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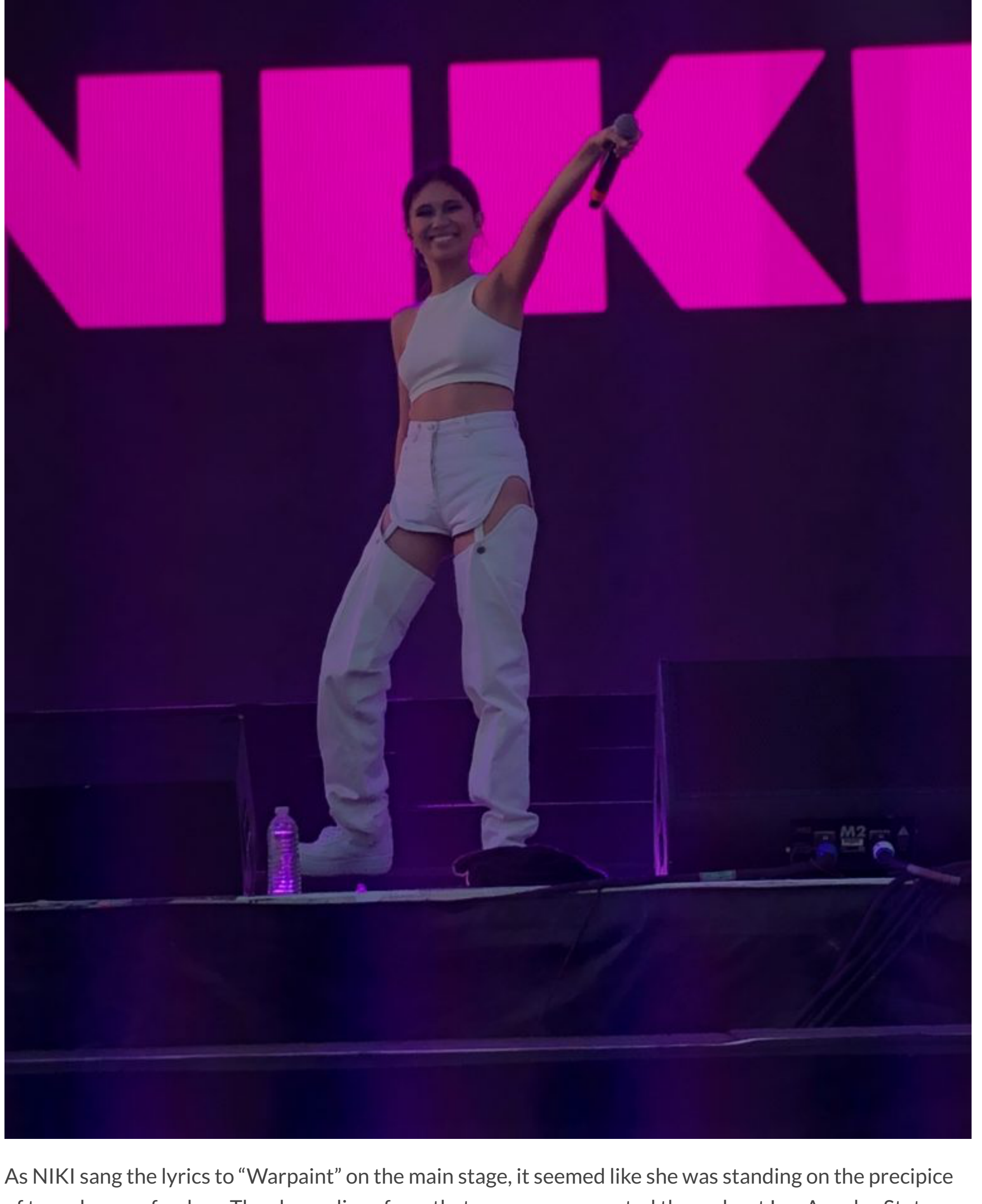
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88 RISING'S HEAD IN THE CLOUDS MUSIC & ARTS FESTIVAL

LATEST, PHOTO BLOG SHOW REVIEWS, REVIEWS / AUGUST 28, 2019 / BY MIGUEL COSTA

Exactly 50 years after Woodstock shook the very foundation of music and culture, the *88Rising: Head In The Clouds Music & Arts Festival* has emerged as a new pillar for diversity and perspective in music. In just its second year of existence, this extravaganza has already become the most impactful live music event for East Asians, Southeast Asians and Asian Americans in urban music. Something of this magnitude has never happened before in America. That sentiment was so heavy that it compelled NIKI to address the topic head-on by sharing some purposeful words with the live audience. Just moments after singing "Dancing with the Devil" she looked out into the crowd and said: "As an Asian female, I do not take this day or this stage for granted...my hope is, above everything else today, that you feel heard, you feel understood, but most of all that you feel represented because we all know that hasn't been very well done in the past. And if we can all be a small part of catalyzing that shift in culture then that is my greatest honor." At that very moment, this festival took on a whole new meaning. And for me...that's when the show officially began.



As NIKI sang the lyrics to "Warpaint" on the main stage, it seemed like she was standing on the precipice of teenybopper fandom. The chorus lines from that pop song resonated throughout Los Angeles State Historic Park like a national anthem for young women. And that was very appropriate because the Indonesian songstress was accompanied on stage by an all-female backup band. The only woman amongst the headlining acts displayed an endearing elegance about herself that was very reminiscent of the late Aaliyah. Songs like "See U Never" and "I Like U" carried the nostalgic essence of '90s R&B. So it was quite fitting that she integrated a section of "My Boo" by the Ghost Town DJ's into her performance of an original track called "Vintage." This groovy mash-up prompted several of the audience members to bob their heads in unison. It was at this juncture that I noticed a vast majority of the 20,000 attendees were young females who seemed to be living vicariously through NIKI's groundbreaking success. They adored her. NIKI's performance was emotional and tender. I think that's part of the reason why iKON's live set, just moments later, became so riveting. Their show was neither one of those things. Their performance was pure and unadulterated pandemonium! A frenzy ensued from the moment this boy band from Korea doused the crowd with water and sang their hit song "Rhythm Ta." Many of the teenagers standing near my section were crying due to their overexcitement. While others were simply being carried out of the audience area after having passed out. I had no idea that boy bands nowadays had enough clout to rap in their pop songs, so this was a fun new experience for me. I was, however, fully aware of Rich Brian's prowess in the rap game. So when the biggest Asian rapper in the world began his live set minutes after iKON left the stage dripping wet with sex appeal, I actually screamed...but just once though...and not like a teenage girl. Oh no! My scream was just the exuberant yell of a grown man who thoroughly enjoys songs like "Dat \$t!ck" and "Rapapapa" perhaps a little too much.



When Sean Miyashiro created 88Rising four years ago, the notion of a successful "Head in the Clouds Festival" in the middle of Chinatown (Los Angeles) easily could have been the pinnacle of his vision. But the benchmark for success rose to new heights when Joji became the first Asian-born singer to have an album reach number one on Billboard's top R&B and hip-hop chart, less than a year ago. The accomplished singer exemplified that feat in typical Joji fashion with silly cartwheels on the festival's main stage and a comedic rendition of "You've Got A Friend In Me" by Randy Newman. Joji slowly changed the mood of his live set as he began to pull on the heartstrings of the audience members with compositions like "Will He." The Japanese-born performer also sang his most popular ballad "Slow Dancing in the Dark" while suspended nearly thirty feet in the air from atop a crane. The imagery of Joji gliding into the night-time sky with downtown Los Angeles as his backdrop served as a great segue to the festival's grand finale. The night ended with an All-Star performance of "Midsummer Madness" by Joji, Rich Brian, the Higher Brothers and August 08.

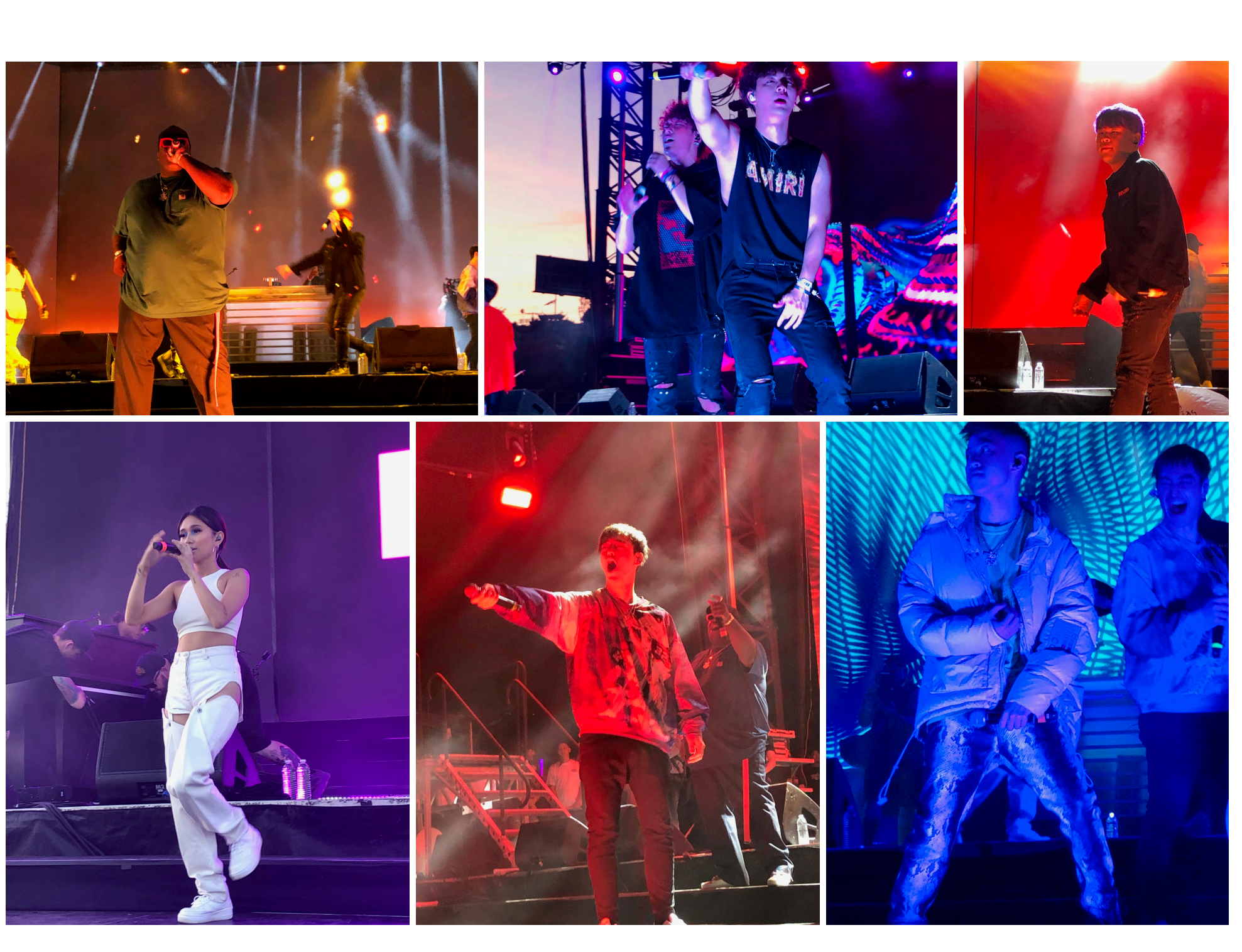


Photo by Jake West

It has been 50 years since Woodstock left a cultural mark on Rock & Roll music throughout the entire world. Today, the *88Rising: Head In The Clouds Music & Arts Festival* might be carving a similar niche in Hip-Hop, Soul and R&B with a distinctive vision that embodies the residue of Asian American hip-hop pioneers like MC Jin, Far East Movement and the Jabbawockeez.

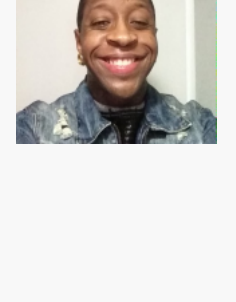


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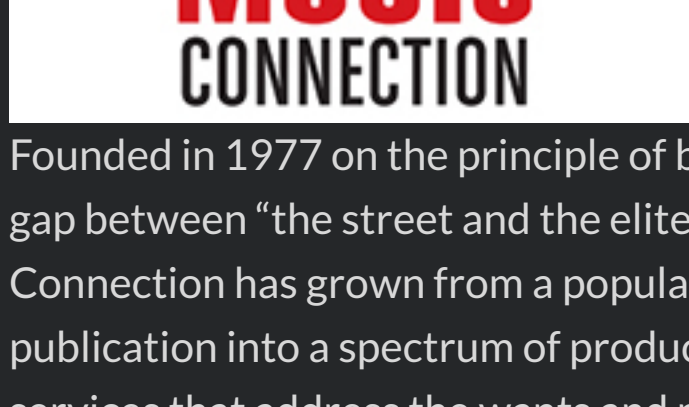
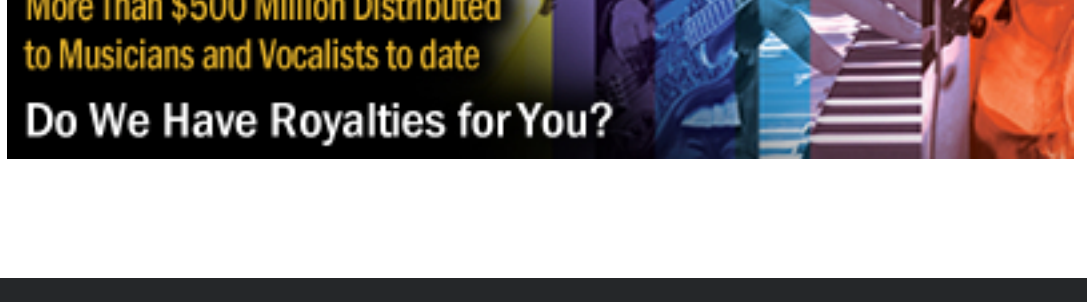
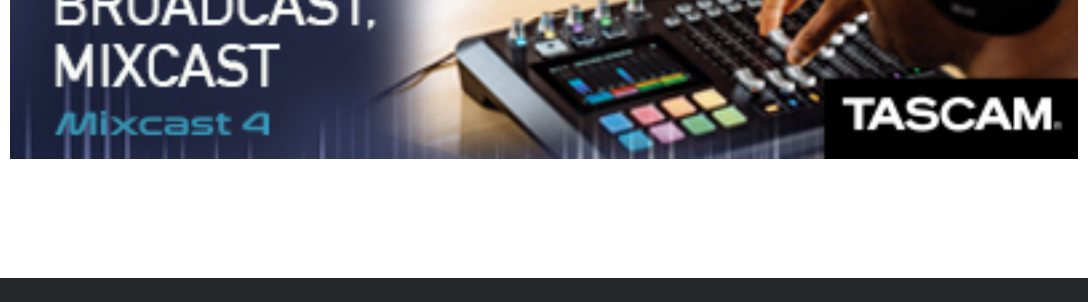
Miguel Costa is a writer and photographer with Music Connection. His tenure with the national magazine has allowed him to augment his passion for journalism, reporting and discovering new music. Miguel's articles span the genres of hard rock, hip-hop, R&B, Soul music, indie pop, punk rock, reggaeton, Latin rock, jazz and more. He thoroughly enjoys covering live events for recording artists who are signed to major record labels. As a journalist, Miguel looks forward to writing many more stories, while expanding upon his content and subject matter.

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