

KHALIL FONG



Khalil Fong is a soul-pop star who is taking the Asian music scene by storm, with sold-out concerts full of cheering fans. “Fong’s concerts are cherished events that attract industry people and music aficionados” writes the *Taipei Times*. The publication also says, with “his smoldering voice and his beautifully crafted . . . songs, he has been conquering radio and television in Taiwan.” Another journalist calls him “one of the best musicians to come out of the Hong Kong music scene in recent years.”

Khalil, who is 26, was born in Hawaii. When he was six, he and his family moved to China, in part to connect with their Chinese culture. Khalil started writing music in his teens and taught himself to play piano and guitar. At 19, he was hired by Warner Music Hong Kong as a songwriter. Warner later released his first CD, *Soul Boy*. Khalil has since produced five CDs in three languages—Mandarin, English, and Cantonese. He’s won many awards in Hong Kong, where he lives with his family. He has also been honored as a top musician in Korea, Taiwan, China, Singapore, and Malaysia.

Q. What’s your favorite childhood memory?

Going to farmers’ markets in Hawaii and having fresh coconut [from] this guy named Coconut Joe. He would climb the coconut trees . . . [and] sell them in his small truck. He’d have this big cane knife, and he’d just cut the top open and give you a straw, and you’d have the coconut juice. And after you finished, he’d cut it in half, and you’d have the coconut meat.

Q. How did you know you wanted to be a performer?

When I was three or four, I saw . . . a film about Ritchie Valens, who really made that song “La Bamba” famous during the ’50s . . . After seeing that film, I wanted to be a singer . . . It was like kids [who] see a movie about firemen, or they really admire policemen or superheroes . . . Kids grow up wanting to be them. For me, it was like that with Ritchie Valens and rock stars. So since four, I loved singing. I started off listening to . . . ’50s music after that . . . plus some ’70s Soul/R&B [Rhythm and Blues] . . . some jazz . . . And also at that time, everyone was pretty crazy about Michael Jackson. So there was a period of three or four years when I actually impersonated Michael Jackson.



Left: At about two years old in Hawaii, Khalil was following in his father’s footsteps as a drummer. Right: Khalil, at age 11 in Hong Kong, practicing the Chinese martial art of wushu.

Q. How would you describe your music to the kids who haven’t heard it yet?

It’s Soul/R&B with a little bit of everything, but mainly Soul/R&B in Mandarin, and occasionally I do some English songs . . . In the States or in the Western world, people have heard a lot of Soul/R&B. But mainly in Asia, it’s pretty rare . . . So I’m just trying to introduce Soul/R&B to the people in China, in Malaysia, and Mandarin-speaking areas.

Q. You're doing a lot at a young age.

Oh, I don't know. A lot of youngsters are really coming about, and [there is] really so much talent on the Internet. You just click on YouTube, and I'm surprised often [by] the talent that's out there. It's quite something . . . Sometimes you wonder, "Why am I the one singing?" . . . So I think it's really cool these days to have things like Facebook and YouTube . . . [It's] a good way for people to gain knowledge of what other musicians are doing on the other side of the world.

Q. How would you sum up the message or messages that you want to convey to people with your music?

First, being positive is one of the main overviews or topics that I like to write about, [and] some social issues . . . I like to write about life in general, so whatever I see or hear, and if I can find a good melody to go with it, then I like to write about it . . . I try to incorporate Bahá'í perspectives in my music, although I don't directly talk about religion . . . But I try to bring that kind of culture into my music.

Q. What advice do you have for kids who want to be professional musicians?

I would say, practice. Practice is the best way, and to listen to a lot of music . . . And be flexible. A lot of people might want to be into the whole superstar thing. I think these days, it's more sing and be happy . . . Live your life positively and try to do some good in your work, and perfect your craft, whatever it is.

Q. In this issue of *Brilliant Star*, we're talking about unity in diversity. How would you encourage kids to deepen their appreciation for cultural diversity?

Being a traveler, I've met a fair amount of different types of people, and I find that the more you get to know people, the more you learn that everyone's really just about the same. You learn to differentiate cultural habits . . . [from] what everyone is really looking for in their hearts. I think that's really good. It's really easy to sort of make friends. It's really easy



Top: Khalil sings from his latest album, *Timeless*, in Hong Kong in 2009. The concert was sold out. PHOTO BY LUCY CHEN
Bottom: Khalil performs with Grammy-winner Jason Mraz at a concert in 2009. PHOTO BY CHRIS CHAN

Q. If you had one wish for readers of *Brilliant Star*, what would it be?

In Chinese, we have a saying . . . "Good Health and Prosperity." During the [Chinese] New Year, we always say that . . . So "Good Health and Prosperity," and spiritual health at the same time.

to understand conflict, because a lot of conflict is just a product of our habits clashing. It helps to see things from a different perspective, and I think being in a diverse situation also enables you, or challenges you, to get into other people's minds—in a good way—and to see how other people think and actually apply that to your daily life.