A&E Empowerment through Kollaboration

RAY LUO // A&E EDITOR // rluo@media.ucla.edu

David Choi and Kina Grannis perform a press conference for Kollaboration 9. Both will compete for cash prizes at the Shrine Auditorium on February 21.

CHRISTOPHER WU // CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Being Asian has nothing to do with being talented. That's the message that Kollaboration 9, a talent show that celebrates Asian American empowerment through the arts, wants to leave us.

"I just want to be as good a musician I can possibly be, whether it's an Asian American person watching me or any other person watching," said Paul Dateh, a hip-hop violinist who will compete at the Kollaboration stage along with other musicians for some of the $10,000 in prize money.

Dateh was trained classically in the violin for 15 years before enrolling in a jazz improvisation class at USC. Soon, he began playing with a band in clubs, blending his unique style of virtuosic violin-playing with hip-hop. He soon worked with a disc jockey named Inka One on a YouTube video that has been viewed by more than 2.7 million people.

"I have no idea" was Dateh's response when asked how his video's popularity has surprisingly taken off so quickly. His recent success has allayed fears that he might not make it in such a tough industry.

Although his parents were initially concerned that he switched majors from classical music to jazz, Dateh's current success and the launching of his first album, "Be More," has persuaded them to accept his way of pursuing musical identity, Asian or otherwise.

"I just want to be as good a musician as I can possibly be, whether it's an Asian American person watching me or any other person watching."

-Paul Dateh

Dateh has also been writing and singing songs that cross the boundaries between musical styles like R&B and jazz, which reflects how Dateh's own life has been a fusion of Japanese and Caucasian heritage.

"I don't know what to call anything [I do]," noted Dateh on his current mix of musical styles. Dateh refuses to label his music as one particular genre, but instead relies on his current experience and musical influences to direct him where to go.

"I'm still searching for where I am musically," said Dateh. "This album ["Be More"], is the way I am, but in the next album, I may be completely different."

This mixture of musical influences can also be seen in the work of another competitor in Kollaboration, Lilybeth Evardome.

Evardome has been singing in churches and choirs since the age of four. While attending La Sierra University, she sang Mozart's "Exultate Jubilate" with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. She came to Kollaboration after being discovered by producer Roy Choi when she sang at a friend's wedding.

"Singing for me is a side thing," said Evardome, who teaches music to K-12 kids and has a three-year-old of her own.

Evardome brings a patience to her music that comes with years of dealing with "kids with hormones"—a patience that is reflected in her sonorous, full singing style.

Evardome, who is of Filipino heritage, was inspired by Lea Salonga's pioneering role in "Miss Saigon," which opened the door for Asian American singers in theater. But she doesn't think of herself as an Asian artist.

"America looks at who is marketed the most," said Evardome, who attributes the lack of Asian American vocal stars to the perception that Asian Americans haven't found the right avenue yet.

Yet for her, the lack of popular success is not a problem.

"I think I'll always teach," said Evardome, who performs mostly independent gigs on the weekends.

One independent folk artist who is getting a lot of publicity around the Internet is Jane Lui, who will also be performing in Kollaboration 9.

"I have never seeked [sic] out an Asian following," said Lui, who, like other competitors such as singer-songwriter David Choi and singer Kinna Grannis, thinks Kollaboration is a platform for advancing their budding careers.

"It's not like I have this huge Asian pride in me," said Lui, who sees herself as just "a girl who's trying to do music."

All this may sound contradictory to the basic premise of Kollaboration 9: to empower Asian Americans by introducing AAPI talent to a broader audience. But if we look closer, this kind of attitude is the only way to debunk racial stereotypes in the media.

To empower and entertain, it doesn't matter if you're Asian. Your identity may be personal, but your work is universal.

Visit pacificties.org for more info about Kollaboration 9.

jane lui

RAY LUO
A&E EDITOR
rluo@media.ucla.edu

It is as if she refuses to do anything but sing out the ideas in her head. Jane Lui, a San Diego based independent singer and songwriter, plays music that she claims "doesn't belong on the radio." One is often wary that such music would not be worth listening to, but Lui's suave, whispery, yet strong and sultry voice at once disarms the guards that protect one's listening taste. Her quirky personality and creative ideas about music then ransacks the castle, capturing one's undivided attention.

In one YouTube video, Lui refuses to talk, and instead puts up a placard that reads, "I'm not too much of a talker, so I thought I'd write," before wishing everyone a "happy hibernation" in a work simply titled "30 second Animal Migration song." Tapping her chest for rhythm, Lui chants a blues-like melody, giving advice with the phrase "run, Shiny run run rhythm, no one's keeping your soul." The song is Lui's way of telling a friend of hers how to "keep warm" in spite of an unfortunate event in his life.

Lui moved from Hong Kong to the Bay Area before studying music at San Diego State. She is classically trained 0n the piano, and began writing songs five years ago. Lui plays some twenty different instruments, including the glockenspiel, marimba, harmonium, and Indian drum, many of which appear in her first album "Teargirl."

"I had a sound in my head that I wanted," says Lui about her first project. "My [first] songs were attention-getters, not songs that I would write right now because I'm not at that place anymore... but they are still a part of my journey as a songwriter."

Lui wrote those emotional songs based on her own troubles during that difficult year. She says she needed songs desperately to sing, almost like crying out loud.

Lui | Page 18

Lui, from Page 13

"The songs were a collection of stories," says Lui. "Teargirl is the name of the story-book."

To Lui, the life of the artist matches her craft. And when one changes, so does the other. Her own ideas evolve constantly over time.

"We change constantly," says Lui. "Not so much the foundation of our character, but things around us, who we have around us, our outlook on life, what inspires us, ... and the way we interpret the world become different."

That difference can be heard on Lui's next album, Barkentine, a moodier opus that came about from a dream that Lui had. In that dream, she recalled being on a ship asking a future-telling spirit what will happen to her dad. The spirit told her that the coming year will be the hardest year of all, and indeed this is reflected in her own life.

"Firefly," a song from Barkentine, is a mellow, start-and-stop work that best characterizes Lui's album. In it, she invokes fireflies to "light the way," because "it takes time to become the one you never knew." The song is punctuated by repeatedly moody chords as well as well-timed phrases like "it's no more than cold, dear." Lui sings it with a breathless yet sonorous voice, like it's the last song she'll ever sing.

Barkentine contains songs recorded in natural environments like churches, classrooms, and of course, onboard a ship. Lui loves having the mike infront of her in an environment where she can operate naturally.

"The problem with doing a studio album is that it sounds like it's done in a studio," says Lui. "I love space and hearing space."

Always seeking the antimaintream/road less traveled route, Lui has been turning her ideas towards circus music, the type of music that most people "can't help but smile" at. Lui notes that modern circus music like that of Cirque du Soleil contains fusion elements.

"[The circus] has an amazing way of keeping the globe together," says Lui. "They have their own language, ... and I want to know why."

For her listeners, we hope she never stops exploring around music, but continue to sing out her ideas. In her "30 second Animal Migration song" video, Lui shows us a placard that says "Didn't actually think anyone would watch."

We're watching alright. And listening too.