

Johnny Hi-Fi as seen and heard on:



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(Alternative rock)

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After Humble Beginnings, Do-It-Yourself Indie Band Plays By Its Own Rules: Johnny Hi-Fi tours the world to Support Bi-Lingual Album Release

[NEW YORK] — On the wall of indie band Johnny Hi-Fi's Brooklyn studio hung a small board full of sticky posts with goals checked off: "Save \$20,000"; "Record double-album"; "Hit the road – 4 countries, 10 days." Most do-it-yourself garage bands record EPs, play some local gigs and get write-ups in their community papers. Not so with Johnny Hi-Fi, the latest emerging alternative rock ensemble from New York City that is poised for serious success with a marketing campaign that only major-label artists are entitled to.

Completely self-reliant, Johnny Hi-Fi operates "with serious ambition", says frontman Eric Hsu, whose songs have been named as Asia's answers to **Coldplay** and **Radiohead**. "We realized that no one was going to make it happen for us except ourselves." That single mantra has racked up a list of achievements for Johnny Hi-Fi that even their most disciplined peers still have on their "to-do" list.

After opening for multi-platinum Taiwanese rock star **A-Yue** through the venerable **House of Blues** circuit in the U.S. in 2004, Johnny Hi-Fi reciprocated with a tour in A-Yue's home base, Taiwan. Upon their return to the U.S., buzz on the street and in the industry landed them a spot on **MTV Chi**, **Viacom's** first attempt to capture the growing Chinese demographic in the U.S. Johnny Hi-Fi was the only unsigned band whose faces were shown on New York's Times Square Jumbotron the night of the station's launch, and to be nominated for the channel's debut music video. This happened because they were prepared – Johnny Hi-Fi was the only qualified band that already had two music videos even prior to MTV Chi's existence. "Preparation meeting opportunity is how we define success," says Hsu.

Born in Taipei, Taiwan, Hsu seemed destined for a stereotypical Asian lifestyle if it hadn't been for the move to Austin, Texas, the live music capital of the world, for college. His exposure to musical icons like **Madonna** and **Michael Jackson** in Taiwan not only helped him with his English but also shaped him into a voracious musician who wants to see change in the music scene in the country he now calls home – the U.S. Now a byproduct of two cultures, Johnny Hi-Fi's music is a marriage of his two worlds. "I didn't need any inspiration to sing in Mandarin. My music is a combination of both cultures. It definitely has a western culture, British rock music sound. But when it comes to the vocals and melody, I get that from Asian music. I'm trying to infuse the best of both worlds to make a new type of music."

With the group's multi-ethnic lineup (Taiwanese lead singer/guitarist Hsu, Pakistani drummer Asif Khan, and Japanese bassist Justin Matsubara) A&R executives would be left scratching their heads on how to market these visibly ethnic but American-rooted musicians. To prove that not ethnicity but only great music matters, Johnny Hi-Fi runs the band like a machine on a tight schedule that demands a yearly album release and national college tours on the weekends. "We are not coming out with a big media blast, but going on street credit," says Hsu. "We are struggling at times — but in the end there is a definite separation between the corporate-made and the self-made. Our philosophy, however, is that one complements the other."

The band's "can-do" attitude is due in large part to the band members' impressive professions. The young Hsu and Matsubara hold posts as founders and chief executives at venture capital funded companies while Khan is a practicing allergy and immunology physician. "Trying to function as a band is quite difficult when each of us is so busy with our regular day jobs, but none of this would have moved along this fast without our professions," says Khan. Two years ago, if they didn't have enough to do, they started a Non-Profit organization called Passion and Profession, a career counseling seminar of sorts held on campuses across the country. They even got a letter from Sen. Hillary Clinton saying what a great job they are doing! Check this out at www.passionandprofession.com.

Johnny Hi-Fi's latest project is to conquer the fastest growing market in the world – China – with their most ambitious project to date: a strategically marketed double album that features English on the first disc and the song's Mandarin-Chinese equivalent on the second disc. Musically, Hsu is returning to his cultural roots, while the band's decision was ultimately strategic. "China is going to be one of the most important music markets in this world," explains Hsu. To support the album, Johnny Hi-Fi embarked on a 4-city, 7-show tour in 10 days throughout Asia including Hong Kong, Taipei, Tokyo and culminating at the massive **Beijing Pop Festival**, where they headlined on the main stage along with bands like **Placebo**, **Supergrass** and **Sebastian Bach**. The band self-funded this \$20,000 tour – the equivalent of record company tour support – with their own money, which they've generated from selling CDs and from touring colleges every weekend. Because they have already toured in Taipei in 2005, they now have "history" – an admirable position for any band that wishes to expand internationally. Plans are also underway for Johnny Hi-Fi to hit the U.K. and Germany later this year.

Paramount to the band in this musical pursuit is to also break some key stereotypes that have persisted here in the U.S. and worsened in some cases for Asian-Americans. Hsu explains humbly, "With more exposure comes greater responsibility, and we're prepared to show the world how similar we all really are."

The new double English-Mandarin record is slated for a Fall 2007 U.S. release. Stay tuned to JohnnyHiFi.com for their touring schedule. This is a band to watch!