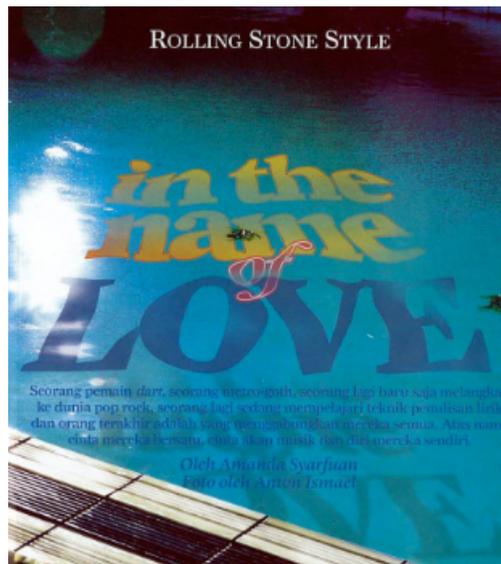


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## *In the Name of Love*



By Amanda Syarfuan

A dart player; a metro-goth; a third person who had just wandered into the world of pop rock; a fourth who was studying the techniques of song-writing; and a fifth who brought them all together. In the name of love they united – and love itself became the guiding principle of their music, and their lives.

Exactly twenty years ago, in 1986, four young schoolboys from Surabaya's Public High School No. 6 decided to form a rock band. They named their group Dewa 19. Armed with big dreams and a name laden with significance [ed. note: Dewa means "god" in Javanese and Sanskrit], they moved slowly forward, not realizing how enormously their decision to form the band would affect their lives in the years to come.

Like many bands in the past, Dewa 19 has not been free of trouble, from personnel changes to gossip and legal difficulties. As the saying goes, 'If something doesn't kill you, it just makes you stronger.' Here in the year 2006, Dewa 19's flag remains firmly planted atop the world of Indonesian music.

*Republic of Love*, Dewa 19's newest album, has just been released by EMI Indonesia. It's reported that the contract for the deal was negotiated directly with EMI Southeast Asia, in Hong Kong. Dewa's decision to abandon their old label was based on a desire to spread their wings internationally. "I never say 'Go international', but rather, 'Go Asia!' Going international is too high an aim for an Indonesian like me," says Dewa 19 front man Ahmad Dhani, tongue in cheek. If any single artist can be said to be the favorite of [Indonesian] journalists, that artist is Ahmad Dhani.

Beneath his arrogance, one recognizes the immense self confidence that accompanies Dhani's smooth answers to journalists' questions. His behavior also radiates confidence in the new artistic creations he's introducing to the public. Although tempted by the phenomenal sales of a couple of recently-formed bands, Dhani claims to remain uninfluenced in his music. To illustrate his point, he offers an interesting analogy. "For example, a chair made by Da Vinci is *art*, while those made by Ligna [a popular brand of furniture] are purely functional, not art. Music that's functional can be called entertainment," he says. "If Dewa chooses to make music that's like Da Vinci's furniture, then it can't be compared to Ligna's product, whose sales will of course be higher." This last sentence was reconfirmed by Dhani via telephone following our interview, to make sure there was no mistake in interpreting his analogy.

"Actually, in order to increase demand for this new album, we were tempted to make it a bit more 'ugly,' but we couldn't! Because outstanding creations can't be made to conform to market demand. That's Indonesia. Sometimes we, too, can be tempted to push sales. If the lyrics to *Warriors of Love* [the lead single on Dewa's eighth and newest album, *Republic of Love*] were changed to read, 'Oh Nurlela!' or 'Oh Sweet Bird!', then maybe there would be greater demand for the song, because it would be romantic, or funny, or conform to mass market tastes more than it does," he says, while humming the song's lead bars. [Soon after its release, *Warriors of Love* became the #1 song in Indonesia, while its music video soared to the #1 spot on MTV Asia's hit program *Ampuh* (*Anak Pribumi Sepuluh*, or *Top Ten Hits by Local Artists*). The song's lyrics were inspired by verses from the *Qur'an* and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.] "That's temptation. My wife Maia even suggested that I use other lyrics to push sales.

"Why didn't I change the lyrics like she suggested? Because I have a mission of promoting peace and tolerance, and that song is really suited to the mission," he adds. Perhaps many listeners will be confused when they hear the song's title, *Warriors of Love*, which is identical with that of Dewa's previous, seventh album. Once again, Dhani claims that to be something perfectly ordinary, which was done by his favorite band, Queen. But in addition to the song's title, confusion may also arise from the fact that the band has now reverted to using the number 19 after their name Dewa. It's a shame Dhani did not explain his intentions more clearly, given the fact that there's always a significant meaning, and message, hidden behind the title of each of Dewa's songs and albums. "It's just cool, huh?" Dhani answered, laughing.

When listening to the song *Warriors of Love*, one hears a strong Middle Eastern influence. In fact, some early reviewers have been surprised and made the mistake of assuming that Dewa has changed its musical style to resemble Arab and dangdut [an Indonesian style of music saturated with Arab and Bollywood influences]. "I don't agree that the song falls into the category of Arab music. Rather, it's *world music* that we're experimenting with. The Arab style only

accompanies the beginning verses; by the first refrain, the style switches to Latin,” says Dhani. “A song doesn’t have to be complex to be good, but that doesn’t mean we always have to make songs like *Separuh Nafas*, either, does it?” [*Separuh Nafas*, or *Half (My) Breath*, was a megahit from Dewa’s fifth album, *Five Stars*, which sold 1.8 million copies on the legitimate market and approximately 8.5 million copies nationwide.] “One always has to evaluate a song’s dynamics, and not be trapped into making the same old songs over and over again.”

[Ed. note: the article continues with twelve pages of photographs and text.]