

# PETRIE

## In Conversation with Diana Bang

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DIANA BANG IN ETRO



Inspired by DC Comics' eponymous series, *Y: The Last Man* on Hulu explores a gender-fluid post-apocalyptic world in which a calamitous event destroys half of mankind – killing every mammal with a Y chromosome with the exception of a man and his pet. While its survivors struggle to rebuild life as they once knew it, Dr Allison Mann, played by Diana Bang, finds herself on a mission to unravel the mysterious plague.

For the Canadian actress Diana Bang, playing Allison Mann in the sci-fi series was exciting to say the least. But it did offer her a bit more – an escape from the harsh reality of the pandemic. “As an actor, you don’t always have a job, so it was nice that I had work to go to. After the collective grief and shock of the pandemic wore off a bit, I gave myself permission to do absolutely nothing, to achieve absolutely nothing. It always feels like we’re in a rat race, constantly hustling. In that way, it was a nice break where I got to breathe a bit,” she explains.

For our November issue, Diana speaks to *PETRIc* about the many joys of playing Allison Mann, learnings from her decade-long career and more.

**Taanya Garg: What is your earliest memory of acting? Having studied Geography and Psychology at UBC, what inspired a change in career?**

Diana Bang: There was a Korean comedian I used to imitate as a kid. He used to do a thing where his hair would fall on his face, and he would blow it away. Friends and family thought it was hilarious so my mum would make me imitate him; sing and dance in front of the guests. That’s my earliest memory of doing anything performance-related. Even though I liked doing it at the time, it was a bit of a nuisance.

I think I’ve always wanted to act, but I just didn’t think it was realistic. It’s very stereotypical, but your parents, especially immigrant parents, want you to have a stable job and career as a doctor, engineer, or lawyer. I went to university, took a 100-level theatre course, and even auditioned for the theatre program. I did not get in, but it led me to sketch comedy. I joined the Vancouver Asian Canadian

theatre, and later a group called *Assaulted Fish*, and it just kind of took off from there. After a couple of shows, people asked if I ever considered acting professionally. I was very much encouraged by people in the Asian and arts community to further my learning. I just took classes wherever around town. I was also finishing up my university degree to please my parents, and also as a backup plan.

**TG: Your sister, Andrea Bang, is an actor as well; growing up in an Asian household, did you experience any resistance from your family concerning your decision to pursue acting?**

DB: The acting classes were a secret I kept to myself; something I wanted to explore without any pressure. Initially, my mum thought it was a hobby, because I did sketch comedy for a long time. She watched and supported me, but was still expecting I would get a ‘real job.’ But I

I just kept at it. I eventually landed a role in *The Interview*. It was a studio comedy where I played against really well-known actors and comedians. I think that after this premiered, my mother realised just how many people are part of a film set and the work that goes into it, she came to accept acting as a job with career potential. I think it's always the eldest who softens the blow for everything for their younger sibling. So, obviously, I had to pave the way. I think my mum had to see us act with her own eyes to accept what we do, and now she's so supportive.

DB: It was fun and it was my first lead role in a feature. Right before I got *The Interview*, I was at a point where I considered leaving acting. I was taking prerequisites for nursing, and went to the audition without expectations. So, I took it as a sign to keep going.

I didn't know that Seth Rogen and Evan, who directed the movie, do a lot of improv. So, during my first few days on set, I stuck to the script. One day, Seth gently suggested improvisation, which freed me to play my character and allowed me to pitch jokes, even. Everyone was so kind. At the time, it



**TG:** One of your most prominent roles was starring in *The Interview* as Sook-yin Park, a North Korean chief propagandist. Can you share your experience of working in the film?

was really difficult to get meaty roles as an Asian Canadian female performer, so it was a great boost that gave me hope to continue acting in this industry. And you know, if there's any chance to be somewhat funny, I'm game.



**TG:** You play Allison Mann in your latest project, *Y: The Last Man*. What was your process in bringing this character to life?

**DB:** Firstly, I had to read the comics. I started reading them when I was auditioning, and then I finished them during the pandemic when I got the part – they were amazing! Allison Mann is this wonderful, iconic, queer Asian character. To play her, I just had to make sure that she was a fully fleshed human being. When I talked to showrunner Eliza Clark, she wanted to make sure that we went beyond the typical scientist trope you see on TV where there's an unfeeling person just spouting off science jargon, and then disappears.

So, the great thing is that Eli wrote Allison to be an out-of-the-box character; controversial, passionate, prickly, cantankerous, loving, and hateful, like she's all over the place. Physically too. It was such a pleasure and a privilege to be able to play a character like that, because I don't always get roles like that. And to have Eli at the helm, making sure that Allison was a three-dimensional character was amazing. I just tapped into parts of myself that are akin to Allison and heightened them.

**TG:** Is there a role you would go back to and approach differently?

**DB:** I think I did the best I could each time. In the moment, I performed to the best of my ability. There are certain roles where I cringe. In some of them, my accent is so bad because back then, I did like a Japanese accent, without being the best at it. So, there are those kinds of things. Early on in my career, I should have either worked on the accent or gotten the casting directors to hire someone else.





**TG: I noticed that you're not on Instagram; do you find it relatively difficult to connect with your fans via social media? Would you consider joining Insta or Twitter in future?**

DB: Yeah, the connecting with the fans is the only part that I would like to do more of. At the very beginning of 2020, before the pandemic, I decided to take myself off of social media. I think it had to do with mental health. For some people, they can partake in social media, and it doesn't affect them as much, but for me, I start getting into comparison mode. At the time, I just wanted to give myself more room to think about other things, other than a post. Not being on it has made me feel better, so I see the benefits. I think I won't be on it anytime soon that I'll return, but maybe in the future.

**TG: Oftentimes, ethnic minorities in the film industry get pigeon-holed in playing stereotypical roles; have you ever found yourself in a similar situation where you had to play a character that you didn't agree with?**

DB: Yeah, I feel that things have only changed in the last couple of years. Prior to this, I was definitely auditioning for some of the most stereotypical of roles; I played sex slaves, a dominatrix, a Chinese restaurant owner. Early in my career, this really started weighing on me and I started to question if acting was worth it.

Most of my roles in the beginning required me to have an Asian accent. Because back then, about ten years ago, they wouldn't write things for Asian women. And even if they did that, five or six years ago, they would inevitably cast a white woman. It was disheartening but that's why I'm so grateful for my sketch comedy groups, both *The Lady Show* and *The Assaulted Fish*. Anytime I felt depressed about the acting side of things, I could go and create with my friends – write my own story, perform, and help produce the show. It was something that kept me going and allowed me to go beyond the stereotypes.

**TG: Have you noticed any positive changes in the industry, or do you feel it still has a long way to go?**

DB: I definitely feel the positive changes. I think there's always more room to grow, especially with behind-the-scenes stuff, where we have more representation from a more diverse population, and they're the ones telling the stories, which in turn will lead to more authentic storytelling. I do see my peers moving on up and getting to higher and higher positions of power where they're able to tell their stories. So that's really exciting. In terms of acting, *Y: The Last Man* is my first regular series and I just feel so fortunate to have been able to play a character that is so multi-dimensional; I hope that's an indication that the industry is changing even more so.



**TG:** With an acting career spanning more than a decade, what advice would you give to other artists trying to make a career in the entertainment industry?

**DB:** I would say find other outlets, other things that bring you joy, whatever that may be—whether it's reading or playing the piano, cultivate those skills as well and create your own work if you can. Find other people who want to collaborate. Especially with iPhones and stuff, it's so much more accessible and easier, compared to when I was growing up, that there's no reason to not create or get your voice heard. Lastly, even though I'm sure everyone's heard this one, it takes a lot of resilience to be in this industry. You just have to keep fighting. Things are going to get hard but that's okay, just keep going.

**TG:** Going forward, what are you the most excited for?

**DB:** I'm excited to delve deeper into Allison Mann as a character. You'll find that by the end of the season, there are a lot of unanswered questions. She keeps a lot of secrets. There are lots of interesting relationships and I'm really excited to learn more about Allison's past.

**TG:** Is there a question you find which doesn't get asked often in an interview or anything you feel people would love to learn more about you?

**DB:** Oh, man, I wish I had something really awesome to offer. So, this is really dumb, but I used to be left-handed as a kid. I don't know if you've experienced this or not, but in the old-school Korean culture being left-handed was considered bad, so I was forced to be right-handed, which is awful. When I was in university, I would try to take notes with my left hand, so I'm a little bit ambidextrous.