

Faith Ako, Tarvin Makia team for a special Kula concert



Faith Ako and Tarvin Makia will perform on Jan. 26 at Ocean Vodka Organic Farm and Distillery as part of the Maui Jazz & Blues Festival Series. Shooting Stars Maui/Stephen Holding

Acclaimed Hawaiian musician Faith Ako collaborated with Maui's Tarvin Makia on "Ho'okanikapila, Mau'i" in late 2024 for her latest recording project. A collection of jazz standards with a few originals, the duo had fun injecting new life into classics like "Autumn Leaves," "Fly Me to the Moon," "Misty" and "The Way You Look Tonight."

"This is my first jazz album," says Ako, who was nominated for a Nā Hōkū Hanohano Award for Hawaiian Album of the Year for "Ku'u 'Aina Aloha" in 2021.

“I told Tarv I want to do an English album. He’s like, ‘Why? All these Hawaiian albums have made you who you are, and that’s your fan base.’ I said, ‘Tarv, but I’m a rock and roll girl. I love English music. To me, I sing it better than Hawaiian music.’ So he said, ‘Fine, come to Maui. Let’s do your jazz album.’”

Ako and Makia will perform some of the songs from “Ho’okanikapila, Mau’i” on Jan. 26 at a Maui Jazz & Blues Festival Series show at Ocean Vodka Organic Farm and Distillery.

Having previously collaborated with Ako on her Hawaiian recordings, Makia was surprised that she wanted to record a collection of jazz songs.

“I told her jazz is not going to go over good in Hawaii. There’s no more hangouts like Blackie’s or Longhi’s in Lahaina. She says to me, ‘But in the Bay Area they love that stuff.’ I said, ‘We’ve got to put at least three local songs on there if we plan to get any kind of airplay.’”

So they included the old standard “Sweet Someone.”

“We put it in a swing mood, and luckily for us, KPOA has been playing it crazy,” says Makia. “We do it as a duet, just with an ukulele. The other song that we enjoyed doing together is ‘You Make It Hard’ by Kalapana. Then a song that I wrote called ‘I’m in Love with a Beautiful Sunset,’ kind of like a jazz ballad standard.”

Assisting on the album were a bunch of Maui musicians, including the late drummer Paul Marchetti, along with Sal Godinez on keyboards, bassist Marcus Johnson, Kala’e Kamarillo on guitar and ‘ukulele, Gilbert Emata on keyboards, and drummers Josh Greenbaum and James Somera.

“It’s a heartbreaker,” says Makia. “Sal Godinez is doing all the keys and Paul Marchetti was the drummer, and Marcus Johnson, who left the island — those three guys came into the studio and we told them what numbers we wanted to do. They did an incredible job. They cut five songs in one hour and at least three of those songs were done perfectly the first take.”

Growing up in Laie on Oahu, Ako moved to Northern California’s Sonoma County in 1985. Best known for singing Hawaiian music, she grew up loving artists like the Supremes, Marvin Gaye, Steely Dan and Fleetwood Mac.

“Growing up on Oahu. I never listened to Hawaiian music,” she says. “I started this

dropped her off at a hālau in Santa Rosa, and she came home and said, ‘Mom, the hula director would like to know if you want to come and play ukulele for the hula group?’ That was back in 1994 and I’m still going.”

Ako and Makia have been friends since their teen years. “We were classmates in Kahuku High School,” says Makia. “She had a great voice in high school, sang like Karen Carpenter.”

A Maui resident for more than 40 years, Makia’s credits include the groups Hau’ula and Mele ‘Ohana, a few years playing bass with Hapa, and the award-winning group A’ea’e, with Keola Donaghy, Kenneth Makuakāne and Jeff Dayton, which won Hōkūs for Group on the Year and Hawaiian EP of the Year in 2023.

Performing together at the Organic Farm, Ako and Makia will be joined by Gilbert Emata on keyboards and Al Villarin on guitar.

“I contacted Ken (promoter Martinez Burgmaier) asking him, ‘Is there any chance that we can maybe get in that because my audience is mainly Hawaiian?’” says Ako. “Ken contacted me and said, ‘Would you be interested?’ I said, ‘Tarp, I’m coming.’”

Ako and Makia will perform on Jan. 26 at Maui Jazz & Blues Festival Series show at Ocean Vodka Organic Farm and Distillery. The House Shakers and Joie Yasha will also play. Music is from 4 to 7 p.m. Admission is \$5.

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