot that, I was thinking about leaving the business and going back to school, thinking maybe I'll just become an attorney and make everybody happy and start a family." Because of outstanding student loans, Justin Lin, the director, was walking a similar path. "He was applying to graduate school, he was about to leave, I was about to leave," he explains, adding, "[*Better Luck Tomorrow*] renewed us and gave us a sense of hope."



Photography | Tony Nguyen Campobello
Stylist | Esther Su
Grooming | Linda Nguyen
Clothing | Asya Couture, 3413 Newport Blvd.
Newport Beach, Ca 92663

He got to work with Lin and co-star Jason Tobin once again on the set of *Fast and Furious: Tokyo Drift*. He says, "The only difference was that with *Tokyo Drift*, we had a whole bunch of money. Everything was paid for, we didn't have to worry about anything. But the passion was still there." Because *Tokyo Drift* had a larger budget and, thus, a larger crew, Kang made new friends along the way. He admits, "Brian Tee and I, we became like brothers, like family." Even the crew, made mostly of industry veterans, warmed up to the relative newcomers because of their passion for the project.

Kang has no trouble making new friends anyway. Beneath his cool and mysterious James Dean-like exterior is an open guy who loves to joke around. In fact, by the end of the day, he feels like family to us. After talking about his road to success and his plans to eventually work behind the camera, we spend the rest of the afternoon sharing stories about childhood, the ways in which our families survived as immigrants, our wild imaginations. Having been inspired by Pippi Longstocking movies, he jokes, "As a kid, I always had a backpack of cookies and Kool-Aid, just in case I needed to go on a journey." As an adult, he's certainly proved himself just as prepared for anything.



FAR*EAST

MOVEMENT

MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION
by THERESA CELEBRAN

There's a long line of people outside Pacific Theaters at The Grove in Los Angeles, waiting to see *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*. I call P*oHgress in a panic, unable to find him in the crowd. It's 6:50 and the guys are scheduled to unveil their new video from the movie's soundtrack at 7, giving us only a few minutes to get acquainted.

"Don't worry about it," he calmly says. "Where are you guys?" he asks, then realizes he's looking straight at me through the glass doors.

He flashes a warm smile and nods, and J-Splif and Kev Nish follow close behind to greet us. We exchange formal introductions, but something feels strangely familiar about meeting Far*eAst Movement. Soon it becomes apparent that familiarity is simply a part of the FM vibe. The three emcees are close friends from high school – not merely business partners – each with a magnetic quality about them and an incredible knack for making complete strangers feel like they've known them forever.

While Asian Americans may not necessarily be a rarity in the hip hop world, many of them either DJ or produce: Chad Hugo of the Neptunes, DJ Honda, DJ Babu of Dilated Peoples, Kuttin Kandi, and the Invisibl Skratch Piklz, to name a handful. Few Asian Americans have made waves on the mic. However, like their predecessors Fists of Fury, the Mountain Brothers, and, more recently, Jin, Far*eAst Movement are simultaneously helping shape the Asian American identity and changing the face of hip hop. Back before Jin kicked down the door on BET's Freestyle Fridays, there had been virtually no visible Asian Americans in mainstream hip hop.



"We're not African American, we're not Latino, and we're not Caucasian – they're not used to seeing anybody represent like this, so they don't know what to expect," explains Kev Nish. There's no false gangsta bravado about them, no artificial additives they use to fit themselves into that hardened rapper mold. Far*eAst Movement has done nothing more than stay true to themselves. In reality, it isn't their ethnicity that makes them different anyway; it's their sound, their stories, their personalities.

They come from humble beginnings, only freestyling and writing a few verses for fun in high school. J-Splif confesses that he and PProHgress barely wrote anything down until they met Kev, who at the time had just moved from Seattle. J describes one of their first collaborations as casual, he and Pro only spitting single verses here and there. Then, he jokes, "[Kev] goes 'Okay, my turn,' and he brings out this encyclopedia of rhymes. We were like, 'Oh man, you *really* ain't got nothin' to do in Seattle!'" He credits Kev for getting them into the habit of writing, after which, he says, "One thing led to another and we finally got a chance to record."

PProHgress's face lights up as he describes their first shows, miserable though they were. He admits with a smile, "We had shows where there would be around four people... counting us. The sound would be dead and sometimes the mics wouldn't work, so we would just get on chairs and stand in front of like one person and rap in front of them. It was so bad." He continues, "And the bartender! You know how the bartender usually would try to give you a free drink? With us they'd be like, 'Okay, are you gonna pay for that?'"

Though they seem destined for success, stories like these keep the three rappers grounded. For many of their accomplishments, they credit fate and the support of their friends and the Asian American arts community at large. They organized their first major event, Movementality, in 2003, a benefit for Nanoom in Koreatown, Los Angeles. This bid to help their community paid them back tenfold. After the event, Carl Choi, head of Catch Music Group, took FM under his wing and helped them network, an opportunity which, they all agree, was a blessing.

Getting their track, "Round Round," onto the soundtrack of a major motion picture was, to them, a work of fate. Their single was so catchy that it set off a domino effect: from singer pal Storm, to EMI Records, to director Justin Lin, to Janet Choi of KTLA, to Bandai. Not only did "Round Round" make it to the soundtrack, but it made it to the actual movie and the Tokyo Drift video game as well.


Perhaps they've won everyone over because they're truly fun guys to be around – a shining trait in the video for "Round Round." The video features actors Sung Kang and Leonardo Nam, models Kaila Yu and Aiko Tanaka, and Far*eAst in a hysterical parking lot bash, racing Power Wheels Escalades and stuffing their faces with hot dogs. The song itself is an uptempo and melodic party cut, a great primer to their fun-loving vibe.

Far*eAst Movement is releasing another album digitally, entitled Folk Music. Once again, the album features collaborations with friends Jin, Ken Oak, Storm, and Mary Jane, along with Bionic, Black Silver and Trek Life.

"Whether people accept it or not, we have yet to see," says Kev Nish. "As far as right now," he continues, "it's been all love."

Check out www.fareastmovement.com for more information.



A close-up portrait of actor Brian Tee. He has dark, spiky hair and is looking slightly off-camera with a soft expression. He is wearing a white jacket over a light blue t-shirt. His hands are clasped in front of him. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

BRIAN TEE

Catching His Drift

by THERESA CELEBRANO

Despite his leading role in the summer blockbuster *Fast and Furious: Tokyo Drift*, Brian Tee stays humble. He's the kind of guy who looks you in the eye and smiles like he's genuinely happy to see you, whether he's being hoarded by fans or standing on the sidewalk waiting patiently because the L.A. traffic held you up. For this reason, popularity has always come easy for Brian: In high school he was captain of the football team, prom king, and student body president. He's warm, down-to-earth, laid back, and probably the easiest guy to talk to in Hollywood.

We meet the morning after he's introduced a preview screening of *Tokyo Drift*. When praised on his fantastic drifting scenes in the film, Tee says, "I like to say I'm the best air drifter out there...kinda like the air guitar but for drifting." He admits that most of the work he did was in front of a green screen, and that the stunt drivers truly deserve all the praise. "But when I pulled up to stuff, that was all me," he adds jokingly.

The road to success was not a smooth one for Brian. He's done everything from bartending at a seedy, depressing Los Angeles dive to appearing as an extra on a crowded set of a music video--an experience that, he says, was akin to being cattle-herded -- all in pursuit of his dream. He had appeared in more than a dozen television shows before landing the *Tokyo Drift* role. His breakthrough performance as Pfc. Jimmy Nakayama in 2002's *We Were Soldiers* was his first big break, but *Tokyo Drift* will introduce him to the masses.

What separates Brian from the typical Hollywood dream is that he didn't merely drop out of school and out of his family with lofty, starry-eyed visions of "making it"; once he knew what his path in life was, he aspired to be the best actor he could be and did what it took to get there. He tells a story familiar to many young Asian-Americans: "My brother's five years older and he was a doctor... I was supposed to be the lawyer."

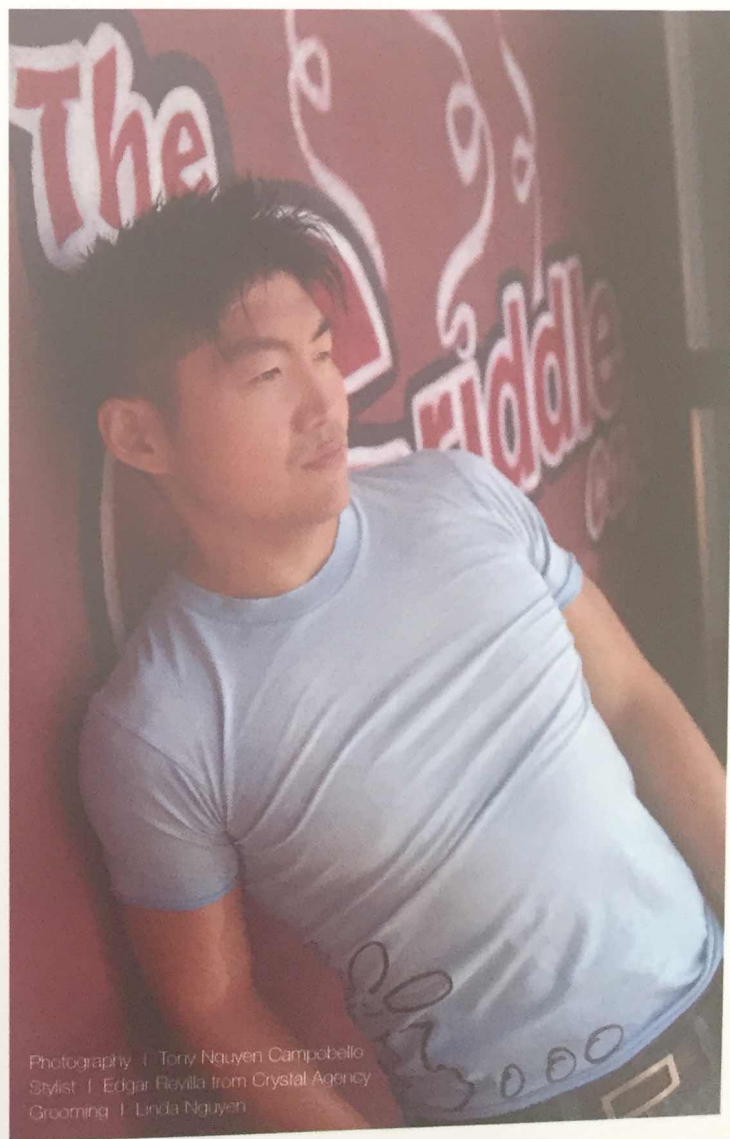
However, a single class at Cal State Fullerton, Acting for Non-Majors, changed the whole path of his life. He completed the theater program at Fullerton and then decided to transfer to one of the best theater arts programs in the country at UC Berkeley.

His family had mixed feelings about his decision. "They were happy I was going to Berkeley but they didn't quite want me to major [in drama]." But as he filled out the registration paperwork, a sign seemed to appear out of thin air: "I came across this third grade paper on what I wanted to be when I grew up. The writing was awful in third grade but it said 'I want to be an actor and be in television and film.' So I checked off the dramatic arts major."

Still, he maintains that his family was supportive, though he faced a dilemma many second-generation Asian Americans face when pursuing a career in the arts. "At first [my family] was really standoffish, but they were really trying to be supportive. They'd give me hints like, 'Maybe you should do this. I mean, we totally support you and all, but what if you got an insurance license or something?'" His family was caught somewhere between wanting to see him happy and wanting to see him not have to struggle like they did. He says, "I started from the bottom of the bottom. For them to see me in that situation, they were definitely hurting."

Now, with the release of *Tokyo Drift* (in which he plays the role of D.K., a different kind of "bad guy"), Brian Tee is on top of the world. For one, he's never had more fun on a set than he's had on the set of *Tokyo Drift*, noting, "Every day was a blast. There hasn't been another show or movie that I've done where I would go to set when I'm not working, just to hang out and just to learn." He still feels a special bond with the cast and crew of the film, adding, "We're young guys and some of us have worked for a while now, but not at this level and this capacity, so we were all gunning for this one movie as a family." To top that, the movie opened third in the box office and, a month later, remains in the top ten.

Regardless of all the success of the movie, Brian is still a family man at heart. Though he talks about the overwhelming positive response that the movie has gotten so far and how fun it was to be on the set, what really lights his face up this morning is talking about how proud his family was when they saw his performance. His mom was so proud, in fact, that she called the local Korean news outlets. As a full-time caregiver to his grandmother, he mentions, "I can take her to the events and take her to the premiere and she can see all that. But her seeing me on the Korean news was huge." He jokes, "Now I'm a star."



Photography: T. Tony Nguyen Campbell
Stylist: T. Edgar Revilla from Crystal Agency
Grooming: T. Linda Nguyen