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Dana Leong isn't your average cellist. Sometimes referred to as a "hi-def Yo-Yo Ma," Dana has revolutionized the classic cello with cutting-edge techniques, jazz and hip-hop textures, and signature improvisations. In a way, Dana's hybrid artistic vision represents the melding of all kinds of music in one unique form. In fact, last year the Dana Leong Band (Dana, Aviv Cohen, Adam Platt, and MC Mtume Gant, aka Core Rhythm) was selected from a national pool of applicants to represent American music overseas as part of The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad program, and they just returned from a sold-out tour throughout Asia. *iaLink* caught up with the jet-setting Dana Leong for an exclusive interview.

iaLink: You recently returned to New York after touring in Asia, Europe, and the American Midwest. What was it like to travel from country to country so quickly? Did you have a chance to sightsee or explore?

Dana Leong: As crazy as it may be, I'm coming up on about two dozen trips to Europe now. I'll come back to that in a second. Being that this past December was my first time in Southeast Asia, I definitely was pumped up to check everything out. The guys (in the band) and I stayed up pretty late, but also got up painstakingly early too. We tried to take in as much local flavor as we could and mostly it happened in a pretty organic fashion where we were met with fantastic local food, people, markets, and HOT SUMMER

WEATHER!! Luckily we had one day off every week to de-compress. However, six weeks, seven countries, sixteen cities, and thirty thousand airline miles later, I touched back down on American soil only to be soon thereafter whisked away for eight more weeks of traveling WEEKENDS ONLY. That's where we come back in on the Euro front. Unfortunately, due to the logistics of my touring schedule this season, there have been a lot of "one-offs," or musical one night stands. Try this:

Weekend # ONE out of EIGHT

Thursday

5am - pack your bags
9am - record movie music in NYC
5pm - car service to JFK
6:30pm - fly to Europe

Friday

8am - run and I mean RUN! for a connecting flight (Paris to Rome, Rome to Sicily)
11:30am - arrive in Italy
3pm - rehearse
8pm – PERFORM

Saturday

6am - fly to NYC
10pm - rehearse in NYC for the next show/trip in ____ (fill in the blank)

As you can imagine, THIS type of traveling is NOT conducive to leisure activity. Thus, the only way to stay "on point" is to ignore the time zones and constantly operate on Eastern Standard Time.

iaLink: What were some of your most memorable gigs from that tour?



Dana Leong: It's difficult to pinpoint the most memorable shows of our '07 SE Asia Tour because they were all very special experiences musically as well as culturally and spiritually. Historically speaking, it is an honor that we were the last performers to play the Saigon Opera House before they renovated from the ground up. The concerts in Cambodia were also really happening because we were placed in two separate large town squares with a full scale stage, sound system, lighting, etc., and a sea of people from all age groups stopped in to feel the groove.

iaLink: Did you discover any interesting destinations that you recommend?

Dana Leong: The day we landed in Vientiane, Laos, some folks told us that *The New York Times* had just listed Laos #1 in "Top 100 destinations for 2008." I can't agree more. Hot hot weather (in December), plenty of scenic undeveloped landscape, a tiny but electric night life, and beautiful friendly people.

iaLink: What do you insist on having with you when touring or traveling?

Dana Leong: The one thing I learn about myself while traveling longer periods of time is what I absolutely need, and what I most definitely do not need. I have learned from old timers that you only really need 1) Any items necessary for your concert (aka your job) & 2) Any items you need for travel. One thing that I use in both of those categories is a laptop.

iaLink: How did you get involved with The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad Program?

Dana Leong: The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad Program hosts a thorough multi-part audition process. After passing through stages involving written statements, sending CDs, and gathering recommendations, we were then invited to perform and interview live against a national pool of bands for the opportunity to represent the USA (musically). Long story short, about one year after starting the application, we hit the road.



iaLink: Where is your favorite place to perform? Where would you like to perform next?

Dana Leong: My favorite places to play are San Francisco, California (where I'm from) and New York City (where I live), where I can play for friends and family. I'm currently working my tail off to make some moves in Japan.

iaLink: Who are some of your musical influences?

Dana Leong: I try to keep my influences nearby. Nowadays it's a dream come true that everyone I'm working with in my life/ career brings positive influence to the picture. Right now the guys in my band (Aviv Cohen, Adam Platt, MC Core Rhythm) are a huge influence on what music I produce and what sounds we are capable of. Today I am a sum of my collected parts, ranging from Early Baroque and orchestral music (Bach, Mozart, Rachmaninoff, Ravel), up to totally electrified productions of many periods (Miles Davis, Bootsy Collins, James Brown, Kanye, early Metallica, Hendrix).

iaLink: What's next for the Dana Leong Band?

Dana Leong: New album, of course! We're already workshopping and lining up pieces for another masterpiece.