

"What Kind of Asian" is Stella Choe? The Kind Who Dances at the 2026 Academy Awards.

"As cheesy as this sounds, I felt like I was channeling my Korean ancestors."

JAE-HA KIM

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It wasn't surprising that EJAE, Audrey Nuna, and Rei Ami sang "Golden" live onstage at this year's Academy Awards. After all, *KPop Demon Hunters* was nominated for and won two major awards that evening for Best Animated Feature and Best Original Song (for "Golden").

But in the prologue to the song, some eagle-eyed viewers (including myself!) noticed that one of the dancers looked familiar. Dressed in a resplendent Joseon-era yellow hanbok, *Stella Choe* — well known for her viral "What Kind of Asian Are You?" YouTube video — was on center stage performing a traditional Korean dance.



Stella Choe on the right. [Courtesy: Academy Awards]

When I saw Choe, my first thought was, “Wait, Stella can dance?”

“The Oscar's appearance was an absolute dream come true,” she told *K-Culture with Jae-Ha Kim*. “I started dancing when I was about six, and when I was 16, I had a teacher who helped me get a dance agent. So I trained in jazz, tap, ballet and was what you would call a commercial dancer.”

But, wait, I had so many more questions for her. How did all of this come together?

Though she was leaving on a family vacation the following day, the Korean American actress and dancer graciously agreed to an interview to satiate my curiosity about the intersection of her work and her ethnicity, how her viral YouTube video landed her a role in one of South Korea's most successful films, and — well — Keanu Reeves. (More on that later.)

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Stella Choe [Courtesy: Theo and Juliet]

How did you end up on stage at the Oscars this year for the *KPop Demon Hunters* “Golden” performance?

My agent reached out about three weeks prior to the Oscars and said they were checking my availability for a top secret job [for the] second week of [March], culminating on the 15th. Then I was officially booked on it a week later, told what it was for, and also had to sign a non-disclosure agreement. The entire experience was truly a homecoming for me. As a dancer, the Oscars are a job you always dream of doing. At this stage and age, I just did not think it would even be a possibility. And then for it to be for “Golden” was just another surreal level of surprise.

What was it like for you to work with the Emmy-winning choreographer, Mandy Moore,¹ for this Oscars performance?

I had come up as a dancer with her. She is one of the most in-demand choreographers right now, and to be reunited on this project was special.

As a Korean American, what did it mean for you to perform a Korean dance set to a song written by Korean diaspora that's featured in a film set in South Korea?

When we started rehearsals and I knew that I was part of that opening prologue where we were doing traditional Korean dancing, I was both overjoyed and quite nervous.

They hired an amazing Korean folk dancer, DaEun Jung, who is a professor at the University of California, Riverside. The creative team collaborated with her to set that opening moment. She was very patient and we did our best to get it down as authentically as possible. And then Oscar night came. We were all so emotional and

proud to do our thing. As cheesy as this sounds, I felt like I was channeling my ancestors.

According to your imdb page, you toured with Sir Paul McCartney. I have so many questions for you! When was this?

Yes, I toured with Paul McCartney back in 2002-2003. I was part of the pre-show that opened up the concert. That was another dream job! We toured all over the U.S., Mexico, Canada, Japan, and all over Europe.

Who's your favorite Beatle?

Obviously, Paul!

What's your favorite Beatles or solo McCartney song?

One of my favorite songs that he played was "Band on the Run" from his Wings [era]. And a song I fell in love with that he also played during the tour was "Here Today," which is a tribute song to John Lennon. Oh, and I loved hearing "Blackbird" every night.

Share some stories about touring with him, please!

On our first day of rehearsals, he had us come onto the sound stage where he and the band were starting to rehearse. We basically got a private concert. In fact, every night was a private concert. During my time touring with him, we did some huge history-

making shows in the Red Square in Moscow, as well as in front of the Colosseum in Rome. Just an incredible experience.

Besides the Oscars footage, where else can we see you dancing?

As a dancer, I have worked on a lot of TV shows. I was in the movie, *The Replacements*, and I've done commercials where I'm dancing. I always loved taking class, and still take classes even now. That's where the real dancing for the soul happens.

Wait, what? You were in the Keanu Reeves film, *The Replacements*?

Yes, I was one of the cheerleaders. Credited as "Asian Cheerleader." [Laughs] And it was so long ago, but yes, he was very nice. We didn't have a ton of direct engagement with him. Overall, that movie was a crazy experience — big budget, big stars. It was exciting and fun.



Stella Choe and Brooke Langton in *The Replacements*.

Many people know of you from your viral “What Kind of Asian Are You?” video.

How did that production come about?

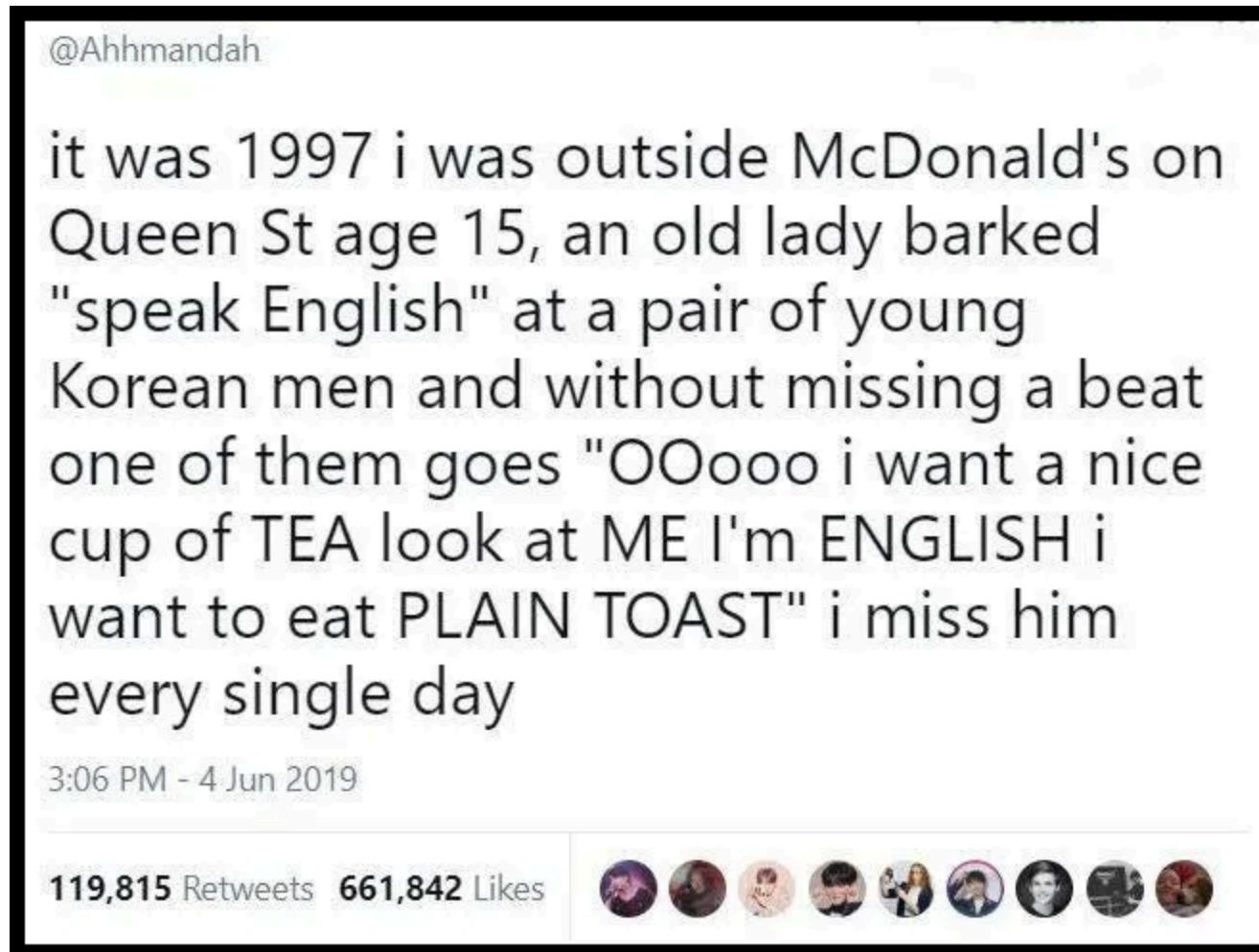
“What Kind of Asian Are You?” was inspired by a real-life moment. At the time, my boyfriend, David Ury — who is now my husband — had access to the YouTube studio that had just opened in Playa del Rey [California]. So he was making a lot of videos at the time. I was at his family’s for the weekend and [one of his] distant relatives and I were chatting. While it wasn’t exactly like the video, it was a funny and awkward

conversation of him trying to connect with me by telling me about his Korean co-worker and how he really enjoyed Korean food, and asking if I ate kimchi, etc.

Every Asian American I know has said they've experienced something like this, but are usually dismissed and told to lighten up by the majority. In real life, how do you handle these moments?

The funny thing about that video is that before we released it, we had shown it to some non-Asian friends who thought it was funny, but weren't exceptionally excited about

it. So we kinda thought maybe it was too inside. But then it popped off and even 12 years later, I get recognized from it. It really took on a life of its own. The video is what I wish *and* wished I could do when that question has come up, but most of the time I'm just in shock and so annoyed [that] I don't know what to say. The video version of myself is a lot more witty and sassy. I wish I was that quick to clap back!



I don't know if this meme is based on reality or is simply something that was made up for social media. But I really hope it's true.

When I was reviewing the film *Ode to My Father*, I was so pleasantly surprised when you popped up at the end playing the daughter who was adopted by an American family. It was a small but integral role, and you played it beautifully.

Oh, I love that you saw *Ode to My Father*. That came about as a direct result of the ["What Kind of Asian Are You?"] video. The assistant director from the movie had seen the video and asked me to audition. That was another incredible and emotional experience. I filmed it in Korea. After it came out, it was such a huge success they flew me out to do a bit of press. The movie felt like my own tribute to my dad and mom as well.

Many Asian Americans have spoken about how they wished they could've blended in more, especially in elementary school. They weren't necessarily saying that they wished they were white, but that being white would've prevented them from sticking out so much and being bullied. What was your experience growing up?

I was born in the U.S. and grew up in Manhattan Beach, California, which is a small beach town community in Southern California. And while I would say it was generally a nice growing-up experience, I'm realizing as an adult how much I tried to just fit in and suck it up. There was like two other Korean families. I was friends with [the other Korean kids] at school, but I was very aware that we were the odd ones out. I didn't want to be clumped together with them. I carried so much shame in the sense of

wanting to hide certain things about myself, like not wanting kids to come to my house because it smelled like Korean food. And I never understood why every older white man would want to tell me that he fought in the Korean War. ² It would make me so uncomfortable, but I'm sure I just smiled. **As an adult, I think it trained me to feel less than, or that I should walk around with my head down or something.** It's a lot to unpack sometimes.

What are you concentrating on these days?

I'm focusing mostly on acting, and I have some small TV roles that are coming out. I am auditioning and like most of us out there, lookin' for the next job! And hopefully a big break! I'm a dreamer at heart. I love to hear everyone's origin story, and I'm figuring mine out daily.

What would be your dream project to work on next?

A movie about the Korean American experience — kind of like *Minari*, but with the thrill and suspense of *Parasite*. And I would love to be on "XO, Kitty." Seriously, I have really been so inspired by the representation of Asians and Koreans in film and TV these past few years that I really can see myself in these types of projects.

For more information on Stella, check out her social media posts on [Instagram](#), [X](#), [YouTube](#), and [TikTok](#).

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Rolling Stone, Mashable, Victoria & Al...

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- 1 Not to be confused with the singer-actress, Mandy Moore.
 - 2 For the record, non-Asian men have told me that I should be *grateful* they fought in the [checks notes] Vietnam War. What in the delusion is even going on here? 😬 And what a weird thing to tell a child, no?



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Ink & Heritage Ink & Heritage Mar 30



♥ Liked by Jae-Ha Kim

Ha ha ha well said!!!

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1 reply by Jae-Ha Kim



Sung J. Woo From Nothing to Something Mar 31



♥ Liked by Jae-Ha Kim

Great interview! I felt so much pride watching the "Golden" segment on the Oscars -- all those beautiful hanboks in action. Stella's English accent is awesome! :)

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