

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## Singer Clara C. is a YouTube sensation

By [RICHARD CHANG](#)

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At first glance, Clara Chung appears to be a normal, happy, healthy 20-something. Outgoing, yet polite. Perhaps a bit taller than average.

But when she opens her mouth and sings, she becomes a different person. Soulful. Inspired. Gifted. Fearless.

Another thing that sets her apart: She can play a multitude of instruments, including piano, guitar, melodica, trumpet, percussion, synthesizers and glockenspiel.

"I feel like the luckiest girl in the world," said Chung, a UC Irvine graduate who turns 23 on Sunday. "I get to do what I love, and all the things that I love at once."

Chung, who goes by "Clara C." professionally, is part of a new generation of Asian American musicians, actors, filmmakers and performers who are making it big on YouTube and transforming that into broader success. The singer/songwriter has more than 2.88 million total views on the popular website and more than 75,100 subscribers.

She also has a real-world following that has sold out concert venues and purchased her music at a robust clip.

Granted, Chung, who lives in Northridge with her parents and two siblings, kind of came out of nowhere. Neither of her South Korean-born parents is a musician, although she says her father can blow anyone out of the water at karaoke.

Just a couple years ago, she was an undergraduate at UC Irvine, majoring in psychology with a minor in education. When she wasn't studying or hanging out at Yogurtland, she would perform at open-mike events at the on-campus Phoenix Club on Tuesday nights.

But in the past year, Chung has accomplished more in music than most do in several years. She won first place in an International Secret Agents (ISA) variety show in 2009.

In March, she performed at the Shrine Auditorium in front of 6,300 people and won Kollaboration 10, a talent and variety show among Asian Americans.

She has performed at the Hollywood Bowl, the U.S. Department of Education, and various venues and festivals across the country. While in Washington, D.C., she shot a public service announcement extolling the virtues of education for the federal agency.

In September, she completed and released her debut album, "The Art in My Heart." The 10-song, independently released collection is full of original, heartfelt lyrics, unique, fun and clever musical arrangements, and professional polish. The master engineer was Tom Weir, a 2004 Grammy winner who has worked with No Doubt, Willie Nelson, Weezer, Eric Clapton and Rooney.

The video for her first single, "Offbeat," was directed by Ross Ching, who has done videos for Death Cab for

Cutie and Orange County's other YouTube darling, Kina Grannis. The cheery, upbeat tune has been playing well on YouTube, with more than 142,500 views since it was released late last month.

"She is someone who's got a great personality – that personality comes off really well when she sings," said Daniel Chae, an L.A.-based musician who performed throughout Chung's album, wrote some of the music and provided background vocals. "A lot of artists don't know who they are, so they try to pretend. Not Clara. She's a go-getter. If she has her eyes set on something, she'll do it."

Chung's manager Jonathan Chang is unsurprisingly effusive in his praise. "I think she really does have the whole package," said the 26-year-old Tustin resident and businessman. "She'll meet every single person in the meet-and-greet line. We've done meet-and-greets for five hours. She's so thankful to every single person. That makes a huge difference.

"Her singing is phenomenal as well. It's very pure. It comes from the soul. She's not singing about bubble-gum type stuff. Her lyrics go deeper."

Here's a sample of her lyrical ability, from the song, "Til We Go": *"Well the gray is choking the/ Blue out of the sky/ But the love's beaming from this/ Little house of mine. /See the sun and its friends have/ Come inside to hide/ From the gunmetal gray/ Explosions in the sky."*

### INITIALLY HESITANT

Every couple of weeks, Chung will post a new video on YouTube, usually a cover of a well-known pop, folk or R&B song, or sometimes a live performance. Clara C. records her covers in her room with a hand-held Canon camera.

"I felt weird about it at first," she said. "I had to be pushed by force. When I started, I'd sing in my bedroom to my computer when everyone had left."

She eventually began feeling more comfortable, particularly when she'd perform with other up-and-coming musicians. Over the past year, she has collaborated with Jay Park, Dumbfounded, Sam Ock, Jason Yang and Gerald Ko, also known as Singindork. Her mash-up cover of "Nothin' on You" and "Airplanes" by B.O.B. has garnered more than 619,400 views.

Along with her YouTube colleagues, Chung represents a phenomenon that's changing the music industry at its core. As the established music industry model is crumbling, fresh young YouTube stars – many from Orange County – are rising, posting their videos online, independently recording and releasing their own albums, and arranging their own concert tours.

Mission Viejo's Grannis is a good example of this. Even though she won a national "Crash the Super Bowl" contest with a video viewed by 97 million, plus a record deal with Interscope Records, she walked away from the label to produce and distribute an album herself. "Stairwells" hit No. 25 on iTunes during its first week and debuted at No. 139 on the Billboard 200. The album got as high as No. 2 on the Billboard Heatseekers chart, and No. 5 on the magazine's Top Internet Albums chart.

Other Orange County Internet successes include David Choi of Fullerton, Joseph Vincent of Irvine and Jennifer Chung of Irvine, who's got more than 125,400 subscribers on YouTube and has received more than 31 million total views. She's working on her debut album, too.

"It's empowering, especially when you're witnessing history being made," Clara C. said.

Choi, 24, who has his own substantial following and is working on a second album, says Clara C. is the real deal.

"She's extremely talented. If you watch her videos, you'll see she can play pretty much anything. She has a great voice. She's definitely a great singer, a great writer. There's not very many Asian female singer/songwriters to begin with. So she's representing."

## FOLLOWING HER HEART

Over the next couple months, Chung has performances scheduled for Nov. 7 at Bovard Auditorium on the USC campus; Nov. 8 at Mandeville Auditorium on the U.C. San Diego campus; Nov. 10 at Royce Hall on the UCLA campus; and Dec. 10 at the Spring Field Center in Fullerton. Tickets for the 8 p.m. downtown Fullerton concert, a fundraiser benefitting Joya scholars that will also feature My Parasol and DJ Nate Haveman, are \$25 in advance, \$30 at the door.

Though her parents were keen on Chung graduating from UC Irvine (she experienced a couple of bumps along the way), they never applied pressure on her to pursue a more professional field. That's different from many other Asian American parents, who actively direct their kids toward medicine, law or business.

"I didn't hear med school or law school once in my life," she said. "I have the best parents I could ever ask for or dream of."

And while she collaborates with other Asian Americans and is associated with that group of talent, she doesn't really see herself as strictly an Asian or Asian American musician.

"Regardless of age, gender or ethnicity, art is art. It's universal. I don't see it as, 'I'm struggling because I'm Asian.' Hopefully, the content will sell itself."

So far, Clara C.'s future looks bright. She's been contacted by at least one major label, and the invitations to perform keep rolling in.

"It's literally my biggest dream come true," she said, smiling. "And it just keeps getting bigger."

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