

DANA HEATH

THE SUPERPOWERED VEGAN

By Carole Audet



Photo by Ashley Byrd

Dana Heath stars in Nickelodeon's *Danger Force*, a show about a group of teenage superheroes. She's been vegan for seven years and shares the benefits and joy of this lifestyle when she can, including with her castmates. She counts on her plant-based diet to provide the energy she needs for long days on set, and she also credits it for her flawless skin. At the end of the day, she rests easy knowing she's not contributing to animal suffering.

Ever since she can remember, Dana has wanted to perform. So, naturally, pursuing an acting career was the most logical step toward achieving this goal. She got her start singing and dancing in musical theatre productions at the age of four.

While in the third grade, she heard that Disney was looking for kids to audition. "I begged my mom. We had to get a headshot, so we went to a local Walgreens and printed a picture and then went to the audition."

Despite her successful audition, it wasn't feasible at that time for Dana and her mom to travel from Miami, where they lived, to Orlando for the callback. But Dana's mom realized that her talented daughter could succeed in an acting career, and indeed was what she wanted to pursue—so they moved to Los Angeles a year later.

When Dana arrived in L.A., a city she's attracted to for its fast-paced energy, she was almost nine and she briefly worked with an acting coach in a class setting, not privately one-on-one. Over the next few years, she got voice-over gigs and did guest spots, but her breakout opportunity when she was thirteen was being cast in the series *Danger Force*—a spin-off of *Henry Danger*, which ended its five-season run in 2020. Similar to its predecessor, *Danger Force* is about four teenagers who navigate life with superpowers. Dana was cast in the role of Mika in the last few episodes of *Henry Danger* when the characters for the spin-off were introduced.

Mika is the leader of the group of teens and her superpower is her voice. "She has a super scream, kind of like Black Canary for anyone who's into superheroes. She screams and it sends out a sonic wave that destroys things. It was fun during season one to play with that because she had no control over it. When she would get frustrated and yell at people, she would explode them across the room, which were always fun scenes."

Dana goes on to describe her as "smart, dedicated, determined, anxious, and kind of neurotic at times. I adore playing her." She considers Mika the "straight man" to everyone else's comedy. "When playing her character, I never really get a moment of her chilling," she explains.

Many of us—especially those of us far removed from L.A. and show business—may wonder how kids in this industry maintain a healthy life/work balance and get their education. The teenagers on the set of *Danger Force* are provided with on-site teachers and, for Dana personally, this is in addition to homeschooling. The online learning program she was registered in is structured so that students work at their own pace, which has allowed her to complete her high school education early, despite her busy schedule.

While on set, a minimum of one hour is dedicated to studies and life balance. "But you're also having to memorize lines and go on set for the next nine hours. The balance is getting used to it. Season one was really difficult trying to find that balance, but once you get the ball rolling, it's something that you pick up."

Danger Force wrapped its third season earlier this year, and despite the schedule organized to complete one episode per week, delays and interruptions inevitably occurred. Of course, Covid protocols slowed things down as well. Everyone was required to wear a mask and actors removed their masks only when shooting a scene.

Since Dana finished high school a year early, she's

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now considering taking a year off to see how things pan out with her acting career, and whether she books another long-term project. If that doesn't happen, university may be in her future, but she's hoping for the former. "I'm focusing my energy into getting a role versus going to university—that is the backup plan." If university ends up being the path she takes, she'll be studying botany—not acting.

"I know it sounds random, but I've always found plant life and all of that science extremely fascinating. Because I already have my foot in the door acting-wise, it would feel kind of weird to major in theatre when I have access to Hollywood in a way. I thought, why not do something else?"

As of this writing, the fate of *Danger Force* has yet to be determined. "We finished season three where it could be an ending, but it's also open to coming back for season four. It's just a matter of how the fans receive it. We are always left in the dark about those sorts of things. We don't know until they send an email that we are coming back, but they don't tell us if we're not coming back."

Even if *Danger Force* is not renewed, Dana has other irons in the fire. She did voice-over work for a show on Netflix called *Princess Power*, and she's involved in another project that's too soon to talk about but one in which she will be seen on screen.

In her downtime, Dana likes to play video games as a way to explore her imagination—and to be a witness to the brilliant minds of game designers, animators and storyboard artists who come up with and develop the concepts. "It's fascinating and so incredible that talented people came together with a united goal and executed it well."

When asked which is her favourite game and which character she would like to play if it were ever made into a film franchise, she responds, "The Batman Arkham series, and probably Arkham Knight, because I think that has the coolest potential with machinery and stunts. You play in the Batmobile, which is awesome. I think I would play Oracle, who is Batgirl."

She has a minor role because you're following Batman, but she does help him and she's important."

Acting, singing, and dancing are but a few of Dana's many talents. She's also skilled at playing the guitar, she cooks and bakes, paints and sketches—using painting as a way to relieve stress, which is undoubtedly considerable for a teenager finishing her education while managing a busy career. "Anything that has some sort of creative touch to it, I have dabbled in."

Her song "Got You," produced by Marqueze Parker, was released at the end of March. A teaser is available on her Instagram account. "I'm proud of it. I think it sounds phenomenal. I was able to work with Ariana Grande's people [Champagne Therapy Music Group], and I feel so honoured to have been in the room with them because watching them work and create a song out of nothing was phenomenal. And being a part of that creative process—I was inspired."

Photo courtesy Dana Heath

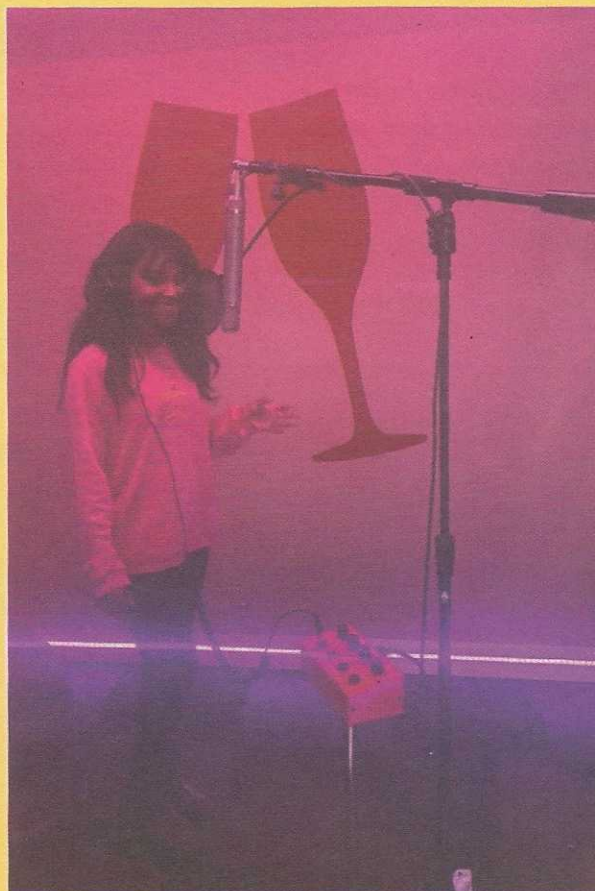




Photo courtesy Dana Heath

If her acting career continues to flourish as she hopes, working alongside established actors such as Samuel L. Jackson and Adam Sandler would be a dream come true for her, and being cast with up-and-comers like Keke Palmer and Jenna Ortega—who has found success on the Netflix series *Wednesday*—would be a welcomed boost to her career. And is there a young actor who doesn't dream of being in a Marvel movie? In particular, Dana would be thrilled to be cast in a *Guardians of the Galaxy* movie. Or the *Avengers* franchise. She's not picky.

On the other side of the country, Broadway—musical theatre in particular—continues to hold a great deal of appeal for her. "It's what I've done since I was four, so I would love to go to the place where every person who loves musical theatre dreams of going. I would go for any role that has a good story behind it."

Dana's Vegan Journey

Vegan for seven years, she originally gave up animal products to deal with chronic stomach issues she was experiencing. Tests didn't indicate anything to be concerned about, so it was suggested that perhaps it was something to do with her diet. Going plant-based helped ease her symptoms, and the bonus was that she felt much healthier. While Dana became vegan to

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deal with a health issue—as it does for many of us—animals play a big part in her decision to continue on this journey. "I love animals too much to eat what people push on you."

Of course, her compassion extends to companion animals, and she shares her life with several dogs—Bam-Bam and Pebbles, and the newest canine, Fred. "He is our baby. He's a Great Dane so he's huge. We have a big, a medium, and a small dog, and two cats."

While her co-stars know Dana is vegan, it's not something she pushes on people, but she'll casually mention a yummy vegan meal she's had at a local restaurant or gently share that veganism helps the environment and that it's a great way to help animals. While on set, craft service caters to each individual's dietary requirements, so it's never been a problem for her to maintain her vegan lifestyle while at work.

"It's a good thing to do as a human because animals are sentient beings. I know a lot of people don't realize that because it's not spoken about. I remember when I was very young and I was talking about being vegan, people were like, 'Yeah, but bacon though,' and they would make jokes about pigs; it was very hurtful. I guess the only way to switch it

around is to ask what if we were them? Those are sentient beings with real feelings and brains and hearts. They have families they love, and they nurture and they breathe the same way we do. If you have the means to go vegan, at least try. It's an easy switch, especially in L.A."

Like many of us who have made the transition to a fully plant-based lifestyle, dairy was the most challenging thing to eliminate. But as Dana points out, plant-based dairy alternatives are abundant, so it's a matter of testing out different products to determine which is most agreeable to you or closest in flavour to your favourite animal-based product. Your taste buds will adjust; in fact, many prefer plant-based alternatives because they are more flavourful, have no aftertaste and are easier to digest.

Dana is fond of her fans on social media, and while she's popular with many devoted fans, particularly on Instagram where she has more than 400,000 followers, she has yet to share about her vegan journey. But she's quick to qualify that she wouldn't be on social media if she didn't need to be because of her career—an uncommon sentiment for a young person. "It can be a very toxic place. My goal with the following and the privilege that I have is to spread as much positivity and love into the community as possible."

Like the character Mika, Dana is using her voice as a superpower by sharing the vegan message when she can. She also volunteers her time with Saving Our Daughters, a charity that engages celebrity mentors to help girls of multicultural backgrounds move beyond barriers to achieve success.

We're confident this multi-talented young woman, who, as she shared on Instagram, travelled to Catalina Island to celebrate her seventeenth birthday in April, will make an impact wherever her future takes her. ●

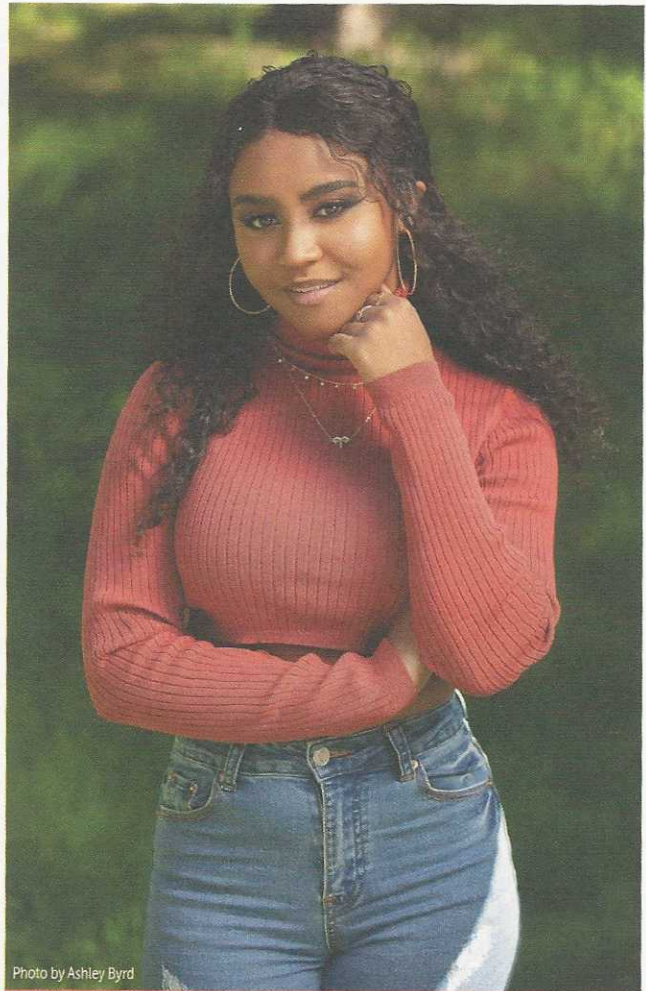


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