

[Haha's Topsy Interview①] "I love you Jack Black..but I'm not a ass-kisser"

[Ilgan Sports Uhm Dong Jin, Park Hyun Taek]

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Lets try use JTBC's "Two Yoo Project - Sugar Man's" generation split format to determine what Haha's (37 years old) profession actually is. For the Over 20 generation, 9 out of 10 would call him an entertainer. That is proof of the huge influential power of MBC "Infinity Challenge" and SBS "Running Man." Lets not

forget, his nicknames over the years include “The President of Children,” “Haroro (A parody of the kid cartoon character Pororo) and the “Short Kiddy.”

There is also the once in a blue moon answer, that is some would actually call him a “singer.” Frankly it is true, Haha is indeed a singer. He would actually be considered somewhat of a veteran singer, having made his debut in 2001 with the group “Jikiri.” Currently, him and fellow company colleague, Skull, are completely absorbed in reggae music. In the beginning, Haha got his fair share of abuse, with many believing that he was just riding on the coattails of Skull, the talented billboard featured singer. However he has now even got the recognition of the reggae gods. Haha was the one responsible for making the Jamaican style greeting “Ya man,” a well known phrase among the general public. At the very least, he garners “respect” for his love and effort towards the art of reggae.

The reason we are holding this slightly tipsy conversation is because Skull and Haha’s new single was being issued on the 29th. Despite that, our questions kept focusing back on variety shows. Just with “Infinity Challenge” alone, we’ve had some of the biggest stories in recent days with projects such as “Jung Jun Ha’s Show Me the Money 5” along the IC team’s Space Project. There is a lot that we want to ask him. We want to ask him whether Yoo Jae Suk really is as faultless as he seems and we also want to hear about Jung Hyung Don, Noh Hong Chul and Gil, names we haven’t seen mentioned on IC for awhile. All of this tugs at our curiosity.

We came here to talk about music but now we were busy just talking about Infinity Challenge. Still Haha didn’t show any signs of annoyance. Hearing him talk, one cannot fail to notice his concerns and excitement about “IC” along with his sense of responsibility and joy as an entertainer. Essentially we were treated to a 2 hour Haha talk show. Then when we finally started to talk about

music, he immediately sat up properly and took on a much more serious mood. We could feel his pure passion towards music and reggae. It makes us believe that he can evolve even further as a singer. We wonder, what will the public say in 10 years time when we pose the question, what is Haha's profession? Will they call him a singer or an entertainer? As we pondered this rather fun curiosity, we continued to be intoxicated by Haha the delightful along with liberal amounts of Soju.



►I'll start off by talking about Infinity Challenge. Looking back at the last 10 years, which moment was your most memorable?.

"Just as I was getting used to the program, we were hit with a major crisis. They told us that the program was going to be cancelled soon. Kim Tae Ho PD then told us that we were going to shoot a New Zealand special as a last project. At the time, the members said to each other, "Hey let's go to New Zealand, pour everything into it and give the program an amazing final send off in our own unique style." and "Yeah we surrender, we lost since we didn't get the ratings. As a send off, let's really have some fun over there. But then

the “Rolling Paper” segment really exploded in popularity and the program sort of “exploded.”

This is a behind the scenes story. The whole concept where I was being awkward with Hyung Don was something I picked up during “Non Stop 3” having observed Lee Jin and Jo Han Sun, who actually never met once. I also got the idea from the sitcom “Friends” with Phoebe and Ross’s awkwardness. That was why I wrote about how I was awkward with Hyung Don on the rolling paper. At the time, I felt guilty about that since it was the root of Hyung Don’s “not funny comedian” character, hahaha, Hyung Don probably resented me a lot but I genuinely really liked Hyung Don’s character back then. If you think about, Hyung Don is a bit of genius for even accepting that character. Who else could be funny for being unfunny?

►Jung Hyung Don has left at the moment but do you still meet occasionally?

"I do contact occasionally. Since it’s an illness to do with his mind, I can’t quite accurately grasp how painful it is and it really distresses me watching from the sidelines. All I know is that it is very very painful. I hope he recovers quickly and returns home.”

►You’ve worked on “IC” for a long time now. What do you think was your biggest “crisis” moment?

"It was when I was making my return. When I returned from national service, I noticed that dynamics of the show had changed. First off, the pace of the show had sped up drastically, the relationships within the show had also changed drastically. This was about when Hyung Don really started to shine

and I just had no idea what I was supposed to do. No matter how hard I worked, it didn't seem like I was helping at all. It was hard."



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▶What do you think was the greatest special of the past 10 years?

"Personally, it was the pro wrestling special. It seriously taught me about what perseverance truly is. I don't think we had a single moment of rest that summer. We ran and ran, even when it rained and even when the typhoons came. We hurt our necks, back and completely ruined our ankles and wrists. It wasn't just me, Jae Suk still talks about the long term effects of that special. Seriously it made me question whether we really had to go to THIS extent.

Some people might think that I'm just a grumbler but seriously, I only endured it because it was "Infinity Challenge."

► **I thought you would say it was the IC Song Festival**

"On the contrary, the song festival is the special that is the most difficult and burdensome. I guess you could say it is because I'm embarrassed and fearful about how extremely ambiguous my profession is. I think it's a problem that stems from the fact that I can't go out and tell people that "I'm a singer." For example, Gil and Yoo Hee Yeol would go out on variety shows and be entertainers but when the focus is on music, they could confidently become "musicians." However I still can't do that.

► **The space project has been on news lately. Do you think you'll be able to go?**

"A lot of people are curious about it. In the end, the only people that will be able to go are the ones that pass the test. It's a simple problem, if you don't meet the requirements then you can't do it.

► **It could end up being the biggest special "IC" has ever done.**

"I'll be honest with you, I can't believe it myself. Also I'm a massive scaredy cat and this terrifies me. The reason I can't ride of the viking rides and on rollercoasters is because I don't trust machines. I can't do something that makes me anxious. I'm also reminded of the movie "Final Destination" hahaha.

► **In the past, a certain drama scriptwriter accused the IC members of crying too much on a variety show. What are your real personalities like?**

"That sort of accusation makes sense. However this is our real personalities. We are scared of bungee jumps and it makes us tremble. At least Jae Suk tries hard but I know him well enough to know that he only does it for the sake of the program. He is definitely not that brave. He is putting in an extraordinary amount of effort into it. That's the same for me as well, when I was jumping off the cliff in Jamaica, I was repeatedly telling myself that my son was drowning below and I was jumping in to save him.

►Having watched the recent episodes, it seems like 10 years of hard work was starting to take a toll on the members. It looked liked you were a bit tired and exhausted

"Our passion hasn't changed but I guess we would have lost some of our strength. We have had members leave the show and Kwang Hee is still adapting to the show. More importantly, the members are getting old. Since we are on this topic I would just like to say that Infinity Challenge is really challenging. You could say it's the show that is the most harshly judged by viewers and fans. I think it's just a sign of how much they care about Infinity Challenge. As an example, I was branded a ass-kisser after the Jack Black special. Hahaha. I guess it means I was too "caring" of the international guest.

Get criticized for not reacting enough, called an ass-kisser for working hard. It really is quite a difficult and hard program. However given that we were welcoming such a renowned guest, I believe it was right to take care of him and support him. If they instead said that "I can't stand the sight of Haha's reactions. Why is that guy over-reacting like that?" then I could humbly accept that. But being told that I was an ass-kisser really takes the wind out of you. I'm really being honest here, I'm sorry.

Reporters Uhm Dong Jin, Park Hyun Tak

Photo=Kim Jin Kyung

[Haha's Tipsy Interview Part 2] "Hyung Don, Hong Chul, Gil....how great would it be if we all gathered"



<http://m.media.daum.net/m/entertain/newsview/20160329103206092>

▶Do you think running out of ideas could become a problem?

"I would be lying if I said it wasn't an issue. Frankly, there is a lot of times where I would be watching another program and be stunned by how unique and innovate it was. There is also the fact that people tend to be particularly strict about "Infinity Challenge," which makes it harder to select certain concepts. Most importantly, the members, including me, are now getting on the old side...hahaha. I am completely flabbergasted when I meet the other member's (non-entertainer) friends in public. I'm sorry to say this, but they seriously look like old elders. Then I would look back at our members, how they have been able to keep up their stamina to this extent and continue to work in this industry. I consider it miraculous. Would I also be able to continue working till the same age as our older members? The IC members are definitely exhausted, it's true. That's just fact. However that doesn't mean we are being pompous. Frankly, I could force myself to work even harder but I don't because it might look like I'm overreacting to everything. Besides that, I really am giving it my absolute all, blood, sweat and tears alike.



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▶What's the impact of Jung Hyung Don's absences on set?

"I'll use basketball as an example. I'm the right point guard, so my role is to assist play. Jae Suk is the manager. Myung Soo is the trusty and reliable center position. Jun Ha makes up the defense and takes care of the rebounds. On the left, we have Hyung Don as the shooting guard. Hong Chul is just like Kaede Rukawa from Slam Dunk, he would shoot the 3 pointers and the occasional slam dunks. However now we are missing two of our main players. It's more than just a big blow to the team, it's a catastrophic blow. I suddenly remembered something, that guy would say that the beauty of pursuit games was in the betrayals.

However when I tried to be like Hong Chul, I had fans find me on SNS just to berate. I got a ton of insults recently thanks to Jun Ha's Show Me the Money incident. Hahaha. However, someone really does need to play this role. Seriously. To be honest, who would have ever imagined that two different broadcasters would collaborate together? Of course, it was only done because of how open minded TEO PD is and how he wanted to guard me. (LB - The line is a bit vague but this seems right) However one thing is certain, Infinity Challenge isn't a program I continue working on for the sake of improving my image and to get lavished with praises. It's a program where I have to somehow create something within a week to meet everyone's expectations and entertain them. I need to do whatever I can to accomplish this, even if it means I get insulted for it.

►Was Jung Jun Ha truly angry about Show Me the Money?

"He was really angry, hahaha. He was telling me "Why are you making me into a laughing stock, why are you being so cruel to me." So I told him, "Hey, I didn't say you had to rap, I just wanted you to stand in line." Even though I told him that, he still got extremely angry. However do you think we wouldn't

understand each other's true feelings? We had a drink together and hugged each other, then I told him "I love you." haha.

► **There was also a lot of talk about that heart warming scene with Gil, who was there as a judge**

"I pretended to not see him when I was on-location. Once the recording was finished, I had a smoke with him. I told him "I hope you do well here, show them how amazing you are. Shock them with your music. This is your comeback, so no matter what you do, I hope you will stir up a scene as LeeSsang's Gil. He probably has a lot on his mind as well, having to work with such young kids.

► **Noh Hong Chul, even if he gets criticized for it, isn't it time for him to return to IC and face that criticism head on?**

"That's exactly what I want to say. That's what I want to ask Hong Chul as well. However, let's think about this for a second. Hong Chul was once someone that was loved by others. That love was so great that the eventual betrayal was also felt deeply. He would know this better than anyone else. Hmm....still when I met Gil recently, I started to draw this picture in my head. How great would it be if we all gathered again.

► **I can tell that you long for the days when the members return**

"Infinity Challenge isn't something you can do just because you wish for it. It's also not something you can quit because you want to. We are not the owners of IC anymore, it belongs to the people. "Hey! You guys are getting boring, stop it now" If that is what they tell us then that is when we stop. Because of that, our writers are working themselves to death. This isn't how someone that

graduated from a prestigious university/college should be living. They are doing hard labor. They have turned into zombies, their faces in particular. When we have a lot to shoot, we would work every day of the week.

►**Do you sometimes think about leaving the show?**

"Leave the show? I would die then. How could I rip out my own heart? A Haha that has left "Infinity Challenge" might as well just be dog scraps. It's not just me, all the IC members think the same as well. Kobe Bryant had this to say when he retired from NBA. "I still have the same passion as I used to but my body won't move as I wish of it." As long as I don't get to that stage, what reason would there be to quit?

Yet there is another scenario. Nowadays, the staff won't burst out into laughter all that easily. In the past, Myung Soo would just brush his hair away, or Jae Suk would take his glasses off and the staff would be rolling around in laughter. Just like the staff, our viewers are also becoming more discerning, at the same time we are getting old and on top of that, we can't make sexual jokes or social commentary on national TV. We also can't resort to crudeness for laughs. We have to remain well-mannered. However the standard for comedy continues to increase....some days I wish there was 15 copies of Yoo Jae Suk and 30 copies of Park Myung Soo.

I am very much aware of our fans' expectations. It drives me absolutely mad with guilt if I can't meet their expectations. Because of that, I dive into anything that I can do. All the IC members right now are taking extreme risks. If someone tells us to dance naked for laughs, then we wouldn't even think about it for 0.1 secs. Jae Suk, Myung Soo and everyone else would take their clothes off. Sorry for that image.



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▶Haha and Yoo Jae Suk are on both “Running Man” and “Infinity Challenge.”
You sometimes get this awkward feel, sort of feels like you are on the board of directors for both Samsung and LG

"Hahaha. That makes feel a bit guilty. It's true. Even I get confused sometimes. To be honest, it's tough. I need to approach this sincerely but there are times where I would be respecting Jae Suk on one program and then be fighting him on the other. At first, I tried to differentiate myself on the different programs but that started to feel strange. Eventually I got rid of that “forced” character and just went with the flow. Just this week alone, I've seen Jae Suk 5 times, hahaha.

▶There is way too many impressive tales about Yoo Jae Suk. Does he really not have any faults?

"Hahaha. It drives me crazy. There really REALLY is nothing to say. He is perfect. One day, the Running Man PD asked me“Can't you tell me just one? Just tell me one fault or problem with him,” so I thought about it carefully but I really couldn't think of any. Ah! He does have one flaw, he is ugly. But even that is disappearing, don't you think he is looking more handsome recently?

It's the "Kim Bum Soo Effect." Do you think there will ever be someone that is as ugly as Kim Bum Soo? Still he appears handsome because he is such a great singer. It's a similar effect to that, Yoo Jae Suk's biggest flaw is that he is amazingly ugly but lately you could even call him sexy. Weird.

►**You've observed him for 10 years, you can't think of a single one?**

"Just a moment...um....there is one thing....It's that he is perfect. That is his flaw. Frankly, when you work with people it's not uncommon to make mistakes and have some faults right? But when we have recordings, he would be the very first one there. It's tough. Haha

►**On the other hand, could you tell us some moving stories involving Park Myung Soo?**

"Do you know this? Myung Soo hates it when positive stories about him become well known. He says it's because it affects his charm and weakens his character. The Park Myung Soo I know can be described as being a "young teenage girl." He is an extremely kind and delicate person. That's why lately he has been hurt quite deeply. Myung Soo has also worked full pelt without a single day's rest. He is now 47 years old, just shy of a full blown 50 year old elder. In my opinion, he is giving it his absolute all given his age and stamina.

►**Being frank here, Kwang Hee needs to leave for national service soon. It feels like there is a need to introduce new members.**

"To be honest, I have been begging the staff to please bring in some new members no matter what it takes. Frankly, for the last 10 years, I have never told TEO PD about what I wanted. It was only recently where I asked him for

the first time, almost in tears. It's just too tough, please bring in some new members. I heard from him later that he was quite shocked by it. "To think I would hear something like that from Haha, the problem must really be quite severe."



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[Haha's Tipsy Interview③] "TEO PD really is Alpha Go. He is a cold hearted genius"

▶What do you think about Kim Tae Ho PD?

He is a true Alpha Go. He's wise, a genius, composed and calm. When the incident with Hong Chul occurred I called him, "Hey! Hey! Hong Chul! What do we do about Hong Chul!" Yet he calmly said "Yeah well~ We just have to work harder from here on." It's shocking and frightening isn't it? This job is everything to him. He would never accept gifts/kickbacks from any company officials. In loose terms, you don't have a snowball's chance in hell. But instead he is fair, since he will give anyone a chance. Even when selecting the

music video that will play after the program ends, he will select them in the order they arrived on his desk. He is completely and utterly fair."

►**During the Sixth Man special, there must have been candidates that the members were each interested in**

"At the time, the members swore in blood while in the waiting rooms. Until the day that the coffin lids closes over us, we shall remain oblivious to who picked who. Let's not even try to find out."

►**Lately it seems like Kwang Hee is having a very hard time, not being able to be funny.**

"Among ourselves, we call Kwang Hee the "sand bag." It must be extremely tough on him and yet he puts on bright smile. He is withstanding this through sheer will power. If it was me, I would have already gone crazy. When you watch someone hit a sandbag, they would pound it like crazy but eventually they would get exhausted and end up hugging the sandbag. That's what is going to happen here. It's just that I hope that happens as soon as possible rather than JUST before he leaves for national service.

►**What kind of advice would you give him.**

"Hey! Don't worry too much about what others are thinking about you, you're doing great!" This is all I want to tell him. I can tell that Kwang Hee is constantly preplanning things in his head. I think he is reading the netizen comments but if he does that then it's just going to restrict his abilities. I find that rather sad. He is the type of guy that is funny when he's doing stuff without putting any thought into it."



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▶Let's talk about music now. Listening to Haha's old songs, it felt like the songs were more from the perspective of a joyous entertainer rather than the work of serious musician.

"Yep that's right. I accept that. I must lack confidence. But it's different this time. Please watch me this time! See how much I love music and how much I love reggae!

▶It doesn't seem like the effort you put into developing your music was relayed to the public

"That's right. I had nothing to show for it, no achievements. That's why this time I plan to take it slow and steady. I plan to work just like an indie musician. I'm not going to worry about the music rankings, I will keep working with reggae style since that is what I want do most and then get acknowledged as a reggae musician through my own abilities.

►Why does it have to be reggae

"I'll be 100% completely honest here. I started off as a hip hop artist, then moved on to dance pop as well but I loved reggae the moment I heard it. It felt like I finally found my match, like I was finally in my elements. However I didn't realize that my paradise was filled with thorns. It's not a popular genre but it's just like natto/cheonggukjang. It's tough at first but once you fall in love with it, there is just no way out. Your life ends up revolving around reggae. My job is to show everyone that Haha really loves reggae, he is actually sincere when it comes to reggae. Rather than asking everyone to love reggae I want to make them fall in love with reggae and for that I just need to shut up and give it my all.

►There has been some complaints that Haha was just riding on the coattails of Skull.

"That's right. One time a certain fan told me that "I know that you love reggae but can you please set Skull free?" They said that Skull's musical talents were being ruined because of me. Rather than becoming angry at that, I actually ended up agreeing with them. In that sense, it's true that I'm just riding on his coattails. Why is that you may ask? It's because Skull is the God of Reggae. I needed him. It's just that, I'm not just riding on his coattails. I'm also being sincere about the music while continuing to love reggae.

►Please tell us about the work you've done this time around

"It took 2 years to get Bob Marley's son, Stephen Marley, to agree to feature for us. You could have a whole stack of cash and it would still be hard to work with the Marley family. You could be a top musician in the U.S. and it still wouldn't be a sure thing. But we continued to convince him over time and I

think he was touched by us. Well to be honest, it might have been that he was moved by Skull. I actually told Skull, "They acknowledge your talents, so if it's my lack of talent which is concerning them then I will leave this project." I can say this because one day I too will become a musician that can stand proudly. But at the time Skull told me "I absolutely must do this with you." Frankly, there is a lot of people that don't know who Stephen Marley is, for those people you can think of him as the Jay Z of the Reggae world. We pestered him like crazy, worked with him and then flew to his country to shoot our music video. It was a real honor.

▶What do you think is the biggest misunderstanding people have about you?

"I definitely have a childish and flippant attitude but that's not all that I am. I am sincerely thinking about my own life, I am a good friend for others and I am father and husband that knows how to love others. I'm not very smart you see? So I actually don't know how to show my other sides to improve my image. If I get the chance, I will try my best to prove to people that "Haha is someone that deserves to be loved by the public," whether that be on Infinity Challenge, Running Man or elsewhere.

▶How is your married life like?

"It is terrifyingly pleasing. We've not had a single fight. It's usually just me getting scolded. Usually I would get scolded about drinking. Just yesterday as well, I was up drinking with friends and Byul till 2AM. Eventually I got scolded about my drinking. Byul might think we are having a even fight but honestly it's just me getting lectured.

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