

The Soft Warrior Spreads Her Wings

BY SUSAN SURFTONE

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DILEE is a cross-media artist who began her career writing poetry. Around 2007, as a means to expand her creative expression, she began to set her original poetry to music, adding her adult contemporary vocals, highlighted with a hint of ethereal new age, along with a slight country twang and vibe courtesy of her Virginia upbringing.

Twists and turns through the music business brought her to the much-anticipated release of her first full CD of music later this year, funded through an ambitious Kickstarter campaign launched in late 2016. Crowdfunding campaigns inherently are stressful and Kickstarter ups the tension with its "all or nothing" provision. You either make it to your goal or you don't—with nothing in between.

When I talked to Dilee, we discussed her then ongoing Kickstarter endeavor, and I was struck by her genuinely positive—yet realistic—point of view. She knew reaching her goal was dicey but, even though I had just met her, the woman's upbeat, positive attitude convinced me she would make it, and she did.

Coming from a Chinese and Italian heritage, she explained that her outlook comes from an Eastern influence. "The Eastern part of the world has taught us that we receive back what we put into the world, and how our environment is a direct reflection of our focus and how we live our lives. I've been shown that everything is time and attention. When we enjoy what we are doing, we will always want to give and, when we do our best to be good to everyone, that joy we put out comes back in abundance in addition to inner peace daily."

She did make it clear that her positive attitude, the support of longtime friends and listeners, and the unwavering belief from her husband Jeffrey, got her through the nail-biting Kickstarter campaign. "Stay positive and, if we don't make the goal within that six-week period, then it just isn't time to release this album yet" was the self-talk that kept her

focused forward. Dilee's crowdfunding started in autumn of 2016 and made its goal on Thanksgiving weekend.

With the Kickstarter hurdle behind her, Dilee found the right team to complement the songs she had cowritten with coproducer Nel Jerome.

Some of the material is A cappella, featuring voice production by Grammy Award-nominated artist Armand Hutton and mixed by Grammy-winning producer Bill Hare, known for his work with Pentatonix. In October 2016, Hare heard Dilee perform at a Grammy mixer in San Jose, Calif., and soon she found herself among his impressive client list. "Working with Dilee has been quite enjoyable. She is never afraid to try something different, cross genres, or take things over the edge, and that's always fun for me—no boundaries or boxes," Hare relates.

Hutton, meanwhile, provided some insight into his creative experience with Dilee: "It's been quite an honor to work with [her] on 'Afterglow' and so many of her other songs. Not many people are brave enough to have their songs remixed with only vocals, but it speaks to her willingness to have a fun, fresh, and experimental sound that still touches people and makes them want to move. I'm blessed she allowed me to be myself and help out a bit."

The song was coproduced by Dilee and Robert Xenon. Dilee's new single, "Afterglow (A Cappella)," released by One Essence Records, was in rotation—as of late July—at several top 40 national radio stations with more than a dozen playing the single about two to 15 times per week and climbing.

Upon first listen, you can hear the soft warrior, a term she uses to describe herself, loud and clear in Dilee's strong, confident approach to her vocals more than ably assisted by Hutton. Dilee has been photographed by Harrison Funk, famous for his images of Michael Jackson. The artwork for "Afterglow (A Cappella)" features one of Harrison's photos of

Dilee, which has garnered much approval from her fans.

So, what are the traits of a soft warrior? "Fearlessness in standing up for what's right, which is truth, and protecting the innocent. We can always show kindness while deflecting negativity. That's what it means to show love and compassion."

Dilee has developed strong convictions in the basic goodness of people. She believes that, even in today's cynical world, fierce adherence to personal principles built on truth and kindness never should be abandoned to get ahead. "Growing up in Vienna, Va., since it was so close to D.C., it was way too political of an area for me. I graduated from high school a year early and left home at 17. I've always been way too independent for my own good, but it has taught me a lot about myself—my weaknesses and my needs. It takes true courage to embrace everyone equally, especially those we disagree with, but all lives matter, and I believe kindness returns to us in all forms."

Attractive from a young age, it was suggested by a store manager that Dilee, at 14, should begin to model for Sears. She rejected the idea then and, at 17, she cofounded a reporter interviewing her on the news after she and a friend were chosen from people walking on the beach to help promote a movie when she told him she had no desire to become famous.

At 18, she declined a role in a foreign film and a part in an American film that required a nude scene. She never has regretted her decisions to avoid the limelight at a tender age. "Praise God I didn't do any of these things because I'm convinced I would not have the inner strength, life tools, and confidence I have today—and I'm sure I'd be a totally different person."

Dilee started writing poetry due to a need to express her inner thoughts. A Canadian company published her work and, years later, she realized she had some song lyrics. "The only reason I started creating music was because I was a single parent and would do anything legitimate to help provide for my children; it ended up being therapy for me. Turning my sadness of divorce and heartache, along with the positive drive to keep going with vigor, I had hoped writing and doing whatever it takes I could be a hardworking example for my kids."

As a result of releasing a spoken word album and her first singles, Dilee became a voting member of The Recording Academy. Within the independent Grammy community she was able to make the connections to further her musical career to the point where she is about to release her first fully musical commercial CD, "With Love."

Through an on-line dating site, Dilee met her present husband Jeffrey, and they have been together for seven and a half years, five of those years married. When asked to describe his life with Dilee, Jeffrey remarks, "She really has been the best thing that has



ever happened to me. She is extremely warm, affectionate, funny, and smart. She works hard and will always stand up for what she believes in. She is very spiritual, and that easily comes through [in] her songs. After a long vacation through Europe, upon our return, a friend asked me what was the best part of the trip. I thought for a few moments and it occurred to me: we laughed every day.”

Dilee, whose full name is Diana “Dilee” Maher, also has committed herself to working with charitable organizations, with the goal of improving the lives of women and children who find themselves at risk. She serves on the advisory board for Safe Passage, an organization that gives life tools to traumatized women and children of domestic violence.

In April, she joined the board of directors for the Drive Hope Foundation, a 501(C)3 that puts funds toward making a difference with underprivileged kids. Here she works with cofounder Malina Moye, a Sony-signed artist. The Drive Hope Choir performed with Stevie Wonder in December 2016. In June, with Dilee’s assistance in grant-writing, the nonprofit organization received notice of its first approved monetary grant. “Hope Chats,” as well as performances in Los Angeles and other cities, will help raise funds for at-risk youth. Jeffrey, meanwhile, serves on the board of directors for the “I Have A Dream”

Foundation—Los Angeles, making public service a family endeavor.

As work on the full-length CD continues, the single “Afterglow (A Capella)” finds itself entering the Top 40 Mediabase Activator Chart at No. 89 in late June. While on her way to the studio to record tracks with flutist Joanne Lazzaro, Dilee gives us some insight into her songs:

“‘Afterglow’ is about the superhero in all of us; to save lives rather than attack; be protectors of peace and defenders of the innocent; advocating the motto to never fight or hate anyone.

“‘Lady Fusion’ assures us that, in times of great confusion, by focusing on doing good, standing up for what’s right, and not reacting to the anger of others, we can have a peaceful existence.

“‘Twist Like a Dragon’ tells us that, in this maze of life, our only enemy is our lower self. If we do whatever it takes to remain positive, staying in control of our demons of hate/anger, ego, and greed, with Divine Grace, may we ride our dragon all the way home, as it wards off anything trying to take us off-course.”

Lazzaro adds, “The first thing I noticed [about ‘Twist like A Dragon’] was the power of the lyrics. I immediately thought about a warrior-princess, with her own personal dragon as

her backup. To create a dragon, I started with the Aztec Death Whistle—it makes a scary, howling wind noise, carrying the other-worldly wailing of departed souls. With some studio reverb added, it sounds like a 747 doing a barrel roll in a canyon, loaded with passengers. Combined with an eagle whistle for the dragon’s call, the dragon sound reappears throughout the song, whenever the warrior is in danger.”

Lazzaro also is one more member of the independent Grammy community lending her considerable musical talent to Dilee’s “With Love.” Author and multiple Grammy Award-winning producer Kabir Sehgal is slated to provide the liner notes for “With Love.”

Kori Linae Carothers, an acclaimed contemporary instrumental composer/pianist, joins Dilee on “Coming Home,” a song defining home as where the heart is and from anywhere in the universe, walking the journey of life together, we come home to our sanctuary. She explains, “Diana Dilee’s music is very different: extremely engaging, expressive, and so fun to listen to. She is a professional, down to earth, and I really enjoyed working with her. I think everyone needs Diana’s music in their musical collection.” ★

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