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Kimo and Ka‘iulani: 34 years strong

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Amanda C. Gregg - Special to The Garden Island The Garden Island | Posted: Saturday, August 28, 2010 11:30 pm | (0) Comments

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Amanda C. Gregg/Contributed photo Kimo and Ka‘iulani warm up before an open-mic performance at Wahoo’s.

They’ve been together since they were teenagers and they still are making beautiful music.

Kimo and Ka‘iulani, return-visiting artists to the island of Kaua‘i, have become part of the local music scene over the past 15 years. Ka‘iulani, a kumu hula at her own halau in Rochester, N.Y., of all places, began dancing hula as a 4-year-old.

Born Victoria Visiko, she was given her name “Ka‘iulani” by an auntie following a dream she had. Her husband, born Wayne Knox, took the Hawaiian name “Kimo” when performing with Sonny Lim at the Hapuna Prince Hotel on the Big Island about 10 years ago.

“He called me up to play and he said, ‘What’s your Hawaiian name?’ I just said, ‘Kimo,’” he said.

The name Knox uttered turned out to be more than just a spontaneous reaction, Knox said, as it turns out Kimo was the name of Lim’s brother, who had just passed away in an accident.

“Also, I was a fan of Kimo Garner who used to play at the Princeville Hotel,” Knox said. “I always liked him.”

Kimo and Ka'iulani fell in love with the Hawaiian lifestyle early in life, and have been living a version of it ever since.

“We perpetuate the Hawaiian culture every day,” Ka'iulani said. “With slack-key guitar, hula, everything.”

Proud of his wife, Kimo said, “She studies the traditional hula and studying with Mapuana de Silva. She teaches her own choreography as well. ... She lives and eats and breathes Hawaiian culture.”

The duo met in drama club in high school. “It’s quite a love story,” Ka'iulani said. “We’ve been together since we were 14 and 16.”

Ka'iulani was onstage performing and singing in the limelight while Kimo was handling the audio, lighting and music.

“We got married when we were 17 and 18,” Ka'iulani said. “Then we went to college together and my husband got his PhD in optics — I studied theater.”

From there, Ka'iulani kept up performing arts through directing, both on- and off-Broadway shows.

But throughout their entire marriage, music and dance have played a role, just as they have in parenting their six children.

“Music and dance have become one with us,” Ka'iulani said.

“All six are musical,” she said of her children, noting, “They all dance, they all sing.”

With a broad age range — the oldest being 30, their youngest, Hanalei, is 8 — two of the children don't yet have Hawaiian names, though Ka'iulani said they keep asking about that.

Married 34 years, the couple renewed their wedding vows on the Mainland in a Hawaiian wedding ceremony, after 30 years of marriage.

“We did the ceremony in New York state, but Kaua'i is our home island. We are looking for property so we can build a home here someday,” Ka'iulani said.

Even without their own property, however, the family spends two months every year on Kaua'i.

“We do a concert tour every summer and do additional gigs with our Kaua'i music 'ohana,” Ka'iulani said. That 'ohana has consisted of Hawaiian musical talents Norman Ka'awa Solomon, the Rev. Dennis Kamakahi and Jerry Santos, to name a few.

Their annual trek usually consists of collaborating with other local musicians, performing around the island, talking story with fellow artists, and foraging the music world for whatever is new and exciting.

This summer, that meant coming across a new method for bass playing, Knox said—on a bass-'ukulele of sorts.

“It’s a Kala, and it’s a ‘uke bass,” Kimo said. “I was playing this all over the island — with John Gilleran and Shilo Pa at the Oasis Friday nights.”

Kimo is no stranger to string instruments, and has written music for six-string, 12-string, nylon, steel, slack-key guitar and, of course, ‘ukulele.

In addition to dancing hula, Ka‘iulani also writes lyrics, many of which are inspired by Kaua‘i themes.

The Hawaiian-inspired ability of the two came together on their CD entitled “Pono,” which encompasses a light, airy, quality. On it, Ka‘iulani’s chants resonate, with a quality that sounds somewhat improvisational and melancholy all at once.

When asked how she learned to sing and compose in Hawaiian, Ka‘iulani was humble, noting she has studied the language and the art of chanting but doesn’t consider herself fluent.

The lyrics to another of the couple’s songs, “Mana O Kalapaki,” were written following last year’s Kaua‘i Music Festival, Ka‘iulani said, at the Kaua‘i Marriott Resort & Beach Club.

“I was feeling a bit frustrated because I hadn’t written any lyrics to songs that summer yet — whereas, for example, this year, this summer, we wrote about seven original songs just from the moment we arrived,” Ka‘iulani said. “It was about 1 a.m. I looked out on the balcony (to Kalapaki) and thought I saw a woman on her knees and her hands were waving as she gently was in the surf. ...I had chicken skin. ...I woke up at 5 a.m. and said, ‘Give me paper!’ And my husband handed me a napkin and one of our children’s crayons. ...We were totally convinced we witnessed a beautiful spirit out there.”

As for memorable experiences on-island this go-around, the couple was pleased to participate in a concert on ‘Ohana Day at the Kaua‘i Museum, and, of course, collaborating with fellow artists at the Kaua‘i Music Festival.

“We went camping up in Koke’e, jamming until the middle of the night,” Kimo said. “We just had a fantastic experience.”

Those wanting to catch the couple performing on-island will have to likely wait until next summer.

However, their CD is available at www.gallerykauai.com.

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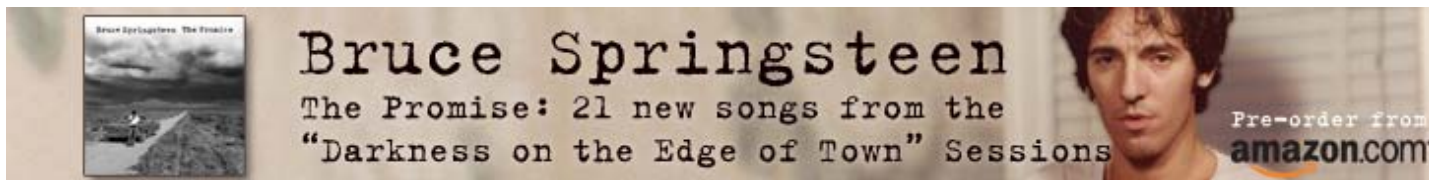
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