

K-Pop Gets a Boost From “Gangnam Style”

KOREAN EXPORT

FOR THE PAST few weeks, one nattily dressed Korean gentleman and his wacky horse-riding dance have been completely inescapable. **PSY**, the 34-year-old sorta-rapper behind the smash viral hit “Gangnam Style,” has 200 million views on YouTube, hit No. 1 on the iTunes singles chart, and landed high-profile appearances on the VMAs, *Today*, *Ellen* (where he taught the dance to **Britney Spears**), and *Saturday Night Live*.

He has certainly arrived, and he didn't come alone. South Korean pop music—known to the world as K-pop—is executing a slow invasion, led by girl-power groups (**2NE1**, **Wonder Girls**) and glammy boy-based R&B (**BIGBANG**, **Beast**). There's even a first-ever Stateside K-pop fan convention, KCON, in Irvine, Calif., on Oct. 13. Plenty of international



acts have infiltrated the American pop charts in waves, like when a bevy of Latin American singers realigned radio at the turn of the century. But though they all indulged in their native tongues at points, artists like **Ricky Martin**, **Marc Anthony**, and **Shakira** scored their biggest successes singing in English. K-pop is different, partially because it may transcend the language barrier. “‘Gangnam Style’ is not in English, and it doesn't matter,” says MTV World general manager Nusrat Durrani. “When **Lady Gaga** goes to Japan or when **Kanye West** goes to China, do they learn Chinese or Japanese? Fans don't respond to language. They respond to the overall package.” That pattern seems to be holding so far. While some Korean artists have partnered with

Western acts to get a crossover rub—Wonder Girls currently have a single featuring **Akon**, and 2NE1 have signed to **will.i.am**'s label—most of the K-pop being spread around on social media is fully homegrown. PSY's “Gangnam Style” video is actually more of a cheeky send-up of glossy K-pop tropes, but the more straight-ahead pop sensations coming in his wake are all fully formed artists with well-polished performance skills and cutting-edge visual style.

Now that PSY has been fully embraced by the American media and scored chart success, expect the onslaught of rising K-pop acts to be fast and furious. “The thing you need to realize is that PSY never set out to break America,” explains Jeff Benjamin, who analyzes the K-pop Hot 100 for *Billboard*. If that's what he achieved without trying, imagine what a little effort will do. —*Kyle Anderson*



PSY took his act to *Saturday Night Live* on Sept. 15

TECH CHECK

Finally, the iPhone 5!

Five years after the first iPhone, Apple debuted an aptly named anniversary gift: the long-rumored iPhone 5. Thinner than the current 4S, but with an expanded four-inch screen, the new model (available Sept. 21) features a host of granular improvements—Longer battery life! Faster downloading!—and ditches Google Maps in favor of Apple's new Maps app with voice navigation. (A not-as-cool-sounding upgrade: the smaller dock connector that will render your current accessories obsolete.) The company also announced an October update to iTunes that will feature a big redesign and full iCloud integration with your devices. (It will also pull the plug on the music social network Ping.) Still, the iPhone news reigned supreme: Two million units were presold on the first day of online availability. —*Darren Franich*

