

On tabletops in most Asian restaurants, stores, and homes, is the bottle with the green top. The plant is in Southern California and the man behind it, David Tran, gave me a personal tour.

words + pictures | Eric Nakamura

THE FAMOUS HOT SAUCE FACTORY TOUR

You've seen the bottle and you've probably burned your ass with the contents. I've heard people refer to the clear chili bottle with the rooster logo and green top as "Red Cock Hot Sauce," but most of us know it as **Tương Ôt Sriracha** (Sriracha is the name of a coastal Thailand town). People across the country probably have loads of names for this bottle of crimson fury, and I'm sure it's aided in the creation of some of the best mixtures of Thai noodles, dipping sauces, and spicy tuna rolls—along with multiple cases of stomach pangs of red chili rejection.

Tương Ôt Sriracha may be (next to soy sauce) the most common form of flavoring. It's absolutely everywhere. When something is lacking that massive twang, a squirt of the red rooster brightens the day in a hurry. But where does it come from? **I had always assumed the sauce was an import item straight off a Bangkok freighter until I read the bottle (printed in five languages!) which said it was made in Rosemead (just out of LA).** So after dialing up the phone number on the bottle and getting a hold of a woman named Donna, I got hooked in to meet the chief assassin of chili, the sultan of spice, the ringleader of the ring of fire—David Tran.

I expected a man wearing a suit and smoking a cigar (looking like Chow Yun-fat), but instead Tran was a humble man wearing a golf shirt (looking more like John Woo). The man was soft-spoken as we sat in a small waiting room filled with sample bottles of sauce, wall-mounted newspaper articles, and a wooden model rooster.

Perhaps the most popular part of the sauce isn't the flavor, it's the packaging. The rooster, proud of its prowess, practically crows. "Why a rooster?" Tran answers simply that he was born in the Year of the Rooster. A Vietnamese refugee, Tran named the sauce **Tương Ôt**, after the boat that took him



to Hong Kong in 1978. The trademark green top represents the freshness of the chili used. Says Tran, **"We use the best red chili. The vegetable is red and the stem is green. If the stem is purple or black it means the chili is not fresh. The cap is like the stem."**

"In Vietnam, I planted chili. I was a farmer," remarks Tran. Although he left everything behind him in Vietnam, he didn't forget about his sauce concoction. In America, he started his business in 1980, making sauce for the Vietnamese community. "We liked to eat spicy food. We could get sauce, but then we thought we could make it better. Before I started, I did not research the market. I just tried to make \$1,000 a month—enough for my family." Now Tran can't fill the demand and although he pawns off 7 million bottles and makes \$10 million a year, he needs to make more.

During the chili season, September through October, the plant receives shipments of tons of chili from an 18-wheeler. The chili is ground right away and placed into vats for months of aging and further processing. The plant can grind down 100–200 tons of

chili in one day, and Tran upgrades his machinery annually.

When shopping at stores for just about any sauce, you'll notice that most bottles are almost always made of glass with pretty labels stuck on them. Instead of paying more for freight and a shiny, colorful, affixed label, Tran gets plastic bottles screened in one color—white. Since the bottles are unbreakable and unuseable as weapons, there's at least one jail buying his sauces for inmates. The economy of the bottle is a reflection of the streamlined company which only employs a total of 17 or 18 people, many of whom are relatives.

For some reason, Sriracha sauce has attained a powerful cult status. The word is spreading slowly, and more and more non-Asians are beginning to know about it. Attributing his success partially to Americans' changing tastes and the growing popularity of Asian restaurants since the '70s, Tran is sure that his sauce is the best in terms of flavor, heat, color, texture, and most of all, price. For example, if you price shop Tabasco versus his Sriracha sauce, they are roughly the same price—if you buy the tiny Tabasco bottle and his 17-oz. mid-sized bottle. Each one is about \$1.50. But if you want the ultimate deal, then show up at his shop and buy a case of twelve 30-oz. bottles for a mere \$18. He made me lift a case to prove his point about the value. Yes, the box was heavy.

After our quick talk in the meeting room, I got the tour of a lifetime. You wouldn't think much of a pepper plant, but after stepping into the rooster-logo'd golf cart, we cruised his spicy fragrance-filled plant. It looked more like a laboratory—perfectly clean with glass windows for observation. From the mixing area (where a worker or two mixes the raw chili with vinegar) to the next room (where it gets bottled), there is not one single drop of sauce



anywhere. This makes Tran proud. He relays a story about the Health Department, who actually enjoy coming to his factory since they have to do little or no paperwork. They are able to relax, and occasionally they bring a new inspector to show how clean a plant can be.

In the bottling machine's area, not only was the floor spotless, the machines were shiny and dispensing the exact amount of sauce per bottle. Tran mentions that he went to another sauce plant that uses the exact same equipment and 10 people, including one to hand-wipe each bottle due to the sauce spillage. At Tran's plant, only two operate the same machine. Also Tran mentions a horrifying article: "I once saw a chili plant in a magazine, and oh my god! Terrible! In Louisiana."

The sauce machines are all prefabricated, but no machine is exactly tailor-made for the creation of the sauce. When there is a discrepancy about efficiency, Tran takes to his tools and makes modifications in his own on-site machine shop. There, he fabricates parts, welds them, and customizes his equipment unless he subs the job out.

I asked about his work schedule and how he manages to maintain such a clean and highly productive factory. Tran claims that he only works 8-hour days, 40 hours a week, with his daily activities being machine work and efficiency figuring. But when there is an emergency, he's there 24 hours doing the fixing.

Even though the chili sauce gets made in rapid speed, there's simply not enough produced to fill the demand. Year after year, the orders grow and the company expands. Just recently, Tran purchased the old Wham-O building two doors down. It is a huge ten acre complex that has a 170,000 square foot warehouse and office. It could house a number of jets, but instead it's used for storing sauce. We cruised it in the golf cart with Tran using his remote controls to open every roll-up door and turn on almost every light. The ride was long and the office space will most likely never be used since he'll never hire the 1,600 people who once worked for Wham-O. Instead it's all going to be for storage for when the sauces someday make the American supermarkets.

After 17 years of operation, not one cent has been spent on advertising, professional research, or promotion. Although there are a few other flavors of Tran's sauces that haven't caught on nearly as well as his Sriracha sauce, he claims that they are all good and will just need some more time to catch on. He claims to have his sauces with every meal. The word on the Red Cock Hot Sauce is still spreading like wildfire through word-of-mouth. Tran envisions his future as a slow growth, keeping his prices as low as possible, penetrating new markets little by little, and still with no plan to waste a cent. That's one of his secrets of success—to not let any competitor even get close. 🐓

TUONG OT SRIRACHA (USA)



Angelyn Wong: Good flavor. The Pace Picante sauce of Asian sauces, this stuff's definitely not made in New York City. I'd put this on anything that needs a kick. Do they sell this in jugs at the Price Club?

Jayson Sae-Saue: This is the market standard plain-but-good Asian ketchup.

FLAVOR: 4.5
HOT: 1

SAMBAL-BADJAK (USA)



Chantal Acosta: The garlic smell would send Dracula reeling, but the fresh, ripe onions give this sauce a delightful flavoring. I wouldn't mind eating this stuff just off a spoon. Yummy!

Jayson: There's a bit of an aftertaste, but I think it's the Hsin Tung Yang seeds lingering on my molars. Put this on your toast, in your salad, or just toss it down straight.

FLAVOR: 5
HOT: 2

TUONG OT VIETNAM (USA)



Chantal: Pretty standard hot sauce. I think it would taste good on rice.

Martin Wong: Hot, garlicky, and grainy, the label says you can add this to American, Italian, and Chinese food. This potent sauce can boost any flavor with a blast of pure sink.

FLAVOR: 3.5
HOT: 2.5

SAMBAL OELEK (USA)



Jayson: Taco Bell hot sauce with seeds! Make a run for the Great Wall...

Angelyn: This one's making me sweat. Instead of going to the sauna, take a swig of this. The description says it "heats up" any dish. Microwave companies, watch out!

FLAVOR: 3.5
HOT: 2.5

from is often as important as its taste. Everyone wants lineage and provenance and you've heard the term "farm-to-table." This is "factory-to-shelf" and somewhere I have an autographed Huy Fong Foods box by this legend who's been imitated but definitely not duplicated. During the pandemic, a world-wide shortage of his sauce made headlines.



CHILI SAUCE (TAIWAN)

Jayson: My head hurts. I should have taken the steam that singed my nose hairs when I opened the bottle as a warning. Someone must be holding a gun to the man giving the thumbs up on the label. The Chinese characters probably say “Do Not Eat.”

Martin: The hot and sticky sensation of this concoction gagging down my throat will no doubt be repeated in my sphincter tomorrow morning. This comes from the Har Har Pickle Food Factory in Taiwan, and the joke’s on me. This sauce sucks.

FLAVOR: -2.5
HOT: 2



CHILI SAUCE CAP JEMPOL (INDONESIA)

Chantal: This reminds me of pineapples! I really like its sweetness, which adds a new, unexpected, and flavorful dimension to your food.

Jayson: I was somewhat skeptical about this one after seeing the thumbs up on the case since my previous experience with a thumb logo was so bad. Actually, it’s just sweet and bland. If these labels thumb-wrestled, the Har Har brand chili sauce would kick this Indonesian sauce’s ass.

FLAVOR: 5
HOT: 1.5

RADISH PEPPER PASTE (JAPAN)



Angelyn: You know how the smell of puke causes gagging reflexes? This stuff did that to me. The mystery is, how could something smell so putrid and taste so bland? This is really just stinky baby food.

Martin: Smells like vomit but tastes like puréed carrots. There’s no flavor, so I don’t know what the point is.

FLAVOR: 1
HOT: 0

KIMLAN HOT BEAN SAUCE (TAIWAN)



Angelyn: Mix up some soy sauce and chili oil and you get this hot, but somehow sweet and salty goop. I made the mistake of licking my lips and now they won’t stop burning!

Martin: This one’s almost sweet in a plum-sauce fashion, but mostly it’s just creamed fire. The beans add a smoothness that the others lack. You can dip fried wonton skins in here to make Chinese nachos.

FLAVOR: 4
HOT: 3.5

SWEET CHILI SAUCE (SINGAPORE)



Jayson: How hot can it be when the major ingredient is sugar? Yeo might have been influenced by Mexican tamarind action.

Angelyn: This tastes like a Mexican tamarind lollipop and could be an ice cream topping compared to the rest of these sauces. Little kids would probably sneak into the kitchen cupboard for this sweet treat.

FLAVOR: 4
HOT: 0

SAMBAL EXTRA PEDAS (INDONESIA)



Chantal: Hey, wait a minute. I just tried this. Same ingredients as Cap Jempol in a slightly different order. Tastes just as scrumptididliumptious!

Jayson: Either my taste buds are numb and dead or this tastes like nothing. Extra hot, my ass.

FLAVOR: 5
HOT: 1.5

MOMIJI OROSHI (JAPAN)



Chantal: It reminds me of spicy tomato soup. I wouldn’t bother putting it on my food since it would probably just give a reddish coloring but not much flavor.

Angelyn: This one’s a waste of sauce. No flavor. No heat. A rip-off.

FLAVOR: 1
HOT: 1

LINGHAM’S HOT SAUCE (MALAYSIA)



Chantal: I was thrilled to read that sugar is the main ingredient of this sauce. Then when I tried it, I thought they overdid the sugar. My stomach is cramping up a little from this marmalade-like sauce.

Angelyn: This is the Grey Poupon of hot sauces with the fanciest packaging. It tastes like relish with a little heat mixed in.

FLAVOR: 2.5
HOT: 0.5





CHILI PASTE WITH HOLY BASIL LEAVES (THAILAND)



FLAVOR: 3
HOT: 2.5

Chantal: Not really hot, just nasty, especially the texture. It's way too oily. Just smelling it makes me want to puke. I wonder how long it's going to take me to digest those chunks of basil leaves.

Martin: This looks like the Swamp Thing's snot, with lots of green leaves, seeds, and oil. At first it just tastes salty and oily (like you're licking a potato chip bag), but when you bite a seed, out comes some funky heat.

HSIN TUNG YANG CHILI SAUCE (TAIWAN)



FLAVOR: 3
HOT: 2.5

Jayson: Looks like GWAR regurgitated this back into the bottle, and tastes like it, too. The seeds stuck in my teeth like corn.

Martin: You can't get away from the seeds in this thick, salsa-textured jar of glop. With nothing but chili, salt, and sesame oil, this is probably the cleanest-burning flavor fuel of the batch.

TIA CHIEU SATE (USA)



FLAVOR: 4
HOT: 2.5

Chantal: Recreate the Stinking Rose experience in your own home with just a little Tia Chieu Sate on your noodles or meat. If you have a weak spot for sauteed garlic sauce, this sauce will sa-tis-fy you.

Martin: Super-garlicky and smooth, this one will be affecting my scent for years. Even if you don't believe in vampires, it's still worth eating, because the flavor is excellent.

SAMBAL KEMIRI CANDLE-NUT (USA)



FLAVOR: 0.5
HOT: 5

Angelyn: Lots of crunch like super-chunky peanut butter, but half the taste. This one goes from mild to fire-engine hot in 10 seconds. The flavor sucks.

Martin: "Candle nut" sounds very testicular, so this must have some sort of potency-boosting or aphrodisiac qualities. Why else would anyone consume this shitty-tasting sauce? Earthquakes, riots, and fires—add this stuff to the list of LA disasters.





STEVEN DAE

Best A Move
Young MC

Box ♪ 2 ♪ Mr. Pibb



COLUMBENE JENNER

In the Year 2525
Zager & Evans

Box ♪ 1-2 ♪ Pocky and Wigs



LILLIAN LAI

Top of the World
The Carpenters

Box ♪ 3-4 ♪
Hot Krispy Kreme Donuts



ANGELYN WONG

We Belong
Pat Benatar

Box ♪ 1-2 ♪ Hi-Chews



AUDREY EDMALINA

That Thing
Lauryrn Hill

Home ♪ 2 ♪ Lumpia



BILL POON

Killing Me Softly
Roberta Flack

Box ♪ Random ♪
Duck with Rice



LEONARD NG

Three Times A Lady
The Commodores

Home ♪ 1 ♪ Prayer



TRANG LAI

Aspelling Goes
Cole Porter

Box ♪ 2 ♪ Dried Fruit



AUDREY "NAIA" LEE

Close To You
The Carpenters

Box ♪ 1 ♪ Granola



YVONNE NG

You're So Vain
Carly Simon

Box ♪ 1-2 ♪ Standing Up



WEI HUNG*

I Don't Want to Wait
P. Cole

Bar ♪ 3-4 ♪ Moutal & A fat butler



CINDY WONG

Bridge Over Troubled Water
Simon & Garfunkel

Home ♪ A lot ♪ Coca-Cola



BILLY SHIN

Match the Knif
Frank Sinatra

Box ♪ 2 ♪ Beer



VIV CHIA

Supergirl
Faye Wong

Box ♪ 5 ♪
Oolong Tea & Marlboro Lts.



TED LAI

My Way
Frank Sinatra

Box ♪ 2 ♪ Bottled water



TONY LEE

Summer Wind
Frank Sinatra

Bar ♪ 2 ♪ Sake and Beer



MASAKI MIYAGAWA

Over Hous
Madness

Box ♪ 1 ♪ Gin and Juice



MICHELLE LEONG

Hotel California
The Eagles

Box ♪ 1 ♪ Nestlé Crunch



MIKE LOCKE

Sweet Child O' Mine
Guns n' Roses

Home ♪ 17,3 ♪ Sour Patch Kids



KELLY O' SULLIVAN

Thank God I'm a Country Boy
John Denver

Box ♪ 1-5 ♪ Velvet Finger Rolls



DAVID MOSS

My Way
Frank Sinatra

Box ♪ 1 ♪ Roscoe's Chicken & Waffles



SILAS LAW

Girl From Ipanema
A. Gilberto

Bar ♪ 2 ♪ Midori Sour



JOSEPH BARIBEAU

Ring of Fire
Johnny Cash

Bar ♪ 1-2 ♪ Jägermeister



WING HO

My Heart Will Go On
Celine Dion

Box ♪ 1-2 ♪ Oolong Tea

KAH = RAH =



TIFFANY NG

I Swear
Boys II Men

Home **n** 2 **n** Lychee Jelly Cup



MICHELLE CABALU

Secret Lovers
Ashanti Starr

Box **n** 1 **n** Lemon Soju & Banana Chips



CATHY YOO

Shake Your Love
Debbie Gibson

Box **n** 3 **n** Pokka Iced Tea



RICHARD CHIA

Spice Up Your Life
Spice Girls

Box **n** 1 **n** Spice



SOO YOUNG PARK

My Sharona
The Knack

Box **n** 1 **n** Beer



LUONG QUANG

I'll Be There
Jackson 5

Box **n** 1 **n** None



GREG WONG

Flash
George Michael

Box **n** 1-3 **n** Cracked Seed



MONTI LAWRENCE

Winnabe
Spice Girls

Bar **n** 2 **n** Beer



JEE HYUN LEE

My Favorite Things
Julie Andrews

Box **n** 7 As Much as Possible **n** Camel Lts.



CHARLAT ACOSTA

Lucky Star
Madonna

Box **n** 4 **n** Tambourine



JANE HSEU

Vacation
The Go-Go's

Box **n** 1 **n** Hi-Chews



HEIDI EYSENBACH

Stop Dragging My Heart Around
Tom Petty & Stevie Nicks

Box **n** 4 **n** Massive head trauma



KAREN SEARGEANT

Black Magic Woman
Santana

Box **n** 1 **n** Sake



KENT LIM

True Love
Family Fujii

Box **n** 1-2 **n** Two Asahis



PETE LEE

I'll Be Loving You Forever
NEOTYS

Box **n** 1-2 **n** Altoids



JERRY HSIEH

Strangers in the Night
Frank Sinatra

Box **n** 1 **n**
Lemon Tea with Honey



PERRY RIVERA

New Rose
The Damned

Bar **n** Not Often **n** Alcohol



SUSAN HSIEH

My Girl
The Temptations

Box **n** 3-4 **n** None



KENNETH WONG

What A Wonderful World
Louis Armstrong

Box **n** 1 **n** Moi



TWIGGIE TORRES

No More Tears (Enough is Enough)
Barbara Streisand (feat. Donna Summers)

Bar **n** 2 **n** Mickey's Malt Liquor



EDDIE RAYDEN

Stop Dragging My Heart Around
Tom Petty & Stevie Nicks

Bar **n** 2 **n** Margarita



PETER ZASLOV

Stay (Faraway, So Close!)
U2

Box **n** 1 **n** Lemon Soju



DAG YNGVESSON

Rapper's Delight
S. H. Gong

Bar **n** 1-2 **n** Red Wine



CHUN LEE

Sweetie
Teresa Teng

Home **n** Once in a while **n**
Jasmine Tea

OH-KAY



CLAUDINE HO

Take On Me
A-ha

Bar **n** 6 **n** Maker's

Somehow, it became this thing—a disease afflicting the suburban homes of Asian families across America, pervading block upon block like spores flying through the air. My parents got it on a trip to Taiwan back in the late '80s, when I was still in high school. Afterward, when it got bad, my sisters and I would stay locked in our rooms, refusing to go downstairs, giving each other meaningful glances when we passed on our way to the bathroom. I remember the first time my friends found out. I was being dropped off after a night out, and all I had to do was open the car door. It immediately permeated the vehicle's interior like a mysterious fog, while bouncing between the street lamps and mailboxes with an eerie echo-effect: "Tie a yellow ribbon 'round the old oak treeeeeeee." **"What the hell is that?" my friends asked. "It's my parents," I answered shamefully. "They're singing karaoke."**

In 1971, Daisuke Inoue, a 30-something Japanese musician, invented the first karaoke machine. He played the electone, an electric organ, while club patrons sang along. One night, he was invited to play at a regular customer's party, but instead of going, he sent a recorded eight-track accompaniment. After that, he started Crescent, a company that specialized in renting out the tapes and echo-speakers. He did not patent his invention. Five years later, a car-audio company called Clarion first coined the machines as "karaoke" (from the music industry term meaning "empty orchestra"), and began commercially distributing their "Karaoke-8" machine. Clarion's early karaoke sales increased 60-fold after only a few months.

It's not just my parents and their friends who do it anymore. Since other Japanese electronic companies co-opted the idea, and recently deceased country singer Boxcar Willie (supposedly) brought the machines to the US in 1984, karaoke fever has become a multi-billion dollar industry, spreading through China, Taiwan, Korea, Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America. Today, "karaoke" is an official word in English dictionaries. In Japan, it's transcended the banal setting of bars or homes to include hospitals, bowling alleys, taxis, and buses. It's been the focus of panels held during academic conferences on popular music. It's even the root of violent crime. (In November 1993, a Toronto man was shot to death after insulting another singer at a Vietnamese karaoke bar.) Meanwhile, **the 59-year-old Inoue was last heard to be running a company that makes cockroach traps.**

After I left home and moved to Berkeley, I had some friends who introduced me to Korean karaoke, or noraebang. We'd go to this place at the border of Oakland and Berkeley on Telegraph Ave.

Noraebang, which is based on the railroad-car-converted karaoke rooms, or "K-boxes," first used roughly 15 years ago in the rice fields outside of the Okayama Prefecture, is less frightening than cheesy open-mic karaoke nights at bars or restaurants. Around 1985 in Japan, K-boxes were only big enough to fit a few people at most and were conducive to sketchy activity. Later, the boxes were reconstructed to fit larger groups, as to allow more families and fewer miscreants. At noraebangs and K-boxes today, you basically rent a private, mostly soundproof room which comes equipped with a TV screen, a couple of microphones, and a menu of thousands of song titles to satiate any karaoke fanatic's appetite. Usually at the end of your song, the machine's computer will "score" your singing ability on a scale of 1 to 100 by digitally comparing your voice to the guide voice tracked onto the disc. But according to a technical support guy at Pioneer, if you're really talented, say like Barbra Streisand, you might score poorly because you actually sing better than the person on the disc.

Still, karaoke isn't a regular event for me, childhood trauma and all. In fact, it was, is, and always will be an unnerving experience. As I'm sure most karaoke-shy people feel, it brings out an inferiority complex in me quicker than an over-demanding, first-generation Chinese mother.



Unfortunately, I can't seem to avoid it. Every time I visit LA, my friends and I inevitably end up stopping off at this club on Sixth St. in Koreatown. We get a table, down glasses of not-so-cheap domestic beer and Korean soju until we're drunk as ice tea on a hot summer's day, fearless as gods. Then it's off to one of the nearby noraebangs for surprisingly impressive-yet-amateurish renditions of '80s tracks by artists like Prince, Chris Isaak, and U2. I enjoy listening; my friend Wes does a killer "Purple Rain." But then there's the inevitable, "Come on, Claudine, pick a song." I'd like to politely tell them to fuck off, but I don't. As a basic rule of karaoke etiquette, it's worse to make a big deal over singing than squeaking out an off-key version of Bette Midler's "The Rose." (That's supposedly one of the easiest songs to sing.)

My parents have since graduated from the lyric-sheet added, old-fashioned karaoke tapes to the low-grade video karaoke system: unwieldy VHS copies of songs where the words are highlighted on cue against a background of, most times, a completely unrelated video storyline. However, my mother's hot to get the latest top-of-the-line Pioneer DVD Karaoke system. More dazzling than last season's video compact discs, it's got digital echo, multi-language functions, DTS, a voice scoring system, and is fully CD-compatible: a doozy of a player. However, even with insider knowledge of Asian markets that sell karaoke machines at prices cheaper than your average American karaoke specialty store, the DVD is pretty expensive at a little over a grand. Luckily, I am pretty much no longer affected by any of this. After moving to New York, the only times I encounter karaoke is when I fly back to California to visit my parents and friends. Then I started going to Junno's.

Three a.m. on a Saturday night, I'm sitting alone at Junno's sky blue bar on Downing St. in the West Village, with my Maker's on the rocks like a sad alcoholic. The haphazardly planned karaoke session is on tonight, and Clem, the Elvis-Costello-glasses-wearing bartender, is at the mic singing Tom Petty's "Here Comes My Girl." A guy I know, Michael, comes up to chat with me and before I know it, I realize I've found one of the many hard-core karaoke lovers who hangs here. (Later, I even meet a guy who acted in a karaoke video in the late '80s!) Soon after, Michael steps up to the impromptu karaoke setup with his hands shoved in his pant pockets. As the music comes on, he clears his throat, lifts his hand, and pulls the mic closer to him. He hams it up for a sultry rendition of Glen Campbell's "Rhinestone Cowboy." Women swoon. "He wasn't this good in 1991-92," his friend Bruce observes.

A little past 4 a.m., the chairs are stacked up on the tables and I am happily buzzed; liquor and karaoke are relatively synonymous. Junno and his friends (his brother Jae, co-owner Jean, waitress Devon, and Michael) are leaving for the night when they decide to hit Village Karaoke, a K-box-style singing place on Bowery. "They have a thousand more songs than we do," he explains. I agree to go along because I have nothing better to do than wait for the next subway train to come.

As we drive across town, I am already adamant about not singing. But it begins again before we even get there. "You going to sing?" Junno asks. "No, I'm strictly observing tonight," I reply. Yet somehow, in between Jae's 86-scoring "With or Without You" and Jean's decidedly professional "Summertime," I acquiesce to Junno's threats of not letting me leave the room without a performance.

I punch in a song inspired by friends from the LA noraebang set, and mentally prepare myself for the opening line, my palms sweating, my midsection tingling. **"If I'm going to fuck this up, I'm going to fuck this shit up," I tell them as I suck it up and climb onto the vinyl-cushioned couch.** The beat starts rocking and I plunge into A-ha's "Take On Me." There are some points when I think I'm hitting the notes right, but I lend that to the late hour and the amount of alcohol still running around my innards.

When we leave and emerge into the outside world, I feel as if I've been transported to a new realm. It's light outside, and I feel vaguely high. Oh, don't get me wrong: there's no epiphany here, no moments of ecstasy as some karaoke partakers seem to feel. I still hate it and feel like an ass; it's just been a long time since I've pulled an all-nighter. 🍷



SUMIE OSAWA
Amazing Grace
Elvis
Home 03 0 Ocha

ONCE UPON A TIME ON SAWTELLE BOULEVARD

CLAUDINE KO

30

ERIC NAKAMURA

JIA TOLENTINO

MARTIN WONG

ERIC NAKAMURA

ERIC NAKAMURA

MARTIN WONG

MARTIN WONG

ERIC NAKAMURA

ERIC NAKAMURA

MARTIN WONG

MARTIN WONG

MARTIN WONG

MARTIN WONG

CLAUDINE KO

CLAUDINE KO

MANAMI KANO

CLAUDINE KO

MARTIN WONG

LYNN PADILLA

ERIC NAKAMURA

MARGARET CHO

CLAUDINE KO

CLAUDINE KO

MARGARET CHO

MARTIN WONG

ERIC NAKAMURA

MARTIN WONG + ERIC NAKAMURA

CLAUDINE KO

BETH ACCOMANDO

IDENTITY

Return to Manzanar

interview with WAYNE LO • *Skid Lo*

YELLOW POWER

interview with YURI KOCHIYAMA • *Angel of Harlem*

interview with LEE LEW LEE • *Yellow Panther*

interview with THE GANG OF FOUR • *Berkeley and Beyond*

interview with MO NISHIDA • *Hard-core Asian American*

interview with NOBUKO MIYAMOTO • *Grain of Sand*

interview with ART ISHII, GUY KUROSE • *Panther Brotherhood*

interview with GEORGE WOO • *SFSU Strike*

interview with ALEX HING • *Red Star in America*

CHINATOWN

LOS ANGELES • *Rediscovering Chinatown*

SAN FRANCISCO • *The OG of American Chinatowns*

NEW YORK CITY • *The Ghetto with a Capital G, Motherfucker*

The Meaning of Squat

Smell My Armpits

I Was A Cat

Beauty and the Beast

Yellow Fever

White Guys That Like Asian Girls

My Search for Brandon Lee

Kah-Rah-Oh-Kay

CINEMA

interview with JOHN WOO • *Number One With a Bullet*

interview • *Tony Leung Chiu-wai*

interview with MAGGIE CHEUNG • *Actress*

interview • *Mr. Wong Kar Wai*

interview with CHOW YUN-FAT • *Eat My Bullet*

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