

Entertainment: Music

Dana Leong

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Innovative, eclectic, and superb are just a few words to describe the amazing musical concoctions that New York musician, Dana Leong, creates. At only the age of 28, his music has caught the attention of music lovers and music professionals alike. He has been able to captivate an assortment of music genres and skillfully blend them together.

With such talent, it's no wonder that he has received worldwide attention, leading him to many opportunities that only a few can obtain. He has performed and composed music with an array of top musicians, including the 2006 Grammy-nominated jazz chamber trio led by Paquito D'Rivera, the 2007 Grammy-nominated Dafnis Prieto Absolute Quintet, Ray Charles, Kanye West, Yoko Ono, and many others. He has even filled in for award winning cellist, Yo-Yo Ma, many times for performances.

*And, his noted talents have also led him to a few appearances on television shows and in movies, such as *The Terminal*, *August Rush*, and *Law & Order*.*

*In addition to being a solo artist, he heads his own band, *The Dana Leong Band*. The band similarly combines an eclectic arrangement of music genres, which includes electronic hip-hop, jazz funk rhythms, and rock. With a diverse musical sound, it's no wonder that in 2007, his band was selected from many nationwide applicants to represent America in the "Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad" program. The U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs along with Jazz at Lincoln Center sponsors the program and selects an applicant to represent America overseas, to help showcase the musical assortment that exists in the United States. The band selected Southeast Asia as their destination, having a sold out tour there.*

And, to date, Dana has released two solo albums, the latest being "Anthems of Life."

Asiance had the chance to interview Dana, to talk about his recent tour in Southeast Asia, thoughts about his career, "Anthems of Life," and everything else in between.

ASIANCE: At the age of 28, you've accomplished so much as a musician: you're a professional cellist, trombone player, music composer/producer, you work both as a solo artist and as the bandleader of your own band, you have been selected as a Jazz Ambassador by the Lincoln Center and the U.S. State Department, released two compelling and highly praised albums, and have worked with many top musicians of different music genres. How has all the success and recognition you've gained impacted your life? At times does the success feel surreal to you?

DANA: All of my achievements show me that it can potentially never end. The old saying "mo' money, mo problems" is starting to make sense to me. No one ever said to me, "Go do music because you're going to get rich!" However, I just see that the more I work, the more I have to invest in maintaining and growing my business life. Success to me is not a state, but instead about the constant adrenaline filled journey.



ASIANCE: A few months back the Dana Leong Band recently traveled and performed throughout Southeast Asia as part of "The Rhythm Road" program. Can you talk briefly about your experience? What was the most memorable part of the trip that meant a lot to you?

DANA: "The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad" program is a fantastic one which is very true to it's mission to bring American music and culture to areas with limited access. I love meeting inspired students and the best part? Of course the shows, the shows, the shows!

ASIANCE: I see on your itinerary you perform a lot in New York. But, for people who live outside of New York, will they be able to see you perform in their area anytime soon?

DANA: Sure, we are constantly looking for ways to expand our musical 'sphere of influence'. I love touring and encourage people to get on my website and Myspace to send us thoughts from all over the earth.

ASIANCE: You recently released "Anthems of Life" in November of last year. Briefly, what are your post-production thoughts on the album? In a few words, how would you describe the album?

DANA: Sit back and take a hot funk injection from a true to life storybook of real LIVE instruments, grand anthemic songs, and slick rhymes. Remember when artists used to make albums that told a story? Remember when CDs used to have more than 1-2 good singles? This one's got what you need, I promise!

ASIANCE: What projects have you been working on and/or involved with?

DANA: In addition to touring with the LIVE version of the "Anthems of Life" album, I am always in my NYC recording studio as much as possible. I started a new project recently called "Life After Dark" which has 2 missions: 1) Bring wider recognition to deserving artists (mostly NYC based) and 2) place artists in collaborative situations that you wouldn't normally see them in. With this project I get to put together dream teams on a regular basis, and document the whole thing in video podcast and artist on artist interview formats. Look out for www.LifeAfterDark.us very soon.

ASIANCE: I recently read a blog post on your Myspace, which talked about your reaction to a recording company who decided to pass on signing you with them. It's so amazing to see how cool, collect and, mostly, how positive you reacted to

that situation. Can you talk a little bit about your search to get signed on to a label and your thoughts about the process?

DANA: With the state of the recorded music business being as unpredictable as it is, many are stepping up to make predictions and criticisms but few are taking responsibility into their own hands. Artists have got to take a step back and think more about producing more GREAT art, and less about mediocrity and mass numbers. The only reason the record industry ever boomed in the first place is because artists started a movement and business people followed. As for the lesson in humility, if hip-hop's most self-praising figure can humble himself in the name of the art form, you bet I can!

ASIANCE: So, let's talk a little bit about music – your music, actually. Your music being very eclectic, if someone asked you to describe your music to him or her very briefly, what would be your answer?

DANA: My music is like the ocean. It can work in any direction you want, whether you want to admire from a far, float on top, or wrestle with Mother Nature's backhand. It's a very personal blend of electro jazz that has a wide dynamic range of all of my favorites. Most importantly it is geared to be inviting to all, with moments of beauty, force and volume, and plenty of groove.

ASIANCE: What does music mean to you?

DANA: Music to me is an ever increasingly important break from reality. The longer we live (the older we get) the more that piles up that we need a break away from. Whether you're center stage or way up in the cheap seats, you feel what I'm saying?

ASIANCE: Okay, now on to a question that some ladies out there are dying (okay, maybe not dying but are curious) to know the answer to. You're intelligent and talented, so down-to-earth, and are pretty darn cute. Do you have a special lady in your life yet? If not, with such a busy schedule, is there any time in your life right now for dating?

DANA: I'm not married yet, but someday.... I like dates just for the storybook tales that I can share with close friends down the line. For now I'll say I'm thankful that I know when it feels "right."

ASIANCE: What do you see yourself doing in the next few years?

DANA: Taking care of business. I'm finding now that any shortcuts I've taken in the past are coming back now in terms of ways I've cut budgets or lived vicariously. Now it's just time to continue sewing up those loose ends and upgrading my game plan. I'll definitely be traveling and performing still but on my own agenda.