Beat: Entertainment

Pjae Stanley - one of the most enigmatic singers and songwriters in Asia

Pjae Stanley - from rock to soul

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USPA NEWS - Moore than two years ago I had the pleasure to meet Pjae Stanley, one of the most dazzling artists in South East Asia. Talented and popular entertainers like her leave a lasting impression in our hearts and minds. The following interview will let you in on her development in the last two years.

Q: What great things have happened since last we spoke?

Pjae: As you know I came to Phuket to live and work full-time in 2011. Since then I've established some great business partnerships. I have a full, five piece band that I work with for large occasions like New Years Eve and other holiday parties and events, but I mostly work with my trio, which I love. We have the great fortune of having regularly scheduled gigs at two world class resorts on the island. We get to perform in front of people from all over the world and we get to work out new material that we then take to the big band for larger performances.

I also have some wedding planners who hire us on a continuing, ongoing basis for work on the weekends at some marvelous places. I'm known by many of the Food and Beverage Managers, Event Planners, and General Managers at resorts and corporations on the island who contact me to do many of their special events as well. Further, I've been able to attract a booking agent that does so much of the "heavy lifting" for me that mostly all I have to do is show up and sing. It's marvelous!

Q: Aside from your singing, did you learn to play an instrument?

Pjae: We talked about the clarinet that I learned to play in elementary school the last time we spoke. I'm not doing much with that lately, although it did give me a wonderful musical foundation. We also spoke about my learning how to play guitar as an aide to song writing. As it turns out, I'm having a great deal of fun with it. I've got a natural, sycncopated rhythmn that works well with much of our music. In addition, the lead guitar player whom I work with, Colin "Illy" Hill, from Australia, is a very kind and patient creative teacher. He's shown me a number of different styles of playing and easy ways to play barred chords that works well with our music.

I've been able to expand my playing, my enjoyment of the instrument, and the quality of the sounds I can produce over the last two years. It's come about simply by playing live three or four nights a week and of course some instruction from "Illy" and YouTube. One of the reasons I encourage others to practice as much as they can is become with practice the playing becomes second nature to you. Your fingers just learn to move effortlessly across the strings the more you play. When the music became second nature, the songs in turn get to fly of their own accord, go where they need to go.

Q: Are there any famous musicians you admire and if yes, why?

Pjae: I've discovered some great new artists, at least new to me, that I'm having a lot of fun with. Katy Perry, who writes enjoyable songs that are also very uplifting. Nikky Minaj, her music is just so outrageous. Pink just keeps blowing me away with her capacities. John Legend, such a soulful crooner. And an old favorite acoustic crooner that keeps coming back to me, Amos Lee. Beautiful.

Q: Which famous musicians would you say have you learned from?

Pjae: I've learned a lot from the singers I grew up with and that my parents grew up with, Billie Holiday, B.B. King, Gladys, Aretha. I learned to sing with true feelings, to let it all hang out, to be authentic. But I'm learning a lot from the younger crowd too. I love the energetic music of Beyonce' and the turn it back on them style of J.Lo, which shows up in songs like "I Love You Poppi". Again, I admire the uplifting music of Katy Perry and the sheer fun of listening and watching videos from Pink and Nikky Minaj. They've taught me about not only singing music with a message but also about having some fun myself on the way.

Q: Could you describe your first instrument or any other instruments?

Pjae: If I had been asked that question before I would have said the Bb clarinet was my first instrument, without a doubt. But upon reflection now, I have to say it's my voice. Of course it's my voice. It's the first instrument I had for speaking out, speaking up, getting noticed. I was always one of the first people to ask questions in school, to challenge my parents about a perceived injustices, to ask my friends to explain what they were doing or what they were thinking.

When I realized I could sing as well, that same voice allowed me to have a much bigger platform with which to reach a greater number of people. To ask more questions. To get more answers. I use my music, as a solo artist and with my band, to perform at a number of charity events. I've used it to teach life lessons at after school programs for inner city children. I can use it to speak up and out and be heard in a way that touches people, maybe even eventually gets people thinking and doing more in their lives.

Q: What are your fondest musical memories? In your house? In your neighborhood or town?

Pjae: I have memories from my distant past that are meaningful and will be with me always, but I'm building some new memories that are more impactful to me at this stage of my life. My greatest memories now are becoming more personal, more intimate. The songs I choose to sing or write I choose because I either have a personal history with the song or I have an emotion I want to share. I had one man from Australia come up to me after one of our performances to tell me that a song I just sang was a favorite of his wife's father, who had recently passed away.

His wife was sitting in the back of the room, crying. Not in sadness, but in remembrance and joy. This made his wife happy and it's a wonderful, personal memory for me. Another time we sang a version of Amazing Grace to the music of House of the Rising Sun. I learned soon after that a couple listening to the performance had lost their teenage son almost two years prior to the date. Listening to that song brought a healing release for them. It's those moments and memories that are so meaningful and dear to me now.

Q: What made you come to Thailand and settle down in Phuket?

Pjae: I came to Thailand because I was mesmerized by its beauty and tropical allure. I stay because I see it as a sort of incubator of ideas and new, creative alliances. I'm fortunate enough to work with a number of people who are literally jumping off the cliff and taking chances to do things they've always wanted to but never thought they could. I can't honestly say why, or pinpoint the reason it's that way here, I can just point out what is. Certainly my music has exploded since I've been here. But at this point I'm looking at an exit strategy. I think I've done what I came here to do. To confirm to myself that I could create a music business that would support my lifestyle.

Q: Do you attend studio sessions and what would you say makes a good session?

Pjae: I do attend studio sessions. I completed my first album in 2012 and now it's past time to go back into the studio. This time will be a collaboration with several singer/songwriters on the island. It will be an album full of original tunes and in fact, as we speak, I'm thinking it will probably be two albums, because there's just so much material we've written in the last two years.

I'm looking forward to having a successfully creative session. Everyone I've spoken to about the project is excited and has their own measure of professionalism and musical thoughts that I believe will make this an extraorinary album, or two.

Q: What would you tell a young musician to do to get an audience or fan club?

Pjae: As I've said many times in the past, as a young musician you have to just get out there! You need to see and be seen by everyone. No one can hire you or buy your music if they don't know who you are or what you can do. Play your music everywhere you can, give it away, jam with everyone, practice, play, play, play.

In addition to that though, I'd say you need to understand the business of music, which is not unlike most businesses. It's not just about sitting around playing for your friends. It's about putting together a show with your audience in mind, with music they can appreciate. It has to be music that moves you but is not so obscure that your audience can't relate.

Additionally, when you go to work you'll have more than one client for each gig. One client, of course, is the person or venue that hires

you. But the second client is the listening audience who have a very different frame of reference for your performance than the person who's paying you has. You'll need to satisfy both in order to be asked to return. However I can tell you that if your listening audience likes you, most times so will the venue owner or manager.

Do your homework. Talk with venue managers about what they want and expect from the musicians. Check audience reactions when you're out playing music. What songs, that you like as well, get the best audience reactions? Be a professional; on time, ready to perform, dressed appropriately for the venue, respectful of your clients, and musically prepared.

For more information go to: http://pjaestanley.com/
Photo gallery: http://www.ilsegibson.com/pjae-stanley-on-stage.html

Q: Are you working on a project right now? If yes, what is it? What are your plans for the future?

Pjae: As I said I am working on the next album, which is a dual album studio project. I'm also working on taking the music to another level. I'm looking at performing at a few musical festivals outside of Thailand, so we're seeing what it takes to tour with the band. Also we're taking a page from the Nashville musicians' playbook and looking at putting together some 'house concerts', which would be of a more intimate nature. It's exciting to think of where these projects can take me. We´ll see what happens but it's guaranteed that singing and performing live will be a huge part of my future plans.

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