

Around 6:24 pm in a dark, rainy night in front of the Vancouver Art Gallery, two girls with no umbrellas clutch their coats on a 6-degree weather while running towards the entrance. "Sorry, we're late! I couldn't find my wallet," says Ricci Pamintuan, who is wearing a black choker, grey top, black furry coat, baggy "mom" jeans and black booties. She recently re-dyed and toned her hair back to blonde, to which her makeup accentuates as she rocks a mauve lipstick. She heads inside the gallery as the second girl, Cassie Masangkay, follows. Cassie takes out her Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH4 camera and scans the area quickly. She is wearing a suede, grey coat, black jeans and pointy, maroon booties. After paying the entrance fees, the two immediately start looking for areas that they can take pictures in. The gallery is packed with people as it was a Tuesday night: entrance fees were by donation. Swift movements and quick shots suggest that they are both here to film, to work. The two take turns photographing each other, while also making sure that they are just above the boundary line: close enough to have a nice photo but far enough to not touch and damage the art. A few people notice the duo and one female approaches them, asking to have a picture taken.

Cassandra "Cassie" Masangkay and Ricci Pamintuan, known as ToThe9s, are a Vancouver based content creator duo best known for their minimalist style and cinematic videos. Their videos can be found on the fashion, beauty and lifestyle section of YouTube. They started their YouTube channel Fall of 2013, but what started off as a fun hobby and a way to showcase the world their style, the duo found themselves excited to do more as they start gaining followers and feedback from other YouTubers just from their first video. Fairly new to the industry, these two 21-year-olds have already garnered a solid fan base with less than half a million subscribers on

their YouTube channel, @wearetothe9s, and 310K followers on their personal and official duo accounts on Instagram combined, in a span of three years.

According to an article by the San Francisco Chronicle last April 2016, it seems that new creators have a tougher time standing out now in Youtube as it grows. With more content on YouTube, brands get their pick of creators, causing some video bloggers to look for niche categories. Most Youtubers who started out in 2010 and earlier easily became a success, as there was not a lot of content created yet especially in the area of vlogging, while those who are just starting out now need to find ways to stand out from over a million other content creators. Cassie and Ricci are lucky enough to have been interviewed by Oak+Fort, along with other brands and sponsors. Despite the competition, ToThe9s are one of the standouts, as they are getting their name known more rapidly than others.

Although they are best known for their minimalist style, they agree that they have an alter-ego, which is street-style. “We like to experiment with our outfits and try not to tell each other what we’re wearing on the day we’re supposed to be filming,” says Ricci. Although ToThe9s film and collaborate with other photographers, their videos are all edited by Cassie. She describes the videos as cinematic, with minimal edits and jump-cuts, and also high quality but not too saturated. Ricci does not mind letting Cassie edit the videos as she knows that Cassie is very particular with what she wants and that “she has OCD”. They agree that the environment also plays a big role when making videos. Perhaps this is one secret to their success; what sets them apart from the pool of other content creators finding a way to stand out. The goal of their videos is to translate fashion to a way that's expressed differently than just standing outside the

environment. They like to keep their videos organic, and they make sure that what they see themselves wearing or what is said and shown in their videos is what appeals to them. “Honesty is key because people go to YouTube for honest advice,” says Ricci.

With the rising number of people interested in having unconventional jobs to have a spot in the celebrity world of social media, YouTube along with a variety of investors have been paying content creators to strategically advertise their own products through each video. The sponsors vary from fashion brands such as Calvin Klein and Triangle, to gaming industries such as Nintendo. YouTube started sharing ad revenue with its video creators only nine years ago. The average content creator now makes at least \$18 per 1,000 views through YouTube, with additional pay from sponsors. Successful YouTubers such as PewDiePie, who gain at least a minimum of 10,000,000 views per gaming video, have quit their day jobs and are relying solely on this industry for income. PewDiePie, whose real name is Felix Kjellberg, was ranked as the highest paid YouTuber in 2015 by Forbes with a current net worth of US \$61 million.

Although ToThe9s are not yet at that point where they are making millions per video, the duo have been able to save up enough from what they've been paid for to travel across LA, collaborate with other content creators and also attend the 6th annual VidCon event last June. “Everyone makes different amounts of money, in different ways,” says Cassie. The duo said that they didn't start making money off of videos at first, and that their first \$1,000 deal came March 2014 from Alta. They also claim that they do not have a fixed rate and mostly rely on ad revenue and sponsorships. Their earnings range from \$1,000-\$40,000 per video, depending on who

sponsors them. However, they added that not every video they make are sponsored. “The bigger the brands, the bigger the money,” says Cassie. In their first years, the duo first split their earnings 60/40 because Cassie edits the videos but have recently agreed on splitting it equally (50/50). The duo are still living in their parents’ homes but “[they] can live on their own now if [they] want to,” says Cassie. “We’re making enough right now but because of the standard living conditions here in Vancouver, it’s just not practical,” she continues.

Although there are benefits such as being able to showcase your hobby and passion for the whole world to see while making money out of it, there are risks that need to be addressed as well. ToThe9s share a conflict they’ve been having with StyleHaul for over 3 years, with hopes that new content creators will become more aware of how sponsors and companies can take advantage of them. 3 years ago, StyleHaul asks the duo to sign a contract stating that they will help their channel grow in exchange for 30% of the ad revenue. Considering how StyleHaul is a big company and is well-known, the duo did not hesitate to sign a 2-year contract with them. The duo express their dismay, saying that “StyleHaul did absolutely nothing to help us with the channel,” except for the one time they were sponsored to model a pair of sunglasses from Sunglass Hut. The duo found out after that they only received the offer because their contract with StyleHaul was expiring at that time, and that it was their way of asking the duo to renew their contract for another 2 years. In their willingness to give the company another chance, they accepted to renew the contract, but was once again disappointed with the lack of support from the company. “Stuck” with StyleHaul for another 2 years and are learning from their mistake, Cassie warns new content creators to “be more careful of who they sign for.”

After a recent trip to LA and Seattle earlier this year, to which ToThe9s attended VidCon and VloggerFair, the duo says that they both have learned a lot more about what goes on in the industry, business wise. VidCon is an annual convention gathering of widespread talent found in social media, which was the perfect place to know more about what goes on behind Youtube. Organized and created 6 years ago by John Green, author of the international bestseller “The Fault in Our Stars”, together with his brother Hank, VidCon is a conference where creators, bloggers, the community of subscribers and anyone who watches Youtube come together in one place. VloggerFair was a much smaller event, and it focused more on the core needs of creators and industry interested in vloggers. Through meeting and collaborating with other content creators, the duo learned more about the “legal stuff and business behind the scenes that no one sees”. This experience allowed them to know more about their worth when negotiating with different sponsors and the importance of having an attorney, in case another issue similar to their StyleHaul experience happens again. “This is why meeting with other content creators is so important,” says Ricci. “There are just so many things that we still need to learn,” says Cassie. Feeling determined and with both of their families fully supporting them, the duo recently decided to “take it to the next level” and be full time content creators. Although Ricci was hesitant in the beginning, she has decided to quit her job as a healthcare assistant, while Cassie is only taking one course in the Education program at Simon Fraser University, in order to fully focus on making videos. They have been content creators for 3 years but have just recently opened a business account earlier this year.

Although they have quite a following on social media, Cassie and Ricci both believe that they are just like any normal person here in Vancouver. They do not hesitate when someone asks to have their picture taken, but Ricci admits that it was weird at first, that “people actually recognize them”. Last June 2015, the two decided to have a pop-up shop and a “meet & greet” in Chinatown, Vancouver. They sold used clothes, accessories, handbags and shoes to which they gave all proceeds to their local church. Recalling what happened, they mentioned that 2 hours before their store opens, a line up, which extended for at least 2 blocks, had already formed outside. Although the shop only lasted for a day, the two said that they did not expect to have so much support in the community. Both are also youth leaders at Rock Generation Church, and say they spend most of their time with the youth and in meetings when not filming. Rock Generation Church recently had a Youth Open House and a few people said they came because of ToThe9s. Ebba, a recent attendee who came because she saw the event through Ricci’s Snapchat, said that she was really excited at first and then saw that the two seemed very normal. “They’re very humble,” she says.

Although ToThe9s have been working hard to be recognized in the fashion industry, with their own dreams of having their own clothing line and store, the two have remained humble and have kept in mind any other risks or conflicts that can happen in the future. For future prospects, they are taking things one step at a time. For videos, they said we can look forward to more travel vlogs and collaborations. ToThe9s, along with fellow friend and YouTuber Ciara DeGuzman, @loveciararose, claims “that monetary gain is not what defines being content creators, but rather

being able to share and/or inspire others- whether that is with a fashion dilemma or instilling confidence within themselves.”

After an exhausting day of filming in the Vancouver Art Gallery in Downtown, Vancouver, the two dine out after in OSushi which was less than 5 blocks away. They head home around 10pm, from Downtown all the way to Burnaby, with Cassie still managing to download a video, “Seattle Outfits,” around midnight.