

IN

Mt. Lebanon



LEBO'S
POP STAR
DAYA
WINS HER FIRST GRAMMY



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LEBO POP STAR WINS BIG

Mt. Lebanon native Daya wins a Grammy and headlines her first national tour.

BY JENNIFER BROZAK

Photo by Nathan Johnson

She's only 18, but Mt. Lebanon native Grace Martine Tandon—better known by her stage name, Daya—has already had a few hit singles, won a Grammy and headlined a national concert tour.

Daya, who graduated from Mt. Lebanon High School in June of 2016, has known since childhood that she wanted to pursue a music career. A formally trained musician, she's been playing piano since the age of three, and spent time studying both voice and musical theater at the Accelerando Music Conservatory in Peters—an experience that she says helped to shape her flourishing career.

"It was an incredible place for me to grow as a performer and musician," Daya says of Accelerando. "It was a very open-minded, creative space where I could really explore and hone in on my own unique sound."

Once she witnessed her first live concert, the spark was ignited.

"I recall going to a Coldplay concert with my dad when I was around seven years old, and seeing Chris Martin kill it on stage in front of tens of thousands of people, and knowing at that moment, without a doubt, that was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life," she says.

She remembers writing her first song around the age of 10, while participating in a talent show at a family camp in Pennsylvania. "I'd usually participate with various covers or parodies with my sisters, but I decided I wanted to write my own song for the show," she recalls. "It was called something like 'Music Speaks'—so cheesy!"

Daya's distinct singing voice is mature beyond her years. Her style is a mix of "bubblegum pop" and classic R&B, and her wide vocal range channels powerhouse singers like Lorde, ZZ Ward and the late Amy Winehouse.

Daya, whose stage name is a Hindi translation of her real name, Grace, burst onto the pop music scene in 2015 with her hit single "Hide Away." The single achieved Top 10 and Top 25 spots on Billboard's Pop Songs and Hot 100 charts, is now double-platinum certified and is featured on her debut EP "Daya." It's also garnered more than 228 million streams on Spotify.



"I was in Los Angeles with a group of songwriters when we came up with it," she says of the song. "At the time, I didn't even think or know it would ever get released and have the kind of success it eventually did."

That success led to a wildly successful collaboration with the band The Chainsmokers, on which she sings vocals on the song "Don't Let Me Down."

"They played me a demo of the song and I fell in love with it instantly and knew I had to be a part of it," she says.

"Don't Let Me Down" reached No. 1 on pop radio and No. 3 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, and has amassed more than 691 million streams on Spotify. The four-time platinum song was nominated for Best Collaboration at the 2016 American Music Awards and for Best Electronic Video at the MTV Video Music Awards. Then, in February, she won her first Grammy Award for Best Dance Recording.

"It felt like I was floating for weeks after," Daya says of her Grammy win. "It was my first Grammys ever, so I was just thrilled to have been there, and to win was completely unexpected and surreal. My entire family was there for support and we all cried together afterwards. It was a really, really special day. I just felt so honored, and nothing could bring my spirit down that day."

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Photo by Nathan Johnson

In 2016, Daya released her first full-length album, “Sit Still, Look Pretty,” which included a hit single of the same name. The song, which promotes a female-empowerment theme, debuted at No. 100 on the Billboard Hot 100 and has since reached No. 28. She credits her upbringing with the theme behind the song.

“I grew up in a house where my parents told my four sisters and me that we could be whatever we wanted to be. That’s stayed with me my entire life, and this song is a perfect representation of that,” she explains. “It’s one of my favorite songs on the entire album and my connection to it is a big part of why I named the album after that song.”

Daya still lives in Pittsburgh, but staying in one place for any significant length of time has proved tricky. She recently crisscrossed the country on her first national tour—an experience she says truly allowed her to come into her own.

“I’ve played a ton of shows at this point, but this was my first proper tour where the show truly felt like my own, so it was super special to me,” she says. “I loved meeting fans across the country and seeing how engaged and excited they were. Everyone was singing along to every song at the show and it’s just a good energy everywhere. Even though the set list doesn’t change much from night to night, the audience does, which created a different atmosphere every night and made it feel a lot less monotonous.”

Growing up here certainly shaped her outlook and professional career. “Pittsburg is such a great place to grow up as a musician. There’s an amazing arts community, without being too intimidating for a young artist. Some of my first gigs were at the open mic at Empire Music 10 minutes away from my house, and I played my first big show at the Three Rivers Arts Festival.”

With three hit singles, a Grammy and a national tour that ended at Stage AE in her hometown on March 30, Daya’s career has been progressing at a head-spinning pace.

“I really haven’t even had the time to process it all, but it’s so amazing and I’m so grateful to all my fans who have helped make it happen,” she says. ■