

“Fresh Off the Boat” team reflects on breakthrough sitcom

By Lynn Elber
AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES — Television is mostly entertaining, sometimes enlightening, and, occasionally, can make a difference.

The sitcom “Fresh Off the Boat” hits all the marks. Because of it, along with ABC siblings “black-ish” and “Dr. Ken” (and, at CW, “Jane the Virgin”), network television’s American family photo album is starting to look authentic.

The contribution of “Fresh Off the Boat” is especially notable. It’s the first network prime-time comedy about an Asian-American family since Margaret Cho’s “All-American Girl” in 1994, which lasted a season. “Dr. Ken” star Ken Jeong (“Community,” *The Hangover*) gladly acknowledges that the success of “Fresh Off the Boat” paved the way for his series.

“Even if I wasn’t a part of any of it, never in a million years would I have thought any of this would happen,” said Jeong, who guest starred in the season finale of “Fresh Off the Boat.” “It really is beyond satisfying” to see two shows on the air and with characters of different Asian origins, he said.

“Fresh Off the Boat” follows a Taiwanese-American family’s mostly eager plunge into the melting pot of the 1990s. On the flip side, “black-ish” is about a contemporary African-American family’s efforts to hold on to its cultural identity. “Dr. Ken,” about a Korean-American husband and father, gives the formulaic domestic sitcom a cheerful ethnic tweak.

Without losing sight of their primary job, to be funny, the ABC shows make the case that there is — cynics and malcontents aside — a suburban-lawn-sized patch of common ground to be found. The shows’ ratings are proof that viewers are responding, with both “Fresh Off the Boat” and “black-ish” secure on ABC’s schedule and “Dr. Ken” returning for its second



year.

As “Fresh Off the Boat” wrapped taping for the season, stars Randall Park and Constance Wu, who star as parents Louis and Jessica Huang, took a set break to reflect on its impact. Executive producer Nahnatchka Khan and Chelsey Crisp, who plays neighbor Honey, weighed in later by phone.

Nahnatchka Khan

The writer-producer marvels at television’s sudden burst of inclusiveness, including Aziz Ansari in “Master of None” and Priyanka Chopra in “Quantico.”

“The difference in the past year has been enormous. The fact we were right in the middle of this kind of change is incredible, and we’re really grateful for it,” Khan said. “The more, the merrier. Let’s just keep going.”

Randall Park

“I get stopped on the street all the time, with people telling me how much the show means to them and that they watch it with their families,” he said. And it’s not just Asian Americans, but “everyone,” Park said.

“It’s easy for us to buy into the myths out

there that people don’t want to watch a family that’s different from them on TV, that it’s going to be too foreign for people,” he said.

“Fresh Off the Boat” is disproving that. But Park recalled his own early concerns about how his character would be portrayed.

“Even though in the grand scheme of sitcom history there’s a tradition of the goofy dad, to me it was a point of concern because there weren’t a lot of Asian sitcom dads to balance that out, or even Asian characters in general,” he said. “He is a character, for sure, but the writers have done such a great job of humanizing him. ... For all the silliness to this character, there’s a loving side, a serious side.”

Louis has shown “what a father could be, an immigrant could be — or just a man could be,” Park said.

Constance Wu

Wu also felt the weight of high expectations for the series.

“Some people wanted it to tackle race issues, and there’s some people who think the more progressive thing is to not look at race issues and just have them (the family)

FRESH OFF THE BOAT. Ken Jeong (left) guest starred in the season finale of “Fresh Off the Boat” with (from left) Lucille Soong, Forrest Wheeler, Ian Chen, Hudson Yang, Randall Park, and Constance Wu. “Fresh Off the Boat” is the first network primetime comedy about an Asian-American family since Margaret Cho’s “All-American Girl” in 1994. Jeong, the star of “Dr. Ken,” gladly acknowledges that the success of “Fresh Off the Boat” paved the way for his series. (Michael Ansell/ABC)

tackle normal issues such as puberty or cooking,” she said.

But the writers have managed to do both.

“There were episodes about raceless things and ones that really did focus on the uniqueness of our story and navigating through an Asian-American lens,” Wu said. “You can’t please everyone, but the writers have been smart to go on both sides of the issue.”

Viewers have told her, through a flurry of tweets and Facebook and Instagram posts, that it’s “inspirational to have Asian-American characters, and rather than trying to hide their culture they celebrate it and take ownership of the story,” she said.

Chelsey Crisp

Playing Honey, the supporting white character in a series dominated by Asian Americans, is a role that Crisp welcomes.

“It feels pretty remarkable that we finally got there, and it feels really special to be a part of the show that did it,” she said.

It also evoked a memory of why television diversity matters.

“My best friend is Korean American, and when we were growing up there was no one that looked like him on TV. When I first read the pilot, reading the family’s experience of going to Orlando and being the only Asian-American family, it reminded me so much of my childhood friend, Richard,” Crisp said.

Lynn Elber is a national television columnist for *The Associated Press*.

564 soon to be newest area code for western Washington

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — Washington state is getting a new area code next year.

The Utilities and Transportation Commission approved a plan to implement 564 as the newest area code in western Washington. The code will be available in areas currently covered under area codes 360, 206, 253, and 425 as those numbers run out. The new area code will first be

distributed to new numbers in the 360 area code in the fall of 2017.

The commission also approved mandatory 10-digit dialing for all western Washington area codes by late 2017.

A projection by the North American Numbering Plan Administrator has the 360 area code being out of numbers by early 2018.

Belly, The Weeknd cancel Kimmel show because of Trump

By Mesfin Fekadu

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Rapper Belly and R&B singer The Weeknd cancelled their performance on “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” because Donald Trump was set to appear on the episode.

The Oscar-nominated musicians were slated to record their performance in Los Angeles for the late-night ABC show. Belly said he cancelled because he didn’t want to share a stage with Trump and disagrees with the presumptive Republican presidential nominee’s views and beliefs.

“I feel like the way I was raised was to be able to see through all the titles in this world — from religion to race,” Belly said in a statement. “I just didn’t want to feel like I was a part of a celebration for somebody who has beliefs [the] majority of us don’t agree with.”

Trump has been criticized by some political rivals and voters for his comments on topics including women, refugees, immigrants, and Muslims, such as when he said some Mexican immigrants in the U.S. illegally are “rapists” and when he called for a ban on Muslim immigration into the United States. The Jimmy Kimmel show had no comment, a representative said.

The Weeknd won two Grammy Awards

earlier this year, including best urban contemporary album for *Beauty Behind the Madness*. Belly has co-written many of The Weeknd’s hits, including “Earned It,” “The Hills,” “Into the Night,” and “Often.”

The Weeknd appears on Belly’s song “Might Not,” which they were set to perform on Kimmel’s show.

Belly, who is signed to Jay Z’s Roc-A-Fella management, recently released a new mixtape, *Another Day In Paradise*.

“I’m here on a campaign of positivity and love and to contribute what I can to music,” Belly said. “I create songs people go to sleep and wake up to, songs that they fall in love to. For me, being Muslim and being somebody that appreciates my access here in America, I love the fact that I’m able to be here. To play my part in this business is a privilege and a beautiful thing. The fact that I could lose that ability through the actions of someone such as Donald Trump isn’t right to me. At all.”

Belly shared an Oscar nomination for best original song with The Weeknd for “Earned It,” which appears on the *Fifty Shades of Grey* soundtrack.

Belly and The Weeknd are from Canada. Belly also co-wrote Beyoncé’s “6 Inch,” which features vocals from The Weeknd and appears on her *Lemonade* album.

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