

Interview with musician Dana Leong

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*One could never accuse Dana Leong of laziness. The ever-busy cellist/trombonist is preparing for the self-titled debut CD release of **Milk & Jade**; he's recording, performing, teaching, and continuing to sing the praises of his adopted hometown, New York. The San Francisco native took time out on Friday morning to do a phone interview before moving into a hyper-productive day.*



Photo: John Walder.

Let's start with the day's schedule-what's on the itinerary?

Well, while I'm talking to you, a pre-taped performance I did last week for [nationally syndicated television show] Better TV with Audra Lowe is on. I played solo cello. Then I have emails to check, speaking on Skype to friends around the world. I'll be on WFMU in New Jersey later on, and after all this I'm going to find time to write some new music.

Can you give us a little background on Milk & Jade?

Milk & Jade is a four piece, live hip-hop/jazz/rock band. It's turned into an all-star collaboration, reaching out to guest artists, with new additions coming along for the ride. I'm very excited about the album. I've been in New York City for over a decade and being in New York gives you the luxury of meeting, picking and choosing artist to work with. Milk & Jade is so dynamic- the richness and harmony of jazz, the energy of a rock band with the styling's of hip-hop. I'm originally from the West Coast, the Bay Area, and grew up in the heyday of hip-hop. The culture was flourishing-the music was great, the videos, the sound. It was a good melting pot of good music and good artists, both on the West and East coasts. We try to bring that element into our music and the live show.

The CD release celebration is taking place at Symphony Space March 5th.

Yes! There is a lot of PR pushing, lots of internet buzz. I'm making appearances on WNYC and the hip-hop radio stations, blogging, the works. We're really proactively promoting *Milk & Jade*. And Symphony Space is right up the street from me, so it's an easy commute home! My resolution for the New Year was to become more of a global citizen. I reconnected with the Museum of the Chinese in the Americas, who will be bringing a large group to Symphony Space. It's awesome to be included in such a fine institution.

What are your touring plans?

We tour and tour and tour. First we hit the road in the States, performing at a lot of arts centers, and colleges. I really believe in the educational component, so we do workshops and master classes at colleges and universities. Because of the high level of technology in the live show, it's an important aspect to share. My cello and trombone are ported in a laptop, altering the sound throughout the show. You know in this golden age of technology, there is a huge boom of things that have revolutionized the very sound of music. With the youth being so technologically savvy I really wan them to see the workings of that in my music. After the States we travel to Europe for a few dates.

Once the tour is done, will there be another Milk & Jade album, or will you work on a different project?

Yes and yes (laughs)! There are lots of plates spinning in the air. I have a studio-Life After Dark- I'm watching that space blossom. There's a documentary about that studio, commissioned by the Apollo Theater. I'm working with a ton of different artists, and continuing to make my own music. Last year I created four of my own albums. They were all completed in one year; each one is different in sound, purpose and ambition. It's important to always move forward and keep working, keep creating.

*The CD release of **Milk & Jade** will take place Friday, March 5th, 8 PM, at Leonard Nimoy Thalia at Symphony Space, 2537 Broadway at 95th Street, New York. Tickets: \$25, \$30 day of show; Members, \$20. Contact Symphony Space at 212.864.5400 or www.symphonyspace.org.*