

# MidWeek

## Hokus for Hoku

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By Melissa Moniz



Hoku Zuttermeister says it was never his goal to win awards, but he still won six Na Hoku Hanohano awards this year

Hoku Zuttermeister Headlines The Big Windward Community College Ho'olaulea This Saturday

After winning six Na Hoku Hanohano awards this year, Hoku Zuttermeister couldn't be shining brighter. But the Kaneohe boy is a bit squeamish over all the recent attention, especially since he doesn't consider his award-winning album, *'Aina Kupuna*, a solo endeavor, but one he shares with longtime friend and group member Ioane Burns.

"I'm still trying to get used to being referred to as a solo artist because that CD is just as much me as it is Ioane," says Zuttermeister. "And the CD is the same kind of music we've been playing for the past 17 years."

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And while he welcomes the honor of winning the categories of Hawaiian Album of the Year, Male Vocalist of the Year, Hawaiian Language Performance, Most Promising Artist, Entertainer of the Year and Liner Notes, Zuttermeister is really beginning to feel the weight of such acclaim. Maybe this is why he waited so long to record an album.

"We've been really busy now after the CD and a few awards," he says. "And it was a really big honor to even get one award, but when we first started out, we asked ourselves what our goal is, and it was never to win an award or to get rich. Our goal was to be proud of what we do and in 20 years to still love what we do. And I think that's still our focus. But it was really nice to be recognized, but I don't think it's our responsibility to make CDs just to win awards."

For Zuttermeister, music began well before he picked up his first ukulele in intermediate school. He was born into a hula family, where the melodies of the mele are as recognizable as the movement, where backyard parties meant listening to legendary Hawaii musicians perform and kanikapila sessions were a regular weekend affair.

“The pillars of Hawaiian music like Mahi Beamer, Aunty Genoa Keawe, Linda Dela Cruz were really influential and, luckily for me, many of these people would be at family parties because they would play for my great-grandmother when she would do her hula performances,” says Zuttermeister, great-grandson of Kau’i Zuttermeister, who penned the song *Na Pua Lei ‘Ilima*, and great-nephew of kumu hula Noe Zuttermeister. “So I was around Hawaiian music all the time, and I got to grow up listening to all the people who everyone looks up to now. Surely that inspired and ingrained Hawaiian music memory in me that I can draw back on.”



Ioane Burns and Hoku Zuttermeister have been playing together for 17 years in various bands

Immersed in the hula culture, Zuttermeister danced hula from the age of 4, but decided in high school to pursue his music passion instead. With a taste for the ukulele and guitar from a music class at King Intermediate, Zuttermeister was curious about taking his music interests further. Those ambitions met an obstacle during his freshman year at Castle High School when he found out there was no Polynesian music class.

“For two years we went around and got signatures of students who would like to be in the class, and so finally we had enough signatures, so we went to the principal,” says Zuttermeister, a 1993 Castle grad. “So our junior year we got a Polynesian music class and it was a learning time for all of us, the teacher included.”

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It was during his junior year that he took his talents to the stage. He met up with a few guys from Kamehameha Schools (Ioane Burns, Marcus Ontai and Kekoa Kaluhiwa) and formed the group Kana’e.

“We’ve been playing as Kana’e every since, but in 2000 one of the members moved to Hilo and the other member (Kaluhiwa) is in the band Holunape, so there’s pretty much just two of us left, Ioane Burns and myself,” says Zuttermeister, who admits that as a child he aspired to be a kumu hula, but is quick to add that this is no longer the case, having witnessed just how difficult the hula business is.

Whether they’re performing as Kana’e or billed as Hoku Zuttermeister, the duo are usually there backing up each other - as they’ve done for the past 17 years. But you will sometimes find one without the other, or even one with another musician. They joke that it’s how they’ve managed to learn and improve over the years.

“We learned to grow ourselves because when we play with other people, it forces us to break out of our routine,” says Burns, a 1993 Kamehameha graduate. “We’ve become better musicians.”

Burns and Zuttermeister have stuck together in a tough business where the lines of friendship, business and loyalty are often blurred. Whether it’s hanging out watching friends and acquaintances perform at the Waikiki Shell or gearing up for a solo gig at a baby luau, it’s always unconditional support.

And both agree that nothing is more perfect than those moments on stage when everything is going right and it just clicks.

“That’s our favorite thing about music, because there’s no feeling that is like that,” says



Zuttermeister loves being on stage when 'everything clicks'

Photo from Hoku Zuttermeister

Burns adds, "It's when we look at each other and it was like, wow, that was pretty good. But it doesn't happen very often."

As the first in his immediate family to play music professionally, Zuttermeister has taken the responsibility of putting his music and himself out in the public eye seriously. It isn't a family obligation, but a personal one, to not only stay true to the music and the language, but to be a positive example for Hawaii's youths. This comes with years of experience as a school teacher, having taught at Waimanalo Intermediate, Kamehameha Schools and King Intermediate.

"Our responsibility is to perpetuate and stay true to what we love," says Zuttermeister. "Being the younger generation, I think the example we try to set is just to be true to the music and share the love for the music and the language. Hopefully that will give the next generation something to follow."

This attitude, as well as his talents and Kaneohe roots, made Zuttermeister the obvious choice to headline this Saturday's (Sept. 27) Windward Ho'olaulea, themed Pulama ka Hanauna Hou -Nurturing the Next Generation. Organizers promise that it will be "the best one yet."

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Happening on the Windward Community College campus from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., the eighth annual event will feature crafts, food booths, keiki games, high-tech Imaginarium shows and a silent auction including items such as two round trips on the Hawaii Superferry and a 2008 Nissan Versa - which is good news for Zuttermeister, since he has pretty much owned every Nissan vehicle except the Versa.

"I've gone through so many cars - I don't know if that should be something I should be proud about," laughs Zuttermeister. "I'd say maybe about seven, but you can check with Guy Mello at King Windward Nissan for the exact numbers."

We'll see if he walks away with car No. 8 at the Ho'olaulea this weekend. But if he doesn't, his checkbook may thank him now that he has a mortgage to attend to, having recently purchased a "fixer-upper" home in Kaneohe.

"I don't know why buying a house is the American dream; it costs so much money," jokes Zuttermeister. "With the house we had to do a lot of work, so it's been pretty gratifying. The inside is pretty much done, but we didn't even touch the outside yet. It's so different from music because I have no idea what we're doing with the house."

Along with his home renovation projects and busy performance schedule, Zuttermeister also is working on a second album, which he anticipates will release sometime next year. And if his schedule permits, he hopes he can get back into the classroom to teach again.

"I taught in the schools for a long time and I really feel I connect with the younger people - I kind of miss it," he says. "It was hard, because an entertainer schedule with an educator schedule just doesn't work, because you're out late at night and then you have to wake up early, and touring. And then you're talking all day, and when it's time to sing, your voice is all tired. So I kind of had to give up teaching for a while."

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But if he isn't teaching, Zuttermeister hopes to be able to give back to younger generations in other ways, perhaps one day helping them record their own albums or simply being a positive role model.

"Working in the schools, I can see how great of an influence people in the entertainment industry are," says Zuttermeister. "I don't consider myself a role model because we're still trying to get our own two feet set in the industry, but I accept it and I take that responsibility."

*To find out more about this young talent, visit [www.hokuzuttermeister.com](http://www.hokuzuttermeister.com).*

## **EIGHTH ANNUAL WINDWARD HO'OLAULEA**

This year's Windward Ho'olaulea happens Saturday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on the Windward Community College campus. Coordinated by WCC and the Kaneohe Business Group, this celebration is one of the largest community events on the Windward side.

In conjunction with this year's theme of Pulama Ka Hanauna Hou - Nurturing the Next Generation - live musical performances showcase the new generation of Island talent, including Pila Nahenahe, Halau Hula O Napunaheleonapua, WCC slack key students, Hoku Zuttermeister and many others.

In addition to the all-day music lineup, folks can enjoy unique island crafts, food booths, keiki games, high-tech Imaginarium shows and an expanded silent auction. And best of all, admission is free.

Among the items up for bid at the silent auction will be a timeshare stay in Cabo San Lucas, a Kaneohe Bay cruise package, special family passes to Hawaiian Waters Adventure Park, restaurant gift certificates and much more. Proceeds from this year's silent auction will help establish WCC's first general scholarship endowment for WCC students.

The Ho'olaulea also will have a used-book and white elephant sale, as well as interactive exhibits from community organizations. Several well-known artists, including Hiroshi Tagami, Michael Powell and Gary Reed, also will be there to talk about their work. A nice selection of artwork will be on sale in a special art corner.

The Windward Ho'olaulea is the recent winner of the prestigious 2008 "Keep It Hawaii" award from the Hawaii Tourism Authority for demonstrating a commitment to the growth and development of Hawaiian culture.

### **ENTERTAINMENT SCHEDULE:**

9:15-10 a.m. - Na Kupuna O Ko'olau  
10:15-11 a.m. - Pila Nahenahe  
11:15-noon - Royal Hawaiian Band  
12:15-1 p.m. - Hawaii Loa  
1:15-2 p.m. - Halau Hula O Napunaheleonapua  
2:15-3 p.m. - The Geezers  
3:15-4 p.m. - WCC slack key students  
4:15-5 p.m. - Halau Hula O Na Wahine  
5:15-6 p.m. - Hoku Zuttermeister  
6:15-7 p.m. - Cyril Pahinui and friends  
7:15-8 p.m. - Pilioha  
8:15-9 p.m. - Kaukahi