

# A More Korean Side to Sheehan

By Elizabeth A. Brennan 🕒 March 23, 2012



Claire Sheehan is waiting for a trip to Japan to come through.

(At right: what Sheehan calls her "YouTube persona")

“Everyone thinks I’m the shyest person on earth, until you get to know me and see my YouTube channel,” says junior History and Global Studies major Claire Sheehan. A slender, well-mannered college student, Sheehan's appearance hardly suggests “Diva of Korean Pop Music,” yet [ucanshine89’s YouTube channel](#) with its 3,000 subscribers and more than 476,000 total video views shows another side to Sheehan.

As she belts out and raps to the latest Korean pop songs in the videos, Sheehan’s personality and presence grow exponentially as she emotively interacts with the camera, occasionally lowering her large, dark eyes to an off-camera lyrics sheet. Sometimes her dark blonde hair is swept up in a high ponytail and she plays the violin in a tee shirt; in other videos she sings wearing makeup, earrings, and dress clothes. In either case, the energetic girl on the screen performs with pure attitude.

Meng Yang, a Chinese International student who was Sheehan's roommate during her freshman year, first introduced her to Korean pop, more commonly referred to as K-pop. Yang showed her videos of the fast-paced pop music to “show me what I SHOULDN’T like,” laughs Sheehan. Although the videos of six to nine young men in flashy outfits singing and dancing frantically did not appeal to her roommate, Sheehan was hooked. “I used to listen to it constantly. I drove my roommate nuts. Literally nuts.” Now, three years later, her obsession remains: “I practically only listen to Asian music now.” In K-pop, traditional Asian instruments, such as the zither, are employed in the songs, and the melodies involve sharps and flats “across the board.”

While exploring the genre, she stumbled onto YouTube users who created covers of songs by singing along with instrumental versions of the songs provided by a K-pop karaoke channel on the site. It was not until November of 2010, two years after her explorations began, that she decided to record her own versions of the song using her voice and her violin.

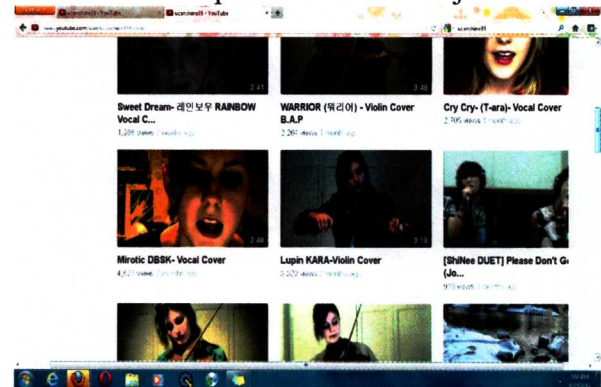
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For this project, Sheehan benefits from her musically-rich background. Her mother plays the piano, and her father, who works in the University's Alumni Office, is “a good singer,” she says. Her older sister Jennifer is a professional singer who performs in New York. Sheehan herself has no musical training besides playing the violin for the school orchestra since the sixth grade. She does not read sheet music for her violin covers; instead “plays by ear” after hearing the songs a few times. Her ear is also put to the test by the languages the songs are in. She has no formal language of Korean, and speaks only a few phrases in the language, but learns the songs by memorizing the phonetics. The first time she hears a song, it usually sounds “like jibberish” to her, but she

finds English translations of the words in order to sing with the proper inflections. After listening to a song a few times, she is usually ready to record.

Sheehan created a channel on YouTube, choosing the name ucanshine89 because “I think it's possible for anyone to show their talents to the world and be able to 'shine' so to speak. The 89 was just a random number to rhyme with shine.” The first video “that really took off” was a violin cover of the song “[Lucifer](#)” by the K-pop group Shinee that she made in 2011. The video now has more than 75,000 views. Sheehan attributes its initial success to a shout-out to Sheehan on a friend's Tumblr blog, which gained many views for the video and subscribers to her channel.



(Pictured right: A screenshot of Sheehan's channel)

More recently, Sheehan submitted a video audition for a contest sponsored by SM Entertainment, in which she covered “The Boys” by the K-pop group Girl’s Generation, and that video currently has . She enjoys the perks of her recognition in the K-pop cover genre: although she used to have to submit audio files of herself singing to audition for parts in musical collaborations with other K-pop cover artists, “now that I have an established channel, I don’t have to try out anymore. People come to me.”

For her videos, Sheehan creates her own arrangements of the songs, as she wonders “Why do people want to see you make a video with the exact same song?” The operation is surprisingly low-tech. “I’m just using my Mac and a video camera. And that’s all you need for YouTube.” The microphone on her computer is not very sensitive, though, “so when it’s a loud part, you have to lean back and when it’s quiet, you have to lean forward.” After recording the melody, she records herself singing the harmony parts. Then, she uses GarageBand to combine the tracks and exports the finished compilation to iTunes. After this, she adds the layered mp3 to the video with iMovie. Even after making hundreds of videos, nerves still surface when she records. “I still get nervous because it's a camera. I'm nervous because I don't want to have to do it again.”

Making the decision to put her videos on a public site was a bit of a struggle. “It’s scary putting yourself out there,” she says. “My mom was more nervous about it. “How do you feel about all these

strangers seeing you on there?” Overall, however, Sheehan says her parents were supportive of her new hobby, though she fears she drives them “nuts” when she records and re-records her music from her bedroom at home.

K-pop holds a special appeal to Sheehan over American pop music because the genre has “intricate melodies instead of the same beat over and over.” Additionally, K-pop songs seem more complex than Western pop songs. “They’re not just singing about partying and going to a club. I find a lot of their songs to have really deep meanings. If you look at the translations, it’s almost like reading a poem.”

Although this semester, she is working at “making schoolwork my main priority,” Sheehan tends to produce a new video every two or three weeks. Some take longer than others. “Violin covers don’t take as long” compared to vocal covers, she says.

More Sheehan:

["Warrior"](#) by B.A.P. - Violin Cover

["Mirotic"](#) - Vocal Cover