

K-Pop: A trend that inspires

K-Pop has proven to be the greatest inspiration for NZ students to take up Korean as a foreign language. We have spoken about it with Alena Aubrey, a 21-year old New Zealand Maori, who currently studies for her second diploma in Digital Media at Animation College in Auckland. Alena is Head of EXO-NZ Facebook page and coordinator of the New Zealand fanclub for EXO. She is also part of the administrative team for the international EXO Fanpage and the former Head of Auckland K-Pop Events.

"I first encountered K-Pop back in High School. One of my friends was obsessed with it, even before Gangnam Style was released. But it wasn't until after I graduated from High School that my interest was caught by a single group, and it spiralled from there. At the time, I had no knowledge of South Korea or the Korean language other than that the characters looked different to Japanese and Chinese. Now I know a great deal more than my teenaged self. I learnt about Korean history and culture and started to learn the language. However, while I can read the alphabet, there is still room to improve my ability to speak and interpret Korean.

To start learning Korean is probably the one typical thing for a K-Pop fan to do. It is a fascinating language and fans love to use the same language as their idols. Otherwise in NZ, K-Pop fans are generally a lot more chilled than the typical western K-Pop fan. I think K-Pop is so interesting for us as it is very different from our laid back Kiwi attitude. K-Pop is very much over the top and very fast paced. Should you end up with no internet for a few hours, you have already missed 3 dating scandals, 2 music comebacks and a music video release. In the K-Pop industry everybody wears make-up, including men. Nobody is ever seen bare-faced. Most K-Pop groups have catchy dance routines. That is something that really stood out to me when I first saw it. I love it but I can also laugh about it at and with them. The biggest difference to mainstream Pop is obviously the language. It makes the lyrics more mysterious and it sounds cool. You feel special for knowing the lyrics when you are not a native speaker. It also makes people want to know more about the song and the people performing it.

Another big difference is organisation. In K-Pop, companies rule. Companies pick up young, promising talent and look from auditions and street scouting and make them trainees at their company. From there, they generally train them in rigorous schedules and many don't succeed. However, the ones that do succeed get to debut as Idols in either groups, or as solo acts. Nearly all seasoned K-Pop fans will be able to tell you the names of the biggest companies in the K-Pop world today. Each company has a certain style. A lot of fans will have a preference to one of these styles and stay very loyal to that company. For instance, YG Entertainment have more of a free hip-hop vibe to most of their groups signed to them such as Big Bang, Black Pink and Ikon, whereas SM Entertainment has more of a mainstream upbeat pop vibe to their idols, such as Girls' Generation, EXO and SHINee.

You will find K-Pop fans at any event related to Korea - Korean food festivals, drama showings, Korean movies and so on. We mostly share our interest through Facebook and sometimes through Twitter and Instagram. I am very grateful to the Korean Education Centre and the Republic of Korea Consulate in Auckland which have been a huge support. They have offered K-Pop related learning, K-movie celebrations and of course, Korean learning to me personally. Becoming a K-Pop fan has had a really positive effect on me. I had hit a bit of a slump when I was about 18 years old, but I found K-pop and that connected me to people who shared my passion and it got me out of my shell. Since then I have done things that I never thought in a million years I would do, like organising events (and I even had fun doing it). K-Pop has become a huge part of my life during the last couple of years."

Here are the links to Alena's two favourites of all time:

EXO – Heaven <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBnI0iIoq28>

EXO – El Dorado <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUqQTBgGRug>

K-Pop Planet is a new social and cultural club for students who share a common interest in Korean Pop culture. Find them on <https://www.facebook.com/kpopplanetnz/>