

Nuva Q&A

Meet Nuva MONICA VILLA

*Actress/Singer/
Voiceover Artist
Monica Villa!*



Photo Credit: Bob Knapp

Monica Villa is a professional actress, singer, and voice over artist who is best known for her work on the New York theater scene. Some of her favorite theatre credits include: "Hair" (soloist) at Carnegie Hall, "Over You" (Suzie) at the The Ma-Yi Theater Company, "Cinderella" (Chorus) with National Asian Artists Project and "The Monkey King" (the Herald) with Common Man Musicals. Audiences may also recognize her from John Wu's viral short, "When Asian Actors Audition for Commercials," as well as her performances with [Model Majority](#), New York's premier all-Asian Comedy Sketch Team.

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Nuva Q&A - MONICA VILLA

Q: You are a professional singer, actor, and voiceover artist – you've performed at many prestigious New York institutions, including: Carnegie Hall and Ailey Citigroup Theater! You also originated the role of the Herald in Common Man Musical's production of "The Monkey King: A New Musical!" How did you get your start singing? How did you land these major gigs?

A: I began singing when I was really young with my elementary school church choir. I went on to study voice in my early teens, and eventually became the cantor at my local parish until I graduated from High School. A lot of my professional singing opportunities have come through the different acting or voice teachers I've studied with over the years. They would often refer me to their colleagues for their various projects or productions and then, I'd be invited to come in and audition for those.

Q: You're a member of the all Asian-American sketch troupe, Model Majority. Your sketch, "A Diver's Guide to Poolside Safety," which was inspired by the life of Olympic diver Vicki Manalo Draves, was named one of the "Must-See Comedy Sketches of May 2021." In addition, Model Majority's work has been featured on Good Morning America, New York Times, Time Out NY, NY1 News, CBS NY, AMNY, BroadwayWorld, and more! Why do you think Model Majority is successful? What types of topics does the team explore through their work?

A: One of the reasons that Model Majority has been so successful is that very few sketch teams shed light on the Asian-American experience, much less explore it through such a humorous lens. For the Asian-Americans in our audience, our shows are one of the few times that they get to see themselves and their experiences reflected onstage. I also think people enjoy seeing us break the usual stereotypes and prove that Asians can be funny.

Apart from our shared experiences as Asian-Americans, another topic that our team likes to explore in our shows is Asian-American History. Asian-Americans have made so many contributions to this country throughout the years and yet, these accomplishments are rarely celebrated the way they should be.

Q: In addition to majoring in theatre at Barnard College of Columbia University, you also studied acting at HB Studio and at the British American Drama Academy's Midsummer in Oxford Program. What is the value that professional acting training adds? What advice would you give to Nuvas who are debating whether to train professionally?

A: Training is an integral part of every performer's career. Even the most naturally talented actors need solid technique to sustain their performances, whether they're doing multiple takes for the camera or performing eight shows a week in front of a live audience. You also need to keep in mind that this industry is constantly changing and what you learned before the pandemic might not serve you as effectively now. This is why performers need to be constantly training throughout their lives.

Q: Can you tell us about your passion for Asian American representation? Do you think the industry is making strides in the area of Asian American representation?

A: I think having strong Asian-American representation is important because it influences the way we see ourselves. If you grew up watching TV shows or films, where the only people who looked like you were portrayed as the villain or the punchline, then you'll always feel limited to those types of roles. That's why I think, "Crazy Rich Asians" was so monumental. It made a lot of us feel like we could actually be more than we thought, like our possibilities were endless. It was the first time we saw well developed characters of our race who weren't geishas, ninjas, hookers, masseuses, IT nerds or nail salon workers.

We saw a culture similar to ours being celebrated rather than mocked or "othered."

That being said, while the industry has certainly made progress in terms of Asian-American representation, I think we're just beginning to scratch the surface.

Q: What is your proudest accomplishment?

A: Right now, it's a tie between having my work featured on "Good Morning America" and having "A Diver's Guide to Poolside Safety," recognized by the Toronto Sketch Comedy Festival as one of its "Must-See Comedy Sketches."



MONICA'S ADVICE:

“Stop striving for perfection because once you eliminate all the “flaws,” whether it be in your work or yourself, you erase all the humanity, too.”

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Q: What is your life motto or philosophy?

A: As George Bernard Shaw once said, “Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.”

Q: Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to yourself at the beginning of your career?

A: Stop striving for perfection because once you eliminate all the “flaws,” whether it be in your work or yourself, you erase all the humanity too.

Q: What are some of the challenges that you have faced in this industry, and how did you overcome them?

A: As we've already discussed in my previous answers, the biggest challenge I've faced and continue to face is the lack of opportunities for Asian-Americans. Collaborating with other creatives who face the same issues has been what's enabled me to make opportunities for myself.

Q: What projects are you excited about for this upcoming year? Do you have an “ultimate” career goal?

A: Ooh! I've got a lot of career goals, but my top three are to perform in a Broadway musical; star in a rom-com; and voice an original cartoon character.

As for future projects, while nothing is set in stone yet, I'm looking forward to continuing my work with Model Majority and NAAP (National Asian Artists Project) in the upcoming year.

Q: How long have you been a Nuva? What do you love about Nuva? 😊

A: I first learned about Nuva last spring and I fell in love with its mission to support women in the entertainment industry.



Photo Courtesy of Monica Villa



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