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## Meet Hojean: A Rising Korean-American R&B Artist

By **Sheila Tran** - November 7, 2019



*Photo Courtesy of Hojean*

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A look at his social media platforms will show that Georgia-based independent R&B artist Justin Hojean Yi, better known by the moniker Hojean, is a bit of an anomaly in the indie music world. His Instagram is filled with [close-up selfies](#), [silly edits](#), and a sizable amount of [caps lock and exclamation points](#). The best words to describe him would be honest and wholehearted — Hojean isn't at all about putting on a front or playing up a "mysterious artist" archetype.

And it's working. His mentions are flooded with dedicated fans who promote his music and jump at any chance to talk to him. Hojean averages around 150 comments on each Instagram post, which is a

higher engagement rate than most artists who have triple his follower count.

"I genuinely love them so much. Sometimes, I'll get on the verge of tears just thinking about it. Because like no one supported me like that ever," he says fondly. "I'd say that my fans are really like family to me."

Originally from New York, the 21-year-old Korean-American singer, writer, producer, and visual artist handles every aspect of his music production and promotion from the comfort of his bedroom. Fans of luminaries like Omar Apollo and Pink Sweat\$ will enjoy his music, which is driven by pop and R&B sensibilities. The Bottom Line sat down for a phone interview with Hojean to chat about his background and musical journey.

As an artist who almost exclusively sings about love, it's no surprise that Hojean's story starts with a simple feeling. He recalls a specific moment during his teenage years, when he'd just transferred to a new high school and noticed that the girl he was crushing on was volunteering for the talent show. Drawn to the opportunity to make new friends and impress his crush, Hojean stepped on stage for the first time.

"When I heard their reactions and their applause, I think right then and there I wanted to make music," he recalls. "Like, forever."

Within a year, he was writing his own songs. "My Love" was written at 3 a.m. on a random free beat he found while browsing YouTube; after a remix by Canadian producer [Loto](#), the song became Hojean's highest-streamed song on Spotify. That led to a feature on popular YouTuber Connor Frata's [Common Culture 8](#), a curated collection of indie music that previously highlighted artists like Billie Eilish. From there, Hojean signed his first publishing deal with Sony/ATV Publishing.

"I'm extremely grateful for [Loto], because that 'My Love' remix that he did — or which is now the original — it definitely helped put me on the map," he says. "So I'm extremely grateful that he popped up in my life."

But his journey hasn't always been smooth-sailing. In 2018, Hojean experienced a nine-month hiatus from making music, which he explains was due to anxiety over the possibility of listeners not liking his next track. So he forced himself to get out of bed and found himself at a local Goodwill, where he saw a \$60 broken guitar on sale. Initially, he wasn't going to buy it.

He was almost out the door when a complete stranger stopped him. She urged Hojean to follow her back inside to her husband, a professional guitar player who then encouraged him to take the chance and buy the guitar. He never saw the couple again. With that guitar, however, he produced "[Memory](#)," a song that would become an immediate fan favorite and one of his highest-streamed songs on Spotify.

Hojean's journey seems to be full of small miracles like this one. "They were almost like guardian angels, in a way," he says, and there's sincerity in his voice.

He's calling from his bedroom in Georgia, straight off a shift at his Korean parents' dry-cleaning business, where he currently works full time. He laughs sheepishly when I ask what his average day looks like and says it's not much of a "cool life" — he goes to work, comes home, works on music, goes to sleep, and then the cycle repeats.

But he's excited for the future. Hojean is still exploring and developing his sound, and for now, he's focused on releasing more singles that showcase his musical diversity.

For Hojean, he has big dreams: he wants Hojean to blow up, get on the radio, tour, maybe even do something worldwide; most of all, he wants to make sure his aging parents are financially secure. He shares that he's releasing a new single titled "You Feel Like" soon — just two months after "Let Me," marking his shortest gap between releases yet.

"I want to do music every day of my life. So I'd say that's definitely Hojean's goal," he says. "Justin's goal is just to be part of the ride."

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*New to Hojean? Check out some of his recommendations for new fans:*

*"If you're feeling sad ... listen to '[Memory](#),' because it's an upbeat track about moving on. If you're feeling in love, listen to '[Let Me](#).' If you're feeling lost, listen to '[You Need Serenity](#),' because that song helped a lot of people and helped me too."*

*Interested in profiling an up-and-coming artist or band for The Bottom Line? Reach out to [arts@bottomlineucsb.com](mailto:arts@bottomlineucsb.com).*

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### Sheila Tran

Starting as an arts & entertainment staff writer during her sophomore year, Sheila eventually found a home in The Bottom Line's cozy two-room office as Copy Editor ('18-'19), Senior Copy Editor ('19-'20), and interim Arts & Entertainment Editor ('20) during her time at UCSB. Sheila is passionate about features writing, food writing, and telling important stories through journalism.