



## Indonesia's Guitar Warrior

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STRIKING A CHORD: Dhani in his Jakarta studio Kemal Jufri/Polaris for TIME

Rabbis are an uncommon sight in Indonesia, much less at a performance by the country's top rock star. Yet there they were, tapping along as Ahmad Dhani (also known as Dhani Dewa) sang his Warriors of Love at a recent conference in Bali on religious tolerance. Afterward, the rabbis—along with Islamic, Hindu and Catholic clerics—jostled for photos with the rock star.

The 35-year-old Muslim may have a way to go before reaching the musician-statesman stature of Bono, but he is talking the talk. "Warriors of Love is a song about love and tolerance for people of different faiths," he explains. "We reject the teachings of hate and the extremists who preach it." Some of his backers hope to widen the song's appeal by assembling a multilingual Muslim star cast to render it as a kind of We Are the World anthem of global Islamic moderation.

Dhani first has to win over his homeland, however. He grew up in Surabaya, listening to Queen and Japanese jazz-fusion outfit Casiopea. After notching up seven platinum albums in Indonesia with his own band, Dewa 19, he announced his intention to wean millions of his countrymen away from extremist Islamic views. "What happens depends on how we deal with

the radicals and teach people about Islam," explains Dhani, who says he quit a religious school as a child because he was put off by its conservative Wahhabi teachings. "It's time to come together, even if we have to do it one song at a time."

While international music fans have yet to take notice, the U.S. security establishment already has. Last October, Dhani spoke at a Defense Department-sponsored conference at NORAD in Colorado Springs, explaining to military and government officials why he rejected the path of his father, a former member of the hard-line body Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, as well as that of his grandfather, a member of the outlawed Darul Islam, which once fought for an Islamic state in the archipelago. In so doing, the rock star "has chosen to help us annihilate the crisis of misunderstanding of the Muslim world," says C. Holland Taylor, an American who founded the LibForAll Foundation to promote moderate Islam, and who accompanied Dhani to NORAD. (It is Taylor's foundation that plans to gather other Muslim pop stars for the multilingual version of *Warriors of Love*.)

But promoting greater understanding of Islam may be a tall order for a star whose private life and secular peccadilloes, often fodder for sensational stories in Indonesian newspapers, seem at odds with his message of spirituality and tolerance. He is estranged from his wife and has told newspaper reporters that women should be free to do as they please "as long as they don't refuse," and that the place of a wife "is one level below the man." He has also been photographed posing in Jacuzzis with young starlets. Although these were publicity shots staged with performers that Dhani was trying to promote as a music producer, they made conservative Indonesians uncomfortable. "I doubt people will take him seriously as someone who can speak about religion given his personal problems," says Jakarta college student Mega Kharismawati, voicing a view common among her peers.

Then there is Dhani's self-professed interest in Sufism. The Sufis make up a mystical branch of Islam that conservative Muslims dismiss as unconventional at best, and deviant at worst. "The fact that he is a Sufi is already going to be controversial with most Indonesian Muslims," says Hamid Basyaib, director of the Liberal Islam Network, a Jakarta-based organization promoting a moderate version of Islam. So will Dhani's admission that he does not pray five times a day—one of the religion's cardinal commands. Says Shofwan Chairul of the University of Indonesia's Islamic Students Association: "People respect him for his music, not his religious views."

Critics say Dhani's newfound spiritual interest masks the falling sales of Dewa 19's albums (the latest shifted 400,000 copies, in contrast to the two previous ones, which sold over a million each). But residual love for his music remains sky high. "Most Indonesians have had a Dewa 19 moment," says Rian Pelor, a music writer for *Trax* magazine. Certainly, there is no musician like Dhani in the country—he is Indonesia's Cobain or Lennon. And while his new musical tack has been greeted with suspicion in some quarters, what if it does articulate a concern of Indonesia's silent majority?

Channeling their feelings is something that Dhani has never failed to do in the past. "Music can reach the masses in a way that Muslim teachers cannot," he declares. "We hope to touch the kids in a way that will make them think about their faith." For now though, whether or not *Warriors of Love* can drown out the warriors of militant Islam is anyone's guess.