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Variety and Gold House Reveal 2026 API Up Next in Entertainment List

The annual selection highlights eight trailblazing Asian and Pacific Islander talents reshaping the industry, from "Bridgerton" star Yerin Ha to "Heated Rivalry" breakout Hudson Williams.

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Variety (<https://variety.com/lists/variety-gold-house-8-api-up-next-in-entertainment-2026/yerin-ha/>) has unveiled its 2026 “8 API Up Next in Entertainment” list. Produced in partnership with **Gold House** (<https://www.weareresonate.com/tag/gold-house/>), the selection identifies rising Asian and Pacific Islander leaders across acting, directing, and executive roles. The cohort reflects a global shift in entertainment, where domestic success often translates into immediate international stardom.

Jazz Tangcay, Variety’s senior artisans editor, noted that the selection process was particularly competitive this year. The list aims to champion “trailblazers whose vision and talent are making waves and opening doors.” Tiffany Chao of Gold House added that these individuals are “reshaping how our community is seen” by bringing personal perspectives to mainstream projects.

The New Faces of Global Drama

Yerin Ha (<https://www.weareresonate.com/tag/yerin-ha/>), the Australian actress who captivated audiences as Sophie Baek in the latest season of “Bridgerton,” leads the group. Her role as the romantic lead in the Netflix hit placed her at the centre of a massive cultural



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phenomenon. Ha recently moved to the stage, starring in Jean Genet's "The Maids" at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn. She advises her younger self to stop striving for perfection: "It's actually about finding the imperfections, and that's what makes you, you."



Heated Rivalry – Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander in episode 101 of *Heated Rivalry*. Cr. Sabrina Lantos © 2025

Hudson Williams (<https://www.weareresonate.com/tag/hudson-williams/>) has experienced a similarly meteoric rise. Since the debut of the hockey romance "**Heated Rivalry** (<https://www.weareresonate.com/tag/heated-rivalry/>)" in late 2025, Williams has become one of the industry's most watched actors. He is currently exploring his directing voice through a collection of short films titled "Runaways." His career philosophy is grounded in literature, specifically Victor Hugo, suggesting that one should "try to love souls" rather than just appearances.

Avantika Vandanapu (<https://www.weareresonate.com/tag/avantika-vandanapu/>) and **Ji-young Yoo** (<https://www.weareresonate.com/tag/ji-young-yoo/>) are also expanding their reach. Vandanapu, a classically trained dancer, recently starred in the action-thriller "Pretty Lethal" and will soon appear in Mindy Kaling's "Not Suitable for Work." Yoo, meanwhile, underwent rigorous vocal and dance training for her role in "K-Pop Superstar," a film that explores the televised competition circuit in South Korea.

The Power Players Behind the Scenes

The list also acknowledges those steering the business of entertainment. **Kevin Lin** (<https://www.weareresonate.com/tag/kevin-lin/>), an agent and co-head of CAA's cultural business strategy group, has become a key figure in spotting ambitious storytellers. Lin signed "Past Lives" creator Celine Song before she had ever written a screenplay and recently brought Hudson Williams into the CAA fold. His mission is to amplify underrepresented voices through initiatives like CAA Amplify.

At Lionsgate, **Courtney Mock** (<https://www.weareresonate.com/tag/courtney-mock/>) serves as senior VP of scripted television development. She has overseen successes such as "Ghosts" and is currently developing the adult animated "Twilight" series, "Midnight Sun," alongside an English-language adaptation of Park Chan-wook's "Oldboy."



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Read more: 'Bridgerton' Season 4 Cast Discuss Asian Representation at MilkTea Event (<https://www.weareresonate.com/2026/03/bridgerton-season-4-cast-discuss-asian-representation-at-milktea-event/>)

Januel Mercado (<https://www.weareresonate.com/tag/januel-mercado/>) is making his directorial debut with Dreamworks Animation's "Forgotten Island," a project he describes as an honour to his Filipino heritage. Meanwhile, **Frankie Yaptinchay** (<https://www.weareresonate.com/tag/frankie-yaptinchay/>) is leading Amazon Music's K-pop strategy. A former musician, Yaptinchay has been instrumental in mainstreaming Asian artists, including a recent high-profile performance by Aespa during Thursday Night Football.

Influences and Legacies

The honorees cite a diverse range of inspirations, from Steven Spielberg and Akari Kurosawa to Beyoncé and Michelle Kwan. This year's list underscores a common theme: the importance of community. Whether through directing, acting, or executive leadership, these eight individuals are ensuring that Asian and Pacific Islander stories are no longer treated as niche, but as essential components of the global entertainment landscape.

Author



Jun Kit Man

Jun is a former News producer and reporter with extensive experience covering major global events. In recent years, Jun has turned his focus to empowering the East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) diaspora. His guest appearance on BBC Stories' "Meet the kids who grew up in Chinese Takeaways" highlights his personal connection to the community. As the founder of Resonate, he provides a platform for young ESEA creatives to showcase their talents globally.

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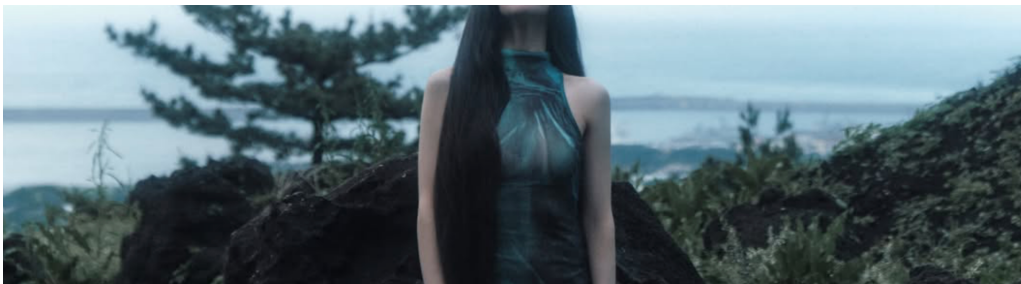
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