

Jammin' with Jack

Kokua Fest back from hiatus with 4 newcomers with Isle ties who share love for planet, music

By: [Catherine E. Toth](#)

Everyone needs a break, including local musician Jack Johnson.

But even when he takes a hiatus from hosting his popular eco-friendly Kokua Festival, he's not really on a break. He's touring, he's producing artists, he's trying to find better, more sustainable ways to live. Such as reducing the carbon footprint of his world tours or recording an entire album using solar energy.



For Kōkua Festival host Jack Johnson, the eco-friendly fundraiser is "the most rewarding of any of our shows."

Kokua Festival is, really, just that sweet frosting on the already satisfying slice of his life.

"This is the most rewarding of any of our shows," said Johnson, from his home on the North Shore, where he grew up. "We make a pretty good living from our CD sales. So this is purely a fundraiser ... and we're lucky to be able to do it."

The concert — happening today and tomorrow at Waikīkī Shell — benefits Johnson's nonprofit Kokua Hawai'i Foundation, which supports environmental education in schools and communities in the state. Some of its projects include 'Aina in the Schools, which promotes healthy school lunches made with locally grown produce and agricultural field trips, and mini-grants for public school teachers to help them advance their environmental education goals.

Johnson's commitment to the environment extends to the musicians he invites to perform.

"We tell them about the foundation and (the festival) has to be something they really support, not just a way for them to break into the Hawai'i market," he said.

For this year's Kokua Festival — the sixth one since 2004 — Johnson has assembled another strong — and eclectic — lineup of globally conscious musicians with some connection to Hawai'i. All four artists will be performing at the festival for the first time.

Artists include multi-Grammy-winning reggae musician Ziggy Marley, who was just in Hawai'i last year promoting his new, family-friendly album, "Family Time," on which Johnson contributed vocals; blues/world music legend Taj Mahal, who lived for years in the Islands; 'ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro, who's wrapping up a European tour; and Maui singer-songwriter Anuhea, who credits Johnson as her musical inspiration.

Johnson said he picks artists he actually likes — not necessarily the ones he thinks will sell tickets.

"I remember that feeling when bands would come to Hawai'i," said Johnson, who waxed nostalgic about seeing Marley in concert at the Waikiki Shell when he was in high school. "It's great to be able to put a spotlight on local artists while bringing in bands that people don't get to see all the time."

THE LINEUP: JAKE SHIMABUKURO



Though ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro doesn't need much of an introduction in the Islands or in Japan, his popularity abroad — and particularly on the Mainland — can be traced to one thing: YouTube.

About four years ago, a fan posted a clip of Shimabukuro playing George Harrison's "While My Guitar Gently Weeps." It's already gotten more than 5 million hits.

"YouTube has been a driving force behind my touring in the states," said the 33-year-old via e-mail while on tour with Tommy Emmanuel in Europe. "It's amazing what a four-minute video clip can do."

Since then, he's been touring the world, serving as spokesman for the Hawaii Tourism Japan campaign, headlining shows and performing alongside such A-list talent as Jimmy Buffett and Bette Midler. He's even performed live on NBC's "The Today Show" and "Late Night with Conan O'Brien."

And that Harrison cover was the title of his 2006 best-selling album and a live cut made it on his most recent full-length CD, "Live," which was released last year.

Not bad for a local kid who took his first 'ukulele lesson at age 4 and gigged around Honolulu cafes.

And he's not taking any of it for granted.

"I'm so thrilled by the increasing popularity of the 'ukulele," he said. "I believe that the 'ukulele is the instrument of peace. If everyone played the 'ukulele, this would be a happier place."

While he loves touring and playing abroad, Shimabukuro hasn't gotten tired of shredding the tiny four-string, two-octave instrument for the home crowd. And he's looking forward to his first appearance at Kokua Festival this weekend.

"It's a great event that inspires us all to think about the planet and our future," he said. "Hawai'i will always be home for me. I love the people and culture I grew up with, and all that experience in Hawai'i will have a special place in my heart. There's no place like home."

ZIGGY MARLEY



Four-time Grammy-winning musician Ziggy Marley is no stranger to sustainability.

Not only does he monitor his water and electricity usage and uses reusable shopping bags, he even composts.

So he's a big believer in the environmental message of Kokua Festival and the programs it supports.

"It feels great to help my friend Jack," Marley said via e-mail. "We both are passionate about the environment and Hawai'i ... I continue to explore how to become even more aware and sustainable."

Though Marley has performed in Hawai'i several times, this will be his first appearance at Kokua Festival.

"I'm very happy to be able to participate (in the festival)," he said. "My fondness for Hawai'i is a spirit thing for me, a feeling. (It's) the people and the vibe."

The father of five recently released his third solo children's album, "Family Time," which features Johnson and Paula Fuga on a track titled "Cry, Cry, Cry." Proceeds of the album sales will benefit Chepstowe Basic School, located in the low-income Jamaican parish of Port Antonio.

Marley is an active supporter of children charity organizations worldwide, including Little Kids Rock, which brings musical instruments and lessons to children in public schools, and U.R.G.E. (Unlimited Resources Giving Enlightenment), a nonprofit organization he founded that benefits children's causes in Jamaica and other developing nations.

"It was just the time for me to make music specially for children," he said.

ANUHEA

When Maui singer-songwriter Anuhea Jenkins heard she was invited to play at Kokua Festival this weekend, she freaked out.

"I seriously started crying," said the 24-year-old acoustic sensation, who's been nominated for two Na Hoku Hanohano awards this year. "Jack Johnson is the reason why I started playing guitar. I'm not even kidding."



She's not.

Growing up in Makawao in a musically gifted family — her auntie is Nalani Choy from Na Leo Pilimehana — Jenkins taught herself how to play guitar, ditching water polo practice at Kamehameha Schools to jam to Johnson and Bob Marley songs in the dorms.

So imagine the first time she met her musical idol at Cholo's Homestyle Mexican Restaurant on the North Shore. There was a lot of hyperventilating.

"He was the coolest, most humble person," she said. "So I wasn't that scared of him, even though he's my idol."

Like many young artists, Jenkins, who played at coffee shops and restaurants, was discovered online. A new record label was looking for emerging talent and found her MySpace page. (Which hasn't been updated recently because she's been locked out of her own account.)

She cut her first album, "Anuheia," — a funky soulful sound — in less than two months in a studio in Los Angeles. It was released to rave reviews this month.

Jenkins just returned home after "The Right Love Tour," which took her to Japan and across the United States.

"It was insane, the best time of my whole life," said Jenkins, who toured with The Green and tried to eat at every restaurant featured in the Travel Channel's "Man v. Food." "It was so much fun. There was music around us every day, all day long."

Now she lives with her band friends in a rental in Kahala, updating her Facebook site, Twittering to her fans and living what she calls "a lifestyle of music."

"Who knows how long this is going to last, though," she said. "The lease is coming up."

TAJ MAHAL

Grammy-winning composer and multifaceted musical legend Taj Mahal makes his debut at Kokua Festival this weekend.

No stranger to benefit concerts, Mahal, who is considered one of the most prominent and influential figures in late 20th century blues and roots music, is a regular performer at Farm Aid.

Born Henry Saint Clair Fredericks, Mahal isn't just some blues musician who cut his teeth in dingy jazz clubs — though he has paid



his dues.

His father was an accomplished jazz musician who spoke seven languages. And Mahal himself is a graduate of the University of Massachusetts and a scholar of ethnomusicology.

He also happens to be one of Johnson's earliest and biggest inspirations.

"He's really had an influence on my music," Johnson said. "I heard his stuff while I was learning to play the guitar."

They met at a fundraiser and Mahal invited Johnson to play a few songs with him on stage. They ended up hanging out all night.

"I found out he lived in Hawaii for a bit," he said. "So this is like coming home for him."

Original Article URL: <http://www.honoluluadvertiser.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/201004230200/ENT/4230304>