

True Music Comes from Outside the Line

Kollaboration 10 performers share their passion for music

By RAY LUO

One of them wants to use her future psychology degree to teach kids in high school. The other wants to work overseas.

Both are madly passionate about music.

Clara C. and Jason Yang are two musicians who performed at Kollaboration 10, an annual Asian American empowerment-through-entertainment event, taking home the Best Overall and Audience Choice awards.

Clara is a Korean American singer raised in Los Angeles, where she grew up playing the drums, flute, guitar, and even the glockenspiel. These instruments are heard in Clara's YouTube videos, "Hallelujah," "Fireflies," and "Misery Business." At Kollaboration, Clara played the guitar, blew on the harmonica, hit the tambourine, and vocalized her way to the best overall performance with her quirky and infectious original "Off Beat."

Clara's success seems to come from her desire to create music that is not, according to her, "boxed in" as classical music. Her dream wasn't extinguished when she decided to study psychology and education at UC Irvine, but Clara didn't perform in public too often until she started participating in singing contests. Soon she was racking up win after win, including JC Penny's ISA Breakout Artist contest.

One of her passions, however, still remains school.

"Remember those kids in schools who always asked why for everything you say?" Clara asked. "I was one of those kids; I wanted to know why everything happened, why you think that way, why people react to this (and) not that."

In the future, Clara wants to do something she loves for the rest of her life, although the choices vary: it could be music performance, music education, or English education.

"Wherever life takes me, I'll be glad to follow," Clara said.

USC student and electric violinist Jason Yang espouses a similar attitude. Born in New Jersey to Taiwanese parents, Yang played classical violin for 16 years. After seeing the success of Vanessa May, a renowned British violinist, Yang's dad urged his son to take up the electric violin. Now, Yang's work can be seen all over YouTube, including clips of his participation in Adam Lambert's Zodiac Show and his award-winning performance at Kollaboration 10.

And all this coming from a non-music major.

"It's a safer choice really," said Yang. "I've seen so many of my friends finish successfully with a performance degree and find no work; I wanted something more academic that I was still interested in."

Like Clara, Yang didn't think he had a music career in him until a friend of his found a flyer for a corporate gig with Panasonic in Las Vegas that demanded an electric violinist with serious rock chops. Yang took the last audition spot, got the gig, and had the opportunity to work with the Ford motor company and Amway.

Balancing school with his music can often be a challenge.

"I would be getting out of a class Friday morning, getting to the airport, in rehearsal Friday evening and Saturday, perform on Sunday, and get back to class Monday morning," Yang said.

Kollaboration was an opportunity to take

himself to the next level.

"My dream would be to perform and record and tour for as long as I can (support myself)," said Yang. "I wouldn't have to necessarily make hundreds of thousands of dollars like in an office job."

With graduation literally days away and his Kollaboration audience award tucked safely into his back pocket, Yang still finds himself at cross-roads between trying to sustain himself in Los Angeles as an aspiring artist or finding a "normal" job at the expense of forfeiting his violin performance career.

"I'd say (the future) is more terrifying than intriguing," Yang said. "Hopefully, opportunities of epic proportions are still waiting for me in the near future, but for now it's back to being an aspiring artist."

Clara, too, has a similar vision of her post-graduation plans.

"I'm still the same person with the same passions, quirks and character I was born with," Clara said. "In this world of entertainment, I keep myself level-headed (by) remembering that music is first and foremost art, not a mere product that is pumped out to be sold."

For both Clara and Yang, Kollaboration represented something bigger than themselves.

"The talents who shine, whether Asian American or not, are the ones who really believe in their art," said Clara. "They don't do it because of the money or fame; people can smell a phony."

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF ERICH CHEN



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ZACH DEZON

Chung won the grand prize, while Yang won the Audience Choice award at Kollaboration 10

Bodyguards and Assassins

By RAY LUO

The story of the prodigal son is one of the many heroic tales in Teddy Chan's historical drama *Bodyguards and Assassins*, the closing night film at the 2010 Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival.

The film takes place in Hong Kong in 1905, prior to the 1911 revolution in Southern China that eventually topples the Qing dynasty. Yan Xiao-Guo is sent to the city to assassinate Sun Wen, a revolutionary member, on behalf of the empire. In response, business tycoon Li recruits five elite bodyguards to prevent Sun's assassination by the Qing henchmen.

Bodyguards and Assassins boasts an impressive cast, including Donnie Yen, one of the few well-known actors in the film not from Hong Kong, and Mengke Bateer, an ex-NBA player turned martial arts actor who plays Wang Fu-Ming, a giant powerhouse capable of easily crushing stones but also a tofu peddler with a soft heart and simple smile. But it is Nicholas Tse who does the best job of immersing himself in his role, as Li's crippled carriage driver, A Si, the last of the bodyguards to sacrifice himself. Tse's character adds a dimension of humanity to what would otherwise be another martial arts film. When the assassin Yan is ready to strike down Sun's carriage, which is really his master Li's only son in disguise, Tse does the only thing he knows how to do, not by fighting but by love.

Leon Lai, a famous Hong Kong pop star, plays Liu Yu-Bai, a beggar who single-handedly takes on the Qing

army. Though Lai is probably the biggest celebrity in the film, he too transforms himself into an unrecognizable character. Only one word can describe Lai's action sequences in this film: austere. There's no excessive carnage in Liu's scenes, only understated and well-planned movements. Perhaps the simplicity is used to underscore Liu's main theme, that of release from his bondage to a lover from the past.

While the film does a good job of infusing each of the bodyguards with individual characteristics that bespeak their bravery, *Bodyguards and Assassins* lacks credibility at times. Sun's character feels more like a puppet than a saver of a nation. While the fight scenes are spectacular, there are also moments – such as people running into horses and lifting buildings – that leave the viewer feeling incredulous. Even with big budget sets, the film sometimes feels like it takes place in a circus, a world that, despite its glamour, doesn't quite seem real. Donnie Yen and Wang Xue-Qi give less than brilliant performances, which often appear reserved and even forced at times.

Despite the historical inaccuracies of the film, it still serves as a dramatic introduction to a key part of China's history. While it ends on a somewhat subdued note, the journey that the characters undergo makes for the most memorable scenes. Despite the film being five hours long, it doesn't feel too long. On the contrary, you find yourself hoping that the action never ends. *Bodyguards and Assassins* is not a film to be missed.



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