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Na Hoku: Rising star shines bright

Zuttermeister wins four awards; Greig is female vocalist of year

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The biggest winner at last night's 31st Na Hoku Hanohano awards show at the Hawai'i Convention Center is appropriately named "Star."

Hoku Zuttermeister, 33, a self-taught musician with a four-octave vocal range whose first name means "star," won Hawai'i Academy of Recording Arts honors for male vocalist of the year, most promising artist and top Hawaiian language performance on his solo debut album " 'Aina Kupuna," which garnered a Hoku as Hawaiian album of the year.

The Kane'ohe native and Castle High grad also won the public poll for "Favorite Entertainer of the Year" during the ceremony, held before a sold-out crowd of 1,040 at the Kalakaua Ballroom at the Hawai'i Convention Center.

"I'm just very thankful for all the people who helped me through the years," Zuttermeister said. "I didn't get here alone."

Robert Uluwehi Cazimero took home a Hoku for the liner notes on Zuttermeister's album.

Napua Greig, kumu hula of Halau Na Lei Kaumaka O Uka in Kula, Maui, who also had a debut album, "Pihana," won for female vocalist of the year. Greig, 33, is on a two-week music tour in Japan so her mother, recording artist Hulu Lindsey, accepted the hoku on her behalf.

Greig had a scary close call in Japan as she performed in Sendai the day before the recent earthquake.

Group of the year honors went to Maunalua (Bobby Moderow Jr., Bruce Spencer and Kahi Kaonohi). Maunalua won the same award in 2003, as well as that year's Favorite Entertainers of the Year award. The trio, which has been together 11 years, also won a Hoku in 2001, playing music described by Modero as "part of Hawai'i's past, with a 21st century flair."

In a surprise to some, compilation album of the year honors went to "Aloha Slack Key — A Tribute to Gabby 'Pops' Pahinui," over recent Grammy Award winner "Treasures of Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar."

But Zuttermeister's was the brightest shining star.

Seen by many as a budding next-generation star, Zuttermeister's roots run deep in music and hula. His great-grandmother, Kau'i Zuttermeister, wrote "Na Pua Lei 'Ilima," which he sings on his album, while his great-aunt is kumu hula Noe Zuttermeister.

"Every song on the album has special meaning for me," said Zuttermeister, who is gathering material for a follow-up album.

He had worked on other people's recordings but said the solo effort was very satisfying.

"People were telling me to do it for a long time," he said. "But there is so much more pressure on yourself when it's yours."

Zuttermeister taught himself to play 'ukulele, guitar and bass and has developed a signature sound for traditional Hawaiian music. He has been honing his talents by performing with notables such as the Makaha Sons, Jerry Santos, Sean Na'auao, Raiatea Helm and Ho'okena.

One of the most interesting stories of the night surrounded 77-year-old vocalist Joy (Valverama) Abbott and pianist Betty Loo Taylor, 79, Punahou schoolmates in the 1940s who reunited to record a Hoku-winning jazz album, "For All We Know."

Abbott, who splits her time between Hawai'i and Miami, began spending more time visiting Taylor in Honolulu after her husband, legendary Broadway playwright George Abbott, died at age 107 in 1995. They decided to do a jazz album together and recorded it in New York.

"How wonderful is this," Taylor said. "It's never too late."

Hoku notes

Hoku is short for Hoku'ikeonalani, Zuttermeister said. "My great-grandmother named me," he said. "It means knowledgeable star from the heavens." ... Bobby Moderow Jr. of Maunaloa recalled how bass player Kahi Kaonohi joined he and Bruce Spencer 11 years ago. Moderow and Spencer lost their bass player and had a paying gig to play at Kaonohi's wedding. They were going to cancel but came up with a substitute, turning down Kaonohi's offer to play. Kaonohi joined the next week. ... Haku mele finalist D. Pono Murray of Lahaina, Maui, is the second-eldest of former Miss Hawai'i Patricia Lei Anderson Murray's five children.
