Withoutabox

Us & Them: Korean Indie Rock in a K-Pop World
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Synopsis
The spread of South Korean popular music, or K-pop, is a striking global phenomenon. In 2012 PSY’s viral sensation “Gangnam Style” became the most viewed video on YouTube ever, generating over a billion hits and scores of imitations. But Korean music is not only idol groups and viral videos. There is also a vibrant indie and punk scene that has been active for the past two decades. Thoroughly undocumented, this hidden scene is a crucible of creativity, providing an exciting counterpoint to the hegemony of bland, money-driven K-Pop.

“Us and Them: Korean Indie Rock in a K-pop World” takes viewers on an intriguing trip that starts in the clubs of the Hongdae neighborhood of Seoul, ground zero for the Korean independent music scene. In this once lesser known part of the city, underground bands have been challenging mainstream Korean pop music and attempting to break free from its corporate mold for several decades. But, as so often happens, the scene has become a victim of its own success: mainstream culture has begun pushing in from all sides, with mega-developers wresting this creative corner of Seoul from the very artists making it cool. Once home to unconventional subcultures, Hongdae has become overrun with “hipsters” and nonchalant wealth. But the bands that call Hongdae their home have been fighting back the best they know how: making music that breaks out of this corporate mold. Bands like Crying Nut, Whatever That Means, a...Whatever that Means and The RockTigers are putting their own Korean inflections on forms as diverse as garage and psychobily. This documentary takes you on a trip to the Hongdae neighborhood of Seoul and some of the underground clubs that challenge K-Pop hegemony. It also follows several of the bands as they embark on US tours. Filmed in Korea and the US, the documentary is a followup to Epstein and Tangherlini's earlier ’Our Nation: A Korean Punk Rock Community’.

Foreign Titles
Korean  그들과 우리; K-POP 속의 한국 인디 음악

Logline
In a time when K-Pop dominates the airwaves, Korean Indie musicians are making music that breaks out of this corporate mold. Bands like Crying Nut and the Geeks are re-imagining the boundaries of punk rock, while bands like...Whatever that Means and The RockTigers are putting their own Korean inflections on forms as diverse as garage and psychobily. This documentary takes you on a trip to the Hongdae neighborhood of Seoul and some of the underground clubs that challenge K-Pop hegemony. It also follows several of the bands as they embark on US tours. Filmed in Korea and the US, the documentary is a followup to Epstein and Tangherlini's earlier ’Our Nation: A Korean Punk Rock Community’.
more particularized. Yet throbbing underneath this disunity, like a bass line amplified a thousand times, is a growing realization among indie musicians that to remain independent, they need each others’ support. Although a lot of the energy driving Korea's indie scene has come in opposition to K-pop, interesting contradictions are arising. Crying Nut, for instance, which formed in the mid-1990s has gone on to become the biggest indie band that Korea has produced. The band now regularly performs at corporate events and outdoor festivals playing in front of tens of thousands of fans. And so the band begins to ask the age-old question of indie music the world over: how does one stay independent while trying to make a living? Breaking boundaries comes naturally to the Korean indie scene and, of course, some of the biggest boundaries are national borders and language barriers. Just as corporate-sponsored K-pop discovered ways to break these boundaries, bands from the can-do Korean underground realized they could do it as well. On a smaller scale, but just as successfully, Korean indie bands have become cosmopolitan and adept, using similar resources—the Internet, social media, MBA-toting concert promoters—to overcome the barriers of country and language.

More and more, these bands are becoming part of a global indie scene and touring overseas. These tours, powered by the international reach of social media and the global desire among indie music fans to discover unknown bands, are a leitmotif throughout the doc, and include the US tours of RockTigers, Crying Nut and …Whatever that Means in 2011. How were these bands received? Can international audiences imagine a Korean music that isn’t K-pop? And how do these bands experience America? Korean indie bands aren’t only trying to reach the world. They are also trying to make the world their own, by developing their own styles influenced by international currents. The RockTigers, for example, inspired by Japanese psychobilly legend Guitar Wold, have put their own Korean inflections on rockabilly, ironically redubbing it kimchibilly. The interaction between the Korean scene and other foreign scenes complicates the notion of what constitutes a local scene. Jeff Moses and Trash are the driving forces behind the first compilation of Korean punk bands in several years, "Them and Us". The compilation asked bands to play one of their own songs and a song from one of their influences. The Geeks, Korea’s most famous hardcore band, for instance, chose to cover Operation Ivy’s “Knowledge.” And so one is forced to ask: If a key figure of Korean punk rock is now an American, one might well now wonder who is “us” and who is “them”? This compelling portrait of the Korean indie scene offers sharp insights into a society that is in the midst of dizzying change. Shot in Korea and the US, the documentary is a follow up to co-producers Epstein and Tangherlini's earlier Our Nation: A Korean Punk Rock Community. The film is narrated by noted Korean-American musician Mike Park, front man for Skankin' Pickle and the B. Lee Band, and founder of indie label Asian Man Records.

Programming Descriptors
Type: Movie (Theatrical)
Categories: Documentary
Genres: History, Music
Niches: Asian, Asian American, Student, Youth/Teen

Official Website
Information not provided.

IMDb URL
None provided by applicant.

• Student Project
• First Time Filmmaker

Social Media Websites
None provided by applicant.

Picture Format
None provided by applicant.

Aspect Ratio
None provided by applicant.

**Shooting Format**
None provided by applicant.

**Exhibition Format**
None provided by applicant.

**Screener Format**
None provided by applicant.

**Main Dialogue Language**
None provided by applicant.

**Exact Runtime**
Information not provided.

**Date of Completion**
August 2014

**Country of Production / Filming**
New Zealand, South Korea, USA / South Korea, USA

**Production Budget**
15000 (in U.S. Dollar)

**Screenings**
Information not provided.