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ISLAND SOUNDS

Zuttermeister debut is award-worthy

By [Wayne Harada](#)
Advertiser Entertainment Writer

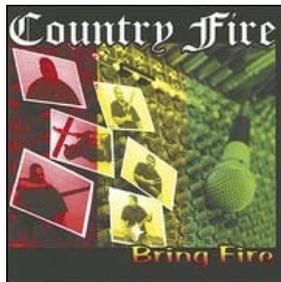
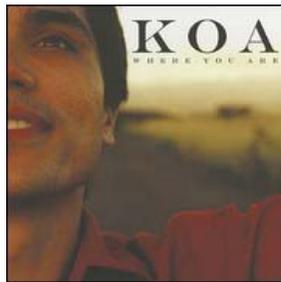
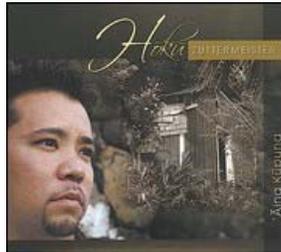
It doesn't get any better than Hoku Zuttermeister's debut traditional Hawaiian album, which should establish him as a major player on the Island music scene.

Koa Siu continues his musical journey with robust Christian rock, providing feel-good tunes with a dollop of contemporary faith.

And Country Fire heats up the reggae burners with its debut album.

"'Aina Kupuna" by Hoku Zuttermeister; Kaleiola Records

- **Genre:** Traditional Hawaiian.
- **Distinguishing notes:** From the opening refrains of "Nani Na Pali Hauliuli O Na Ko'olau," which is a staple in the hula halau of the late Kau'i Zuttermeister, to



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the closing tempos of " 'Aina Kupuna E/Ho'i Ke Aloha i Rai'atea," Hoku Zuttermeister stands out as a bridge linking yesterday and today, with obvious links to tomorrow.

His great-grandmother's hula roots certainly have made a lasting impression on this versatile artist who has previously recorded, performed and toured with a stellar roster of local artists including The Makaha Sons, Ra'iatea Helm, Sean Na'auao, Ku'uipo Kumukahi, Ho'okena and Frank Kawaikapuokalani Hewett. His pedigree, plus his potent voice, make him a key player. Here, he teams with Robert Cazimero and Kea'o Costa on Hewett's delicate and moving "Ola'a Beauty," revives his late great-grandmother Emily Kau'i Zuttermeister's "Na Pua Lei 'Ilima," puts his seal on the traditional "Moanalua," demonstrates his interpretative skills on " 'Akahikuleana A Ka Piko" and turns on the falsetto on "Kuhio Beach" and "La'ieika-wai."

Beautifully packaged (with enlightening liner notes and lyrics), smartly arranged, exquisitely performed (with basic guitar and occasional piano, plus guest musicians such as Bryan Tolentino, Casey Olsen, Byron Yasui and Abe Lagrimas), this CD is poised to be this season's buzz-maker and scene-stealer, deservedly so.

- **Our take:** This is the kind of auspicious debut that evokes admiration and endorsements, and ultimate stardom. Simply put, this is Hawaiiana at its best and an early contender to sweep the awards next year.

🔊 Sample song: "Moanalua" by Hoku Zuttermeister

"Where You Are" by Koa Siu; Firestarter Records

- **Genre:** Christian rock.
- **Distinguishing notes:** Koa Siu, the prolific son of entertainers Leon & Malia, wrote 14 of the 15 tunes here. He puts punch and zest into the Christian genre, singing of hope, commitment, goodness and godliness in a very robust, contemporary manner with a penetrating impact.

One of the best cuts is "I Thrive," which could easily be his personal anthem — "I thrive on Your love, I survive by Your grace. The punishment that I deserved You carried in my place ..." — as he bares his soul about his highs and lows in his Christian life. "Overcome" also exposes the dichotomy of life's ups and downs — "I may be lost but not out ... I may be scared but not alone ... Well I've been cold, but I'm not frozen; I've been weak but not destroyed." There's repeated expression of hope, promise, dedication,

determination — laced with earnest belief and desire to do good, feel good, be good.

- **Our take:** The gospel, according to Koa, is worth a listen — those who tune in will have faith in his contemporary sound.

🔊 Sample song: "I Thrive" by Koa

"Bring Fire" by Country Fire; Mix Track Records

- **Genre:** Island reggae, world music.
- **Distinguishing notes:** Country Fire is an Island reggae act — composed of Austin "Kahele" Easley, Jeffrey "Kaimi" Tong, Glenn Ida, Jay Santos, Rocky Contado and Fred Sacatropez — that gained initial exposure as the 2004 Mai Tai Rumble/Battle of the Bands competition winner. The band members composed all of the 15 tracks, bringing an original edge and stature to its urban reggae sound that borrows from soul and blues. With Papa T from B.E.T. guest-performing on three tunes ("Girls Go By," "Bring Fire" and "Distruccion"), the Fire gets a bit of special heat. Country Fire utilizes the usual instruments in molding its sound — but Easley's 'ukulele is somewhat of a rarity with a reggae unit (check out Easley's "Music in My Soul").
- **Our take:** Country Fire should find its niche in the realm of local reggaemeisters.

🔊 Sample song: "Bring Fire" by Country Fire

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