

'Keyboard Cat' phenomenon spreads on Web, TV

May 22 2009, By JAKE COYLE , AP Entertainment Writer

(AP) -- A new Internet phenomenon has drawn the interest of millions - including Stephen Colbert.

One of the most popular current online crazes is something called "Play Him Off, Keyboard Cat," a user-generated video meme.

The formula is a simple. A clip is played of a pratfall or some unfortunate, self-inflicted accident. This is immediately followed by (always the same) old clip of a cat playing an upbeat tune on a keyboard.

The keyboard cat is, in a way, the smiling face of fate, perpetually making light of silly human failures. It's not stupid pet tricks, it's stupid people tricks. Like the old vaudeville hook, the keyboard cat will play you off the stage.

The phenomenon was started by Brad O'Farrell, a 22-year-old syndication manager for the video Web site MyDamnChannel.com. In February, he uploaded the first video: a clip of someone falling down an escalator, promptly "played off" by the taunting keyboard cat.

The video has spawned hundreds of copycats that have collectively been watched by millions. One shows a commentator on Fox News passing out on screen; another features a failed marriage proposal.

"I did kind of try to make it a video that other people could repeat easily," said O'Farrell. "The original clip of the cat playing the keyboard,

I was already sending to people ... following bad news."

The trend even jumped to "The Daily Show" recently. While Jon Stewart did the "toss" to "The Colbert Report," Colbert worried he would make a mistake and be mocked by the keyboard cat. Sure enough, Colbert stumbled over a line and the keyboard cat gave him the hook.

"Every time it gets to a larger media outlet, I assume that's the biggest one that's going to happen," said O'Farrell.

O'Farrell made the video with the permission of Charlie Schmidt, who created the original keyboard cat video two decades ago. O'Farrell links his video to Schmidt's site to help Schmidt benefit from all the traffic.

Schmidt, a performance artist, made the [video](#) by manipulating the shoulders of his cat, Fatso, so his paws touched the keyboard. Fatso may be long dead, but he's having the last laugh.

On the Net:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/BradOFarrell>

<http://www.charlieschmidt.com>

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