

On the Personality of Greyson Chance

(on the occasion of the second anniversary of the beginning of his career)

On this day two years ago (on 28 April 2010), Greyson Chance (GC) appeared in the sky of pop like a supernova, but instead of fading like one, he gained in luminosity. I will attempt to venture a glimpse behind the secret of his success.

At the beginning of his career, he enjoyed better conditions than anybody before: chat show host Ellen DeGeneres as a go-between, Lady Gaga as a public relations assistant (they have the same manager and the same label), two of the best managers and sundry other things I have described in my first article. He was offered these conditions, not without reason, but because his talent seemed worth it – and he lived up to the expectations.

One should not, however, reduce him to his musical abilities. When I sent two friends of mine, married musicians (baroque musicians, actually), a GC video, asking them for a piece of information, I received the reply together with the remark ‘he is sensational’; and when I asked them what was so sensational about him, the answer was ‘the total package of lyrics, music, and aura’. The word ‘total package’ hits the nail on the head: to consider only GC’s songs would mean to disregard the central element – himself. If I were asked how many points out of ten I would give him, the reply would be ‘thirty-five’ – ten for the music and twenty-five bonus points for the total package of lyrics, music, interpretation and personality. In this gradation the weighting of the various nameable components increases, though, of course, they cannot be separated from each other in the total package, which is an irreducible entity. In my view he is one of the most inspiring people I have ever encountered (that is why I paint him), and what fascinates me quite especially is the ease with which he reaches his goals.

It is on account of his personality that it makes sense to begin with videos before exposing oneself to the purely acoustical impression of a CD. GC may be of below-average height and build for his age, but the way the little fellow handles his situation is so fascinating that with some videos, even after watching them for the umpteenth time, I can only shake my head at the thought that such a thing is possible. That is why I think care homes for the elderly could cut back on antidepressants by showing GC videos.

One of the most astonishing videos is the Toronto one dating from 1 October 2010. Five months after launching his career he sits in a more than spacious hall, confronting an audience of 18,000, by far the largest so far. But instead of getting nervous, he unpacks his entertainment abilities, talks a little, sings to piano accompaniment and maintains total control of his audience: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7Swsx4NdhQ>

So self-confidence appears to be one of his most salient characteristics.

Further peculiarities of his personality:

- The way he expressed it in the booklet that accompanies his first album, it bespeaks not only a fundamental faith, but also skill in handling the language. After thanking quite a few people who helped him reach his goal, he thanks ‘the reason this is all possible, God’.
- A second remark from the booklet clearly reveals what he values. He describes co-operating with many people to get his album done and stresses that ‘most respected me’. I also think that respect is fundamental when dealing with young people, and it helped me in my work as a teacher that I took my pupils seriously and did not treat them with condescension. What fits in here is especially GC’s cover version of *My Way* which I described at length in my second article. He approaches this song with so much

seriousness and respect that he not only achieves some of his best work but also surpasses all previous versions:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wW8dEi7qQ1U>

- His modesty may be due to his education, but also to his faith, as he knows that he received his huge bundle of talents without doing anything for it. When, in the early stages of his career, he was passed on from station to station he was often greeted with the words 'you are a mega-superstar', and it might have been expected that a twelve-year-old might at least get conceited on account of this; however, quite unimpressed, he remained the modest boy he had been, which must have earned him a great deal of sympathy.
- He also received his strong will, but how he uses it is his specialty. Already with his first CD he wanted to encourage other youngsters to leave the confines of day-to-day life in which they find themselves boxed in. Having succeeded at this himself, he is now *Waiting Outside The Lines*, that is, outside those confines. When he was working up to his first album, he left home and home town at thirteen and moved to Los Angeles. Not knowing anybody there, he was lonesome and his heart felt as though it were made of stone; he turned this into the song *Heart Like Stone*. Missing a girl in whose eyes he felt at home, he created *Home Is In Your Eyes*, with the rendition of which in Singapore in 2011 he took his place among the all-time greats of pop/blues (my reasoning behind this claim will be found in the retrospective portion of my second article). And when he felt a lack of courage, he told himself he had to make it through the day and put this to service with his title song *Hold On 'Til The Night*, a cheer-up song telling his fans that they will make it as he did. These examples show that GC has a tendency to turn the way he feels into songs, which helps himself and his fans overcome their problems. This ensured him the loyalty of his fans, who tend to view him as a leader (and his integrity undoubtedly makes him good leader material). It is also typical of him to wind up his album with a song addressed to the doubters: *Take A Look At Me Now*.
- The proximity he establishes to his fans rules out ever singing playback; he accepts occasional voice problems rather than serving up a tinned performance, which would not be in keeping with his honesty and his entertainment-oriented tendency to interrupt his songs for spoken words. That he sometimes jumps off the stage to get closer to his fans is frowned upon by security staff, but he does not seem to mind that. A video that gives a good illustration of these habits is the one of his cover of *Pumped Up Kicks*, recorded in concert in Manila, April 2012 (a description will be found in my second article on p. 4): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cG2-4qwTIBU>
- Mobbing at schools (known as bullying) is an even bigger problem in the US than in Europe. In an Edmond OK local paper I discovered a report that mentioned three pupil suicides within a fortnight. GC was also bullied at school, but instead of committing suicide he rather wanted to write a song about it that would hold the problem before the public eye. Not being able to compose for a band in the autumn of 2010, he turned to Danielle Brisebois, who had co-written *Light Up The Dark* with him and whom he valued, and asked her to compose *Purple Sky* with him. The song did not attract much attention until the bullying-related suicide of Jamie Rodemeyer, a fourteen-year-old fan of Lady Gaga's; it prompted her to launch an anti-bullying campaign in which she included even President Obama. But she left the honour of performing at the 15th Annual Human Rights Campaign National Dinner 2011 (1 October 2011) to GC, and I regard this interpretation as one of his most outstanding achievements (see my first article, p. 5, and my genius article, also p. 5, for more): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qC-NFuAn-U>

(It was this video which I sent to my friends, the married baroque musicians; cf. the beginning of this article.)

- When watching photographs and videos, one notices that situations in which he has to remain silent suit him the least. Although he would have liked to take up photography (had he been unsuccessful as a musician), he frequently seems unhappy during photo sessions. Things work better in interviews, because he can come out of himself. And he is nearly unbeatable when at his piano, singing – then he is in his element like a fish in water.

Examples:

A photo session of June 2011:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8xOH_0deK4

His first radio interview, 27 May 2010:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QNT1DhdnTw>

An appearance of 18 November 2010, in which he addresses a New York audience about New York and then performs Alicia Keys' *Empire State Of Mind* in his special cover version (Empire State being a common nickname of the state of New York):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZpgZxEW8l0>

A video recorded in the Philippines in January 2012 which shows that he is slowly getting used to photo sessions as well:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4POQNW3U7CQ>

- He changes completely when he slips into a role. Incredible though this may sound, he is also a brilliant actor – just another of his many talents. This video shows him in the TV series *Raising Hope* (until 0:46):

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_O4eequEQ8

And here, to wind up, a video of October 2011 that shows him in an unaccustomed environment: on an ice rink, a figure skater performs to the strains of *Summer Train*. This was the first live performance of this song. GC here appears in the role of an enchanter, a word his fans corrupted to 'enchancer' – but they misapply it to themselves.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLzFmmMkNN8>

Erwin Kohaut ©

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