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Mission Viejo woman wins record-deal contest during Super Bowl

Kina Grannis, 22, scores in Doritos competition for undiscovered singers.

By **TOM BERG**

The Orange County Register

The surprise star of Super Bowl XLII may be a young singer who last month worried about getting 25 people to a show in Los Angeles.

On Sunday, an estimated 90 million people watched Kina Grannis, 22, of Mission Viejo, sing during a first-half ad featuring her music video.

In 60 seconds, her career was launched.

Grannis, a Capistrano Valley High School graduate, has never played for a crowd larger than a few hundred people. Now she's been seen by roughly three times the viewers of an "American Idol" finale. She's being wooed by pop singer Christina Aguilera's management company. And she has a record deal with industry giant Interscope Records.

"I didn't even see any of it," she said of the life-changing ad won in an online contest sponsored by Doritos. "When it started, my heart almost fell out of my body. I just broke down for like five minutes, hugging people, hugging my family, hugging other contestants and crying."

One of her first calls came from Azoff Management Co., which manages Aguilera and the Eagles. It's interested in putting her on tour, she said. Interscope's contract with her - signed upon entering the contest - is for one album with an option for six more. An album and tour are expected this year.

"This is unbelievable," Grannis said by phone from a viewing party held in Phoenix for the Doritos "Crash the Super Bowl" contest's three finalists. "A month ago, I had a show at the Mint in L.A. and I was very stressed out, trying to get 25 people there. Now, it might not be as hard."

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Just last October, Grannis was a coffee-shop waitress hoping to make it as a singer.

She originally recorded her song, "Message From Your Heart" to post on her own Web site, which was lucky to draw 200 views on a good day. After recording it, she heard Doritos was looking for unsigned acts to compete for a 60-second Super Bowl spot. She submitted her video to a panel of music executives, which narrowed the 352 entries to 10. Online voters next placed her in the top three.

At that point, Doritos brought all three finalists to Los Angeles to film a professional music video, even as online voters began to select a winner. To keep it a surprise, no one was told the winner until the video aired Sunday.

Afterward, someone reminded her that once she stepped out of the private viewing party in Phoenix, she would probably be recognized - possibly around the world since the game was broadcast in more than 220 countries.

That's when it hit her

"Oh, my gosh," she said, "I can't even think about it."

Even before Sunday's video aired, Grannis had made a name for herself with a savvy, self-marketing campaign to win votes.

She recorded a series of songs at home - one a day, recorded in front of her laptop computer - that gained nearly 1 million YouTube views. One song, called "Gotta Digg" about the popular Web site digg.com became an overnight Internet hit - and a "viral video," so-called because it spread so fast - and got mentioned on more than 1,000 blogs, turning the young singer into a "blogebrity."

Within weeks, she gained fans from more than 40 countries. She received dozens of marriage proposals. And scores of heartfelt e-mails that made her realize her lyrics and music resonated with people.

"On my blog," she said, "everyone left the nicest comments, saying, 'We'll never forget you' and 'We're so honored you shared this time with us,' and I was going to cry. These people are so supportive and believe in me and I feel so lucky."

After the game, her song was featured atop the iTunes Music store banner - alongside season six "American Idol" winner Jordin Sparks and Grammy Award winner Missy Elliott.

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Grannis' song - her style is more like Sarah McLachlan - is about your heart telling you to remember it, she said. It's about making sure to step back every once in a while and realize that just being alive is exciting.

Today it's a message she must be hearing loud and clear.

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