

She speaks for the trees

The rise of Ashby Florence

By **LILLIAN CURTIN**
Opinion Editor

What is the recipe for success? Apparently, just leather boots and a jacket, or an orange jumpsuit with a yellow mustache.

Ashby Florence, better known as Ashby on TikTok, has become one of the fastest-growing creators, and the most deserving of the fame I've ever seen.

Even if you don't know her by name, I bet you've seen a few videos of hers. Let me jog your memory.

The first video of hers that blew up was part of a trend featuring a song from the musical "Hamilton." Ashby immediately stood out from other creators doing the same trend. Why? Because while others were in a full Alexander Hamilton get-up, Ashby was the true character.

Instead of the full costume, she just put on cowboy boots and a letter jacket and called it a day — her attitude and facial expressions sold it. That was the beginning of the world getting to know her personality, and boy, are we glad we did.

Ashby has to be one of the funniest people I've seen on social media in a while. Her improvisational skills are mind-blowing. It's the unexpectedness of what she's going to say next that has me in tears when I watch her. In the world of scripted humor, there's a uniqueness and freshness that she has that

doesn't come all that often.

Her fame came suddenly, almost overnight. She posted the video to "It's Quiet Uptown" from the "Hamilton" soundtrack, and gained a bit of traction. However, it wasn't until she started doing her livestreams that people started to notice the star that was in front of them.

And by livestreams, I mean Ashby running around in a full orange jumpsuit, stuffed with who knows what to create that "Lorax" build, calling for the execution of pigeons and redheads.

Besides using her free will to cosplay a character from a movie she's never seen, she also has a full-time job. That's right. She is a graphic designer and has been for years. She comes home from her job, where she works nine to seven, and basically shape-shifts into whatever character she decides she wants to act as that night.

Somehow, Ashby has gone from just an everyday graphic

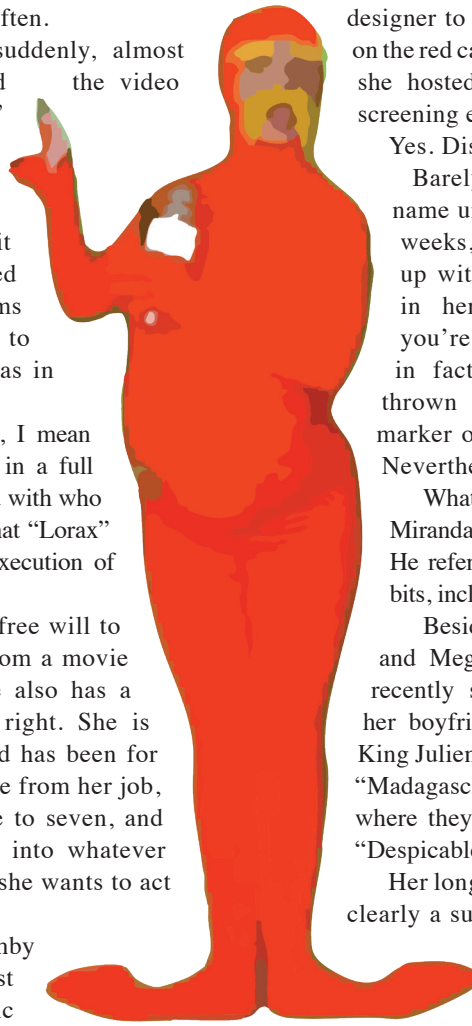


ILLUSTRATION BY LILY MIRABELLA

designer to interviewing celebrities on the red carpet. Earlier this month, she hosted a Hamilton premiere screening event by Disney.

Yes. Disney.

Barely anyone knew her name until recently, yet within weeks, she was chatting it up with Lin-Manuel Miranda in her Hamilton outfit. If you're wondering, it was, in fact, just regular clothes thrown together and black marker on her face for a beard. Nevertheless, a work of art.

What's even better is that Miranda knew of Ashby's content. He referenced some of her other bits, including Megamind.

Besides The Lorax, Hamilton and Megamind, Ashby has just recently started doing bits with her boyfriend. One where she is King Julien and he is Mort from the "Madagascar" movies, and another where they are Gru and Bob from "Despicable Me."

Her longtime boyfriend, Ben, is clearly a supporter of her hobbies.

In fact, you can tell he encourages it. When he makes an

appearance and contributes to her videos, the dynamic reminds me of Jenna Solomita, better known as Jenna Marbles, and her husband Julien.

Since Solomita and Julien left social media, there has been a genre of quirkiness and randomness that has just been missing — now, we've struck gold.

Not only is she hilarious, but she just genuinely feels like a good person. When interviewing the stars of Hamilton, she was doing a bit, but she balanced it perfectly with insightful and thought-provoking questions. Clearly, she was taking the job seriously.

She made a statement quickly after she began to rack up views when someone claimed that they were waiting for the day it was revealed that she was a bigot. She is adamant that day will never come. She was deeply offended, but she communicated that she knew she had to earn the trust of her followers. She doesn't care if people find her funny, but she cares about how we view her as a person.

I was originally worried Ashby was going to be just another creator who gains fame quickly and then loses it. I don't see that happening here. I think she's here for the long haul, and I'm grateful for that. She's a fresh face with a quick wit that comes every once in a while.

So as for her stardom: let it grow, let it grow.

'Man on the Moon' turns 16: Kid Cudi's debut that spoke to a generation

By **COOPER WOODWARD**
Contributing Writer

The year is 2009 and a young 25-year-old by the name of Scott Mescudi, better known as Kid Cudi, is finishing up his debut album.

With a sound that blended themes of early 2000s hip-hop with raw and pure emotional vulnerability, he was preparing to introduce himself to a music world that hadn't seen anything quite like him.

Sixteen years later, "Man on the Moon: The End of Day" still resonates as the album that gave a generation of hip-hop fans, young and old, permission to feel, permission to dream and permission to embrace their imperfections.

This album came at a time when mainstream rap was dominated by larger-than-life personalities and a bold sense of confidence. Instead of following that trend, Cudi offered something that felt deeply human. His lyrics confronted themes of isolation, depression and self-doubt wrapped in beats that made it feel like you were taking an adventure into Cudi's psyche.

It was a kind of honesty that early 2000s hip-hop had dared to explore, and it was that kind of honesty that struck a deeper connection with the fans — one that continues to resonate with fans over a decade and a half later.

The album has a play-like structure with a five-act arrangement that takes you through Cudi's psyche, struggles, dreams and escapes. Songs like "Day N' Nite" and "Pursuit of Happiness" became anthems to a generation, while deeper cuts such as "Cudi Zone" and "Solo Dolo" cemented his reputation as a trailblazer willing to be an

open book with his audience.

The album would hit gold certification (500,000 units sold) by the end of the year, but "Man on the Moon"'s impact simply couldn't be measured in sales numbers. This album came at a time in pop culture when mental health was still considered very taboo, and despite all of this, Cudi openly admitted to fears and insecurities

that many were experiencing in silence.

For a generation of young hip-hop fans, he wasn't just a rapper — he was a mirror into the soul.

In the years that followed, Cudi's influence started to become tangible. Artists like Travis Scott, Juice Wrld and Billie Eilish have cited him as a major inspiration for their music. Not to mention

that they are often considered pioneers for an era that was finally ready to talk about their feelings.

Sixteen years later, the album feels less like a debut and more like a stepping stone. Its themes of loneliness, resilience and self-discovery started conversations that began to question how mental health was perceived in music.

Those conversations began to spark change on a global scale. The emotional openness of this modern era of music owes a lot of itself to the path that Cudi carved on this project.

Through the rise of streaming, new listeners can capture the magic of this project that so many caught over a decade ago, realizing that it's okay to feel your feelings, it's okay to be sad and it's okay to not be okay. For longtime listeners, this project served as a reminder of where they were in 2009, and how much this album has gotten them through.

Over sixteen years since its debut, "Man on the Moon: End of Day" has cemented itself as a landmark event in hip-hop history. What began as the story of a young man trying to find his voice became the soundtrack for a generation trying to find their own.

For Kid Cudi, it was the start of a career that was defined by honesty and experimentation. For his fans, it became a lifeline that made the lonely stoner feel a little less alone.

As the album continues to find new ears in 2025, the project stands proof that sometimes the most powerful thing you can do as a musician is simply to be honest.



ROB LOUD/FICKR

Kid Cudi's 'Man on the Moon' redefined vulnerability in hip-hop and gave a generation permission to feel.