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Bathroom singers Rin on the Rox are hot Web act

Kristin Luna, Special to The Chronicle

Friday, March 20, 2009



Lance Iversen / The Chronicle

Erin Perey (left) and Roxanne Ilano posted videos to YouTube of themselves singing in Ilano's parents' bathroom, and they are now Internet sensations.

Images



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Roxanne Ilano and Erin Perey, like millions of other aspiring singers, made a video of themselves performing and posted it on the Internet. Unlike all the others, their clip was aired on a popular daytime television talk show, catapulting the Bay Area college students into "American Idol"-like celebrities on fan blogs and social networking sites.

Ilano, 21, and Perey, 20, have been best friends since attending choir class at Deer Valley High in Antioch. They still live there, waiting tables at a local Chinese restaurant by day and perfecting their vocal prowess at night. They like to shop, as evidenced by their carefully accessorized outfits, and both get giggly and demure when speaking of their boyfriends.

On a whim last summer, the women sat in front of a Webcam and sang covers of their favorite Top 40 songs while in Ilano's parents' downstairs bathroom. ("It has the best acoustics of anywhere in the house," Ilano says.) Since then, the videos, posted under the name Rin on the Rox, have received more than 15 million hits on YouTube, garnering thousands of adoring comments from fans.

"We usually try to wait a few days between posting videos, but when we do, people are on it," Ilano explains. "When we uploaded 'Us Against the World' by Christina Milian, we had 200,000 views within two days. It's like they're sitting there waiting for our next move."

In January, talk show host Ellen DeGeneres spoke in her opening monologue about discovering the videos, and right there on the air invited Rin on the Rox to come on her show. The twosome, who are not regular viewers, found out about the invitation from fans who sent messages via MySpace and YouTube.

"Ellen played a clip of our 'If I Were a Boy' cover and said, 'If you're watching right now, we'd love to have you on the show. Please contact us!' So we did. Four days later, they flew us to L.A., and we made our TV debut."

DeGeneres interviewed the women on-air, and they performed Ne-Yo's "Miss Independent" while sitting - where else? - in a bathroom backstage. DeGeneres even started a recurring segment, "Ellen's Bathroom Concert Series," where she and a guest of the show sing together in the studio's lavatory. Celebrities who have participated include Carol Burnett, Pink and the band Fall Out Boy.

As if that weren't enough, DeGeneres then offered Perey and Ilano tickets to the Grammy Awards, where they walked the red carpet alongside music powerhouses like Taylor Swift and LL Cool J, and again served as correspondents for the "Ellen" show at Elton John's prestigious post-Oscar bash.

Then YouTube deactivated their account.

Ilano and Perey said they were not officially notified of the removal, though they admit any communication could have been lost in the 246,000 messages they have received in the past month. YouTube did not respond to requests for comment. But the women, eternally bubbly,

have since opened another account. True California girls, they're riding the waves as they come. After all, the Rin on the Rox motto is "Like it, love it, hate it, whatever! Just enjoy it."

They've just recorded their first single, which will be released this month (on Amazon and iTunes, written and produced by friends), and will make their local performance debut next month at San Francisco State University. The fast-paced developments have prompted Ilano, previously a junior at Cal State East Bay, and Perey, in her second year at Diablo Valley College, to put school on hold - but they emphasize they will return at some point.

It's apparent that Ilano and Perey share many similarities, namely their Filipino heritage, a positive outlook on life and a talent for vocals and harmony. The duo's name - which, keeping in character, they thought up together - is more fitting than they likely intended. Not only does "Rin" (Perey) harmonize on top of "Rox's" (Ilano) melody, but the two even speak in polyphony - when they're not finishing each other's sentences, that is.

"We wanted a name that represented harmony sounding as one, together, being sisters, best friends," Ilano remarks. "We were thinking, 'Hmm, one voice, one harmony, music, soul ...' and then it just came together and seemed to make sense."

Perhaps the most interesting part of their unorthodox rise to the top is that neither woman has any formal training, aside from school choir classes.

"It was more in the family, in the Filipino karaoke culture," Ilano says. "We'd have get-togethers, and everyone would tell me to get up there and sing, so I would. We grew up with it that way. We've been singing ever since we were little, but never furthered it until now."

Perey's parents - an accountant and Italian restaurant manager - and Ilano's, one of whom works in software engineering, were born in Manila and couldn't be more fascinated by their daughters' newfound fame. Especially because the pair is perhaps more famous in the Philippines than anywhere else, as some of the national news services have been following them since they've been in the spotlight. "We're kind of known there, and we've never even been!" Perey says.

Roxanne Ilano and Erin Perey will give their San Francisco debut performance, featuring their first single, at 6 p.m. April 4 in Jack Adams Hall, Cesar Chavez Building, San Francisco State University. The event is a fundraiser for the Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavour, an organization dedicated to Filipino American history, culture and community. Tickets cost \$10, \$12 at the door. To reserve tickets, e-mail talentadofive@gmail.com.

The official Web site for Rin on the Rox is Rinontherox.net. Their videos are posted under the YouTube account "hiphoprinrox."

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This article appeared on page **F - 1** of the San Francisco Chronicle