

# Island Mele: ‘Kulaiwi’ by Faith Ako

SEP. 29, 2013 | 0 COMMENTS

REVIEW BY JOHN BERGER / [jberger@staradvertiser.com](mailto:jberger@staradvertiser.com)

## ‘Kulaiwi, My Beloved Homeland’ - Faith Ako (Faith Ako)

Expatriate islander Faith Ako, formerly of Kahuku and currently a resident of the Bay Area, excels at doing Hawaiian standards in traditional nahenahe (soft, melodious) style. She does so here with beautiful arrangements of “Pauoa Liko Ka Lehua,” “Puamana” and “Poliahu,” and introduces three newly written songs as well.



Two of the new songs are intended for folks who are fluent in ‘olelo Hawai‘i. “Na Pua O Ka La‘akea” is her “thank you” to the halau that encouraged her to record her first album. “Kawahine O Ka Po” is one of her favorite songs by avant garde kumu hula Mark Ho‘omalulu.

The third, “My Hawai‘i,” written by her nephew, Keenan Kanahele, is hapa-haole. It expresses the sentiments of everyone who has lived here, now lives elsewhere and misses the islands. Ako sings it with heartfelt conviction.

The other English-language song on the album is a timely 50th anniversary remake of Roy Orbison’s 1963-vintage “B-side” classic, “Blue Bayou,” that shows Ako’s potential as a mainstream pop singer. Ako’s “Blue Bayou” could easily be the preview cut of an entire album of pop chart remakes. Adding Hawaiian lyrics to it, as Ako and her translator do, isn’t necessary but makes their version more than a straight remake of Orbison’s timeless song.

Songs with ties to specific locations are an important and popular tradition in Hawaiian music. So are medleys. The medley of Maui songs she does here contributes to both traditions. It also continues the personal musical “journey” she started in 2007 with a medley of Kauai songs on her first

album, “Ku Kahi.” On her second album, Ako made a musical stop on the Big Island with a Hilo medley. With a few more albums she’ll reach Oahu, Molokai, Lanai, Kaho‘olawe and Ni‘ihau as well.

Whether the songs are newly written or island standards, Ako maintains the nahenahe feeling, singing and accompanying herself on 8-string ukulele. Her studio musicians — guitarists Jim Cramer and Tadd Aiona, steel guitarist Sean Allen and bassist Tua Poueu are the core of the group — do excellent work. Piano, cello, Tahitian “banjo,” congas and Hawaiian percussion implements enhance several arrangements.

Ako’s love of her island homeland extends to Samoa (“Ta Elena I Petesa”) and Tahiti (“Vaihiria” and “Huahine”). Additional information on the songs and their personal significance for her is available at [www.faihako.com](http://www.faihako.com).

— — —  
*John Berger has been a mainstay in the local entertainment scene for more than 40 years. Contact him via email at [jberger@staradvertiser.com](mailto:jberger@staradvertiser.com).*

# Faith Ako stays local to record her latest CD



By: Kaydon Coburn,  
TheCommunityVoice.com

August 9, 2013

**RP-based artist will perform at Spreckels Center on September 6**

“It’s going to be a full-sound album,” declares traditional/contemporary Hawaiian musician Faith Ako.

“Kulaiwi, My Beloved Homeland,” Ako’s new CD, will be released and performed the first week in September. It will contain all new material and arrangements.

“I love performing the other Hawaiian artists’ songs, but I’ve finally come out with some good ones. I am really excited about that,” an enthusiastic Ako revealed.

The title “Kulaiwi, My Beloved Homeland,” Ako’s inspiration for the album, refers to her birth origin in Hawai’i, and Iwi, which means bones in Hawaiian. “It connects my cultural

ethnicity back to my Samoan ancestry roots and rich Hawaiian influence, which I am very indebted to and proud of.”

The fresh 14-track CD will feature three original songs by Ako, “Halau Hula Na Pua O Ka La’akea,” “My Hawai’i,” and “Ka Wahine O Ka Po,” a composition written by the renowned, Kumu Hula Mark Ho’omalulu of the Academy of Hawaiian Arts. Keenan Kanahale, a popular San Diego based artist, also contributed.

“Kulaiwi, My Beloved Homeland” is a combination of Hawaiian classic and contemporary music. “The big part of this album for me was that I got to do my own harmonies. I’ve got these great harmonies going on in my head, and it’s all part of my upbringing (listening to music). We grew up with church and all that stuff,” Ako said.

After a long search throughout Marin and Sonoma Counties and advice from family and friends, Ako began recording in April 2012 at the Prairie Sun Studios in Cotati. For more than 16 months, the Rohnert Park-based musician, recorded “with my assembly of musicians” to produce her new CD.

“I was looking to find another recording studio here in Sonoma County because the other two previous albums I had gone home to Maui (to record). My husband said it might be better to do it close to home,” she explained.

Ako had strong reservations about venturing into an unknown studio. “I wanted to make sure the studio is used to the Hawaiian sounds. Hawaiian music is very different (compared to rock, blues, jazz). The tones are very different. It’s very passionate feeling. It’s just beautiful music, so I’m going to make sure if we do this, I know that they are going to take care of that.”

Ako had more control over the production of these recordings compared to her two previous releases. “I actually produced the album. It was everything I wanted to hear Hawaiian music that I know I could fulfill in my own capabilities. It’s nothing like the other two albums, which are “hula” albums. They are more simple.” The wider scope allowed Ako to

arrange cello, steel guitar and two acoustic guitars, in addition to the traditional instruments. "I got congas, and everyone onboard," said Ako. "I wouldn't be able to do that if I did it at home in Hawaii."

"Such great people in the studio have really helped me appreciate the time and effort that is given by these experts in the recording field. I produced this album with a vast labor of aloha, along with the design that my fans would enjoy a new creative suit of blends to my much applauded music, while retaining an earful of harmonies, which is the matchless part of recording for me."

Ako's two previous CDs: "Ku Kahi" (2007) earned Hawai'i Music Awards for Traditional Hawaiian Music and New Artist of the Year, and "Papku, Bring It Home" (2009) was in the top 20 selections for Grammy, Hawaiian Genre 2010.

Ako's claims a multitude of American musical influences from her youth growing up on the islands: Motown, Staple Singers, Natalie Cole, Linda Ronstadt, Bonnie Raitt, Norah Jones, Sheryl Crow, Grace Potter, Jill Scott, Sade, and Lisa Fischer; she cites specific Hawaiian musical influences: Aunty Genoa Keawe, Lena Machado, Marlene Sai, Melveen Leed, Hui O Hana, Uncle Gabby Pahinui, Olomana, and Loyal Garner.

"Coming from a large Polynesian family (I am the youngest of fifteen children), music naturally has been a big part of my family traditions and cultural heritage. Singing in the home and at church formed the solid foundation of my passion for music," Ako says.

"Traditional Hawaiian music is making its way back and surviving against other genres of popular music in its home state of Hawai'i and worldwide. Personally, my goal is to help preserve and promote music of the Hawaiian people. This intention is a deep and reflective passion that I've come to pursue and delight in."

A prolific performer, Ako began entertaining in the Bay Area in the mid-90's with various performers who have also pursued successful solo careers. "What got me interested in getting back to music was my 4-year old daughter, Felila, who wanted to learn hula." Over the years, Ako also has been a member of three different established bands in the Bay Area. "During that time, I played well in excess of a thousand gigs in many different venues."

Special guests for the concert will be Kumu Hula Shawna Alapa'I, and Halau Hula Na Pua O Ka La'akea.

The "Kulaiwi, My Beloved Homeland" CD release concert will be Sept. 6 at Spreckels Performing Arts Center. Purchase tickets at the Spreckels Box Office (707) 588-3400, or [www.rpcity.org](http://www.rpcity.org). Doors open at 7 p.m. Go to [www.faihako.com](http://www.faihako.com) for more information.

"It's like going to the islands without a plane ride," Ako said about her upcoming performance. "We are flying flowers in from Hawaii for the show."