


# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Ali Wong... always

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, October 2nd, 2019

I was already familiar with the work of [Randall Park](#). I had interviewed him in 2014 for the Seth Rogen comedy *The Interview*, where he played North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, then I had seen him in the TV sitcom *Fresh Off the Boat* (2015-2019), where the Los Angeles born son of South Korean parents plays a Chinese-American from Taiwan, and [Constance Wu](#) plays his wife. But I was not yet aware of [Ali Wong](#). So, when a romantic comedy starring the two actors was previewed for press, *Always Be My Maybe*, I was eager to see it. It was released on Netflix on May 31, only 2 days after a limited theatrical release.

 I was impressed by this funny and original love story, set in San Francisco, where the woman is a celebrity chef opening a new restaurant, while the man is a struggling musician still living at home with his parents. And I was delighted to discover Ali Wong, born Alexandra Wong in San Francisco from a Chinese-American physician father and a Vietnamese immigrant mother. She majored in Asian-American Studies at UCLA, where she joined a theater group Randall Park had founded, and the two have been friends and creative collaborators ever since. Wong is a writer on *Fresh Off the Boat*, and both actors worked on the screenplay for the movie. Park says that their inspiration was the quintessential RomCom *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), directed by Rob Reiner, starring Meg Ryan and Billy Crystal. Wong says that they chose to make her character a chef, because food is a great vehicle for self-expression, a way for Sasha to express her sense of humor. They both recall their years of struggling before their success, Park living with his parents well into his 30s while auditioning as an actor, Wong moving to New York at 23 to do stand-up, away from her family, poor and lonely in the cold winter. The movie is directed by [Nahnatchka Khan](#), born in Las Vegas of Iranian parents, who is the creator of *Fresh Off the Boat*.



Randall Park, Ali Wong. Photo (c) HFPA 2019

When I found out that Ali Wong would be performing her third stand-up comedy special, *The Milk and Honey Tour*, at the beautiful Art Deco [Wilern theater](#), I got tickets to see her live.



Ali Wong-Baby Cobra. photo (c) Alex Crick-Netflix

That is when I watched the two previous comedy specials, that were filmed for Netflix from live performances, *Baby Cobra* (2016) and *Hard Knock Wife* (2018).



Ali Wong-Hard Knock Wife. Photo (c) Alex Crick-Netflix

Wong makes jokes about marrying her husband so he could support her as a stay-at home wife, dirty jokes about her sex life, horrifying jokes about birth by caesarian section and breast-feeding; and you know she is referencing her own life experiences, but certainly heightened or invented whole cloth for comedy. She is hilarious and I found myself laughing out loud.

Ali Wong's husband, Justin Hakuta, is the son of inventor and TV personality [Ken Hakuta](#), a Japanese-American born in South Korea, and a Filipina mother. He graduated from Harvard Business School and works at a healthcare company. Wong says that her husband is quite an atypical and interesting guy, that's he's great and she's very proud of him, but that more than getting married, she always wanted to have kids.



While performing both shows, Wong is visibly in an advanced state of pregnancy, in one with her first child, Mari, in the other with her second, Niki. It is to her young daughters that she addresses her [upcoming book](#), titled *Dear Girls, Intimate Tales, Untold Secrets, & Advice for Living Your Best Life*.

Release date is October 15. I pre-ordered it as an audio-book to hear the voice of the comedian herself perform it. You may listen to an audio clip at [this link](#).

As a footnote, this year I also appreciated the dramatic performance of another young Asian actress, [Awkwafina](#) (born in New York from a Chinese-American father and a South Korean immigrant mother), in *The Farewell*, an autobiographical story directed by Chinese born [Lulu Wang](#).

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