

Kamekooa



[BAND](#)

[BIO](#)

[STORY](#)

[MUSIC/MEDIA](#)

[CONTACT](#)

BAND

Kanekoa describes its music as ukulele powered hawai'ian reggae folk rock. Kanekoa has been playing together since 1999, melding elements of Hawaiian, Rock, Folk, Blues, Reggae and improvisation into a truly unique sound. In Hawaiian the word KANEKOA (kah-ney-koh-ah) has its roots in the words kane (man) and koa (a sacred tree indigenous to Hawai'i), and translates into English as "a strong man or warrior." Kanekoa as a band translates into one of Hawaii's premier live music experiences. Because their sound is based on the yet untapped potential of the electrified Hawaiian ukulele, inspired by the range of musical tastes of its players, and shaped by the land and culture of Hawai'i, Kanekoa has discovered a land of limitless musical possibility. In short, you have not heard or seen anything like this before.

TRAVIS RICE

cajon, percussion, drums,
backing vocals

KAULANA KANEKOA

Rhythm ukulele and lead vocals

VINCE ESQUIRE

Lead ukulele and
background vocals

DON LOPEZ

Bass and
background vocals

[BAND](#)

[BIO](#)

[STORY](#)

[MUSIC/MEDIA](#)

[CONTACT](#)

Kanekoa



“Kanekoa takes the ukulele and uke-related music to another place”

— James “Hutch” Hutchinson, *Bass Player for Bonnie Raitt’s band*

“The band is amazing, and Vince is amazing”

—Mick Fleetwood

“The Hawaiian Grateful Dead”

— Bill Kreutzman, *Drummer for the Grateful Dead and 7 Walkers*

“These guys scare me, they are that good”

— David Hidalgo, *Los Lobos*

BIO

Kanekoa describes its music as ukulele powered hawai’ian reggae folk rock. Kanekoa has been playing together since 1999, melding elements of Hawaiian, Rock, Folk, Blues, Reggae and improvisation into a truly unique sound. Kanekoa consist of Kaulana Kanekoa (rhythm ukulele, lead vocals, lyrics), Vince Esquire (lead ukulele, backing vocals, sounds), Travis Rice (cajon/congas, kit, electric pads, backing vocals), and Don Lopez (u-bass, electric bass, backing vocals). Kaulana Kaneka, Vince Esquire, and Don Lopez are sponsored by Kala Ukulele..

Bill Kreutzman, drummer for the Grateful Dead and the 7 Walkers, called Kanekoa “The Hawaiian Grateful Dead.” Kanekoa was invited to play Bill’s wedding on Kaua’i. Mick Fleetwood (Fleetwood Mac) said of Kanekoa: “The band is amazing, and Vince is amazing,” says Fleetwood, who also plays uke and travels with one when he’s on tour. “I saw him playing electric guitar years ago on Maui, and it was pretty stunning. He’s now uniquely applying all his influences, stepping out of the traditional ukulele approach. He’s great.” James “Hutch” Hutchinson, bassist for Bonnie Raitt, says of Kanekoa: “Kanekoa takes the ukulele and uke-related music to another place.” “Vince has a much different and funkier pocket than any other uke player I’ve heard or have played with.” David Hidalgo of Los Lobos says “These guys scare me, they are that good”

Kanekoa has shared the stage with Jake Shimabukuro, 7 Walkers (Bill Kreutzman of GDead), Los Lobos, Joan Osbourne, John Mayall, Marshal Tucker Band, Makana, Steve Kimock, Willie Nelson, John Cruz, Eric McFadden, Ekolu, Willie K, Anuhea, Paula Fuga/Mike Love/Sam Iles, Brudda Waltah, Trombone Shorty, Fruition, Ian Neville’s Dumpstafunk, George Porter, DJ Logic, David Nelson, Afromassive, Popppa Grows Funk, Jerry Joseph and the Jack Mormons, amongst others. Kanekoa has toured and played festivals in Hawai’I, California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, North Dakota, and Colorado. Kanekoa appeared in the winter 2015 edition of Ukulele Magazine. Kanekoa appeared in the Farelly Brothers feature film “Heartbreak Kid” with Ben Stiller and two of their songs were used in the movie. In 2014 Kanekoa was invited to play the JamBase Live video series. The band’s 2007 CD “Under the Coconut Sky” is distributed worldwide courtesy of Fontana/Universal. Kanekoa released its most recent studio album Tales of the Fruit Stand Mystic in December 2016.

[BAND](#)

[BIO](#)

[STORY](#)

[MUSIC/MEDIA](#)

[CONTACT](#)



RIDING THE WAVE:

MAUI'S KANEKOA TAKES THE UKE ON A STRANGE TRIP

by Jon Woodhouse

Playing what it describes as “ukulele-powered Hawaiian reggae fusion rock from Maui,” the band known as Kanekoa is riding a wave of renewed interest in the instrument most closely associated with the Aloha State. Though Kanekoa has been at it for nearly 20 years, the band continues to surprise and delight unsuspecting audiences. Wherever the guys play, it seems, people are mesmerized. They’ve never heard anything like Kanekoa before.

Currently the group features Kaulana Kanekoa on rhythm ukulele and lead vocals, Travis Rice on the cajon percussion box, Vince Esquire on lead uke and background vocals and Don Lopez on Bass and backing vocals. Esquire, in particular, has been performing since his early teens, a virtuoso taking the ukulele into new territory—just like local legend (and occasional collaborator) Jake Shimabukuro.

CONTINUE >>

“At first I thought it was just the novelty of the ukuleles,” says Kaulana about Kanekoa’s appeal. “People loved us on the mainland. I would meet musicians, and they’d say, ‘It’s astounding what you’re doing on the ukuleles.’ People see Vinnie and ask, ‘Is he the only one in the world playing like that?’ And I say, ‘There are a couple of guys.’”

The band’s innovative approach has not gone unnoticed among notable musicians. “Kanekoa takes the ukulele and uke-related music to another place,” marvels bassist James “Hutch” Hutchinson, from Bonnie Raitt’s band. “Vince has a much different and funkier pocket than any other uke player I’ve heard or have played with.”

Kanekoa has also caught the ear of Fleetwood Mac drummer Mick Fleetwood, who frequently books them at his popular restaurant, Fleetwood’s on Front Street in the west Maui city of Lahaina. “The band is amazing, and Vince is amazing,” says Fleetwood, who also plays uke and travels with one when he’s on tour. “I saw him playing electric guitar years ago on Maui, and it was pretty stunning. He’s now uniquely applying all his influences, stepping out of the traditional ukulele approach. He’s great.”

HAWAIIAN STYLE

Formed as a trio on Maui in 1997, Kanekoa eventually expanded to a five- and six-piece band. At one time, the group was billed as the only band in the world fronted by two electric ukulele players. In the last couple of years, Kanekoa has scaled back to an acoustic trio, occasionally adding bassist Don Lopez to the mix.

When the guys are flying high, it’s easy to imagine Kanekoa as a Grateful Dead-inspired jam band with eclectic roots and a sound that embraces flavors of reggae, blues, funk, and island music. Esquire’s fluid, liquid runs on the ukulele sometimes recall Jerry Garcia’s tonal lyricism. Some fans have even wondered if he channels Garcia.

“He was never one of my influences; I never listened to the Dead until recently,” Esquire says. “I think Jerry and I had some of the same influences, as far as jazz and blues players and listening to the same people, like Miles Davis and Coltrane and Wes Montgomery.” Esquire was born in Oakland, California, but moved to Maui when he was four years old. Exposed to music at an early age by his father, he picked up the uke at seven and by 15 was blazing on guitar. “I started on ukulele and I transmitted that to the guitar, and it evolved, and then I went back to the ukulele,” Esquire says. “People frowned on me doing new things with the ukulele, and I got kicked out of a couple of groups because I was trying to evolve with the instrument. Kanekoa gave me the outlet to do whatever I wanted.” Kaulana and Rice first hooked up with Esquire just after he turned 13. “When we met Vince, he was going out of the box, all over the place,” Kaulana recalls.

“They told me you can play whatever you want,” says Esquire. “I had been playing guitar and listening to Stevie Ray Vaughan, and I wondered if I could do the same thing on ukulele.”

Born in Maui, Kaulana moved to Reno, Nevada, as an eight year old. He first learned the violin, then switched to trumpet. Inspired by the beauty of Hawaiian slack-key music, he eventually turned to guitar. “I loved ki ho`alu,” Kaulana says, using the Hawaiian phrase for the slack-key style. “My dad was a great slack-key player. It wasn’t until I moved back to Hawaii that I started playing the uke all the time. To me, it’s yoga—a release. My grandfather called it ‘Hawaiian drugs,’ because it’s so relaxing.”

Absorbing a diverse range of influences, from Gabby Pahinui and Peter Moon (of Sunday Manoa fame) to Led Zeppelin and Bob Marley, Kaulana began composing his own songs. “Then I got together with these two guys, and it grew from there.” Percussionist Travis Rice has known Kaulana since high school and was inspired by the Grateful Dead’s improvisational approach. “We started going to Dead shows,” Rice recalls. “I had never heard a band that would purposely lose time and play with that.” Rice gravitated from a drum kit to the cajon a couple of years ago. “The cajon is perfect for what we’re doing,” he says. “With the cajon and the acoustic thing, now we can play anywhere. Even when we’re shredding and the tempo is straight-up punk rock, it’s palatable because it’s ukes and the cajon.”

CONTINUE >>

A UKE JAM BAND

Slowly, Kanekoa built a following for their progressive music. “When we started, we knew we were going to do something different with the ukes,” says Kaulana. “We were taking it out of the traditional format, to make our own style of folk jazz, kind of like the jam-band scene is doing now. As we were getting to learn music together, bigger opportunities started happening—like getting into a movie.”

That movie was the 2007 hit comedy *The Heartbreak Kid*, starring Ben Stiller. “We were at the Mint in LA, doing really long sets and things like an epic, 14-minute ukulele rock song ‘Nahiku,’” Rice explains. “The director of *Dumb and Dumber*, Peter Farrelly, walked up to us after the set and said, ‘That’s the best live show I’ve seen in ten years; I’m putting you in a movie.’” And so he did.

A thrilled five-piece version of Kanekoa was flown to San Francisco for the filming. Kanekoa appeared as the wedding band, playing their original song “Way Down.” It’s not their only movie work: Their version of “Over the Rainbow,” a song popularized on uke by the late Israel Kamakawiwo‘ole, was included in the amiable film Marilyn Hotchkiss’ *Ballroom Dancing and Charm School*. While Kanekoa’s rendition was a hit on iTunes and gave the band increased exposure, the guys were not entirely happy about it.

“It wasn’t really our idea, it was more our management,” Esquire explains. Kaulana adds, “I kind of felt it was taking away from Israel’s version, which was so beautiful. That song opened up the uke to the world. Now, we won’t do it live.”

Central to the Kanekoa sound are the Mele ukuleles favored by both Kaulana (six-string) and Esquire (four-string). “Ever since we started, we have had a relationship with Mele Ukulele,” Esquire says of the Maui-based instrument maker. “They’ve been big supporters since the beginning. We both agree there’s a specific pickup their instruments use that has a sound nothing else compares with.”

“When we first started buying ukes from [Mele’s] Mike [Rock], he was able to drop preamps inside of his ukes, and do it with such finesse that it never took away from the tonal quality of the instruments,” adds Kaulana. “The preamps were giving us power, and we could plug into any amp, and that’s how we could play loud uke songs.”

Over the years, Kanekoa has released a number of studio and live recordings, including the band’s most recent studio work, *Hawaiiana Americana*, and a live album recorded in June that captures them opening for New Orleans voodoo blues musician Papa Mali. A previous live project, recorded at the Maui Arts & Cultural Center in 2014, includes an astonishing cover of Pink Floyd’s “Another Brick in the Wall,” featuring Jake Shimabukuro and Esquire on dueling ukuleles.

“Jake was so excited at what was happening, because Vince was just killing it, going so fast,” Kaulana remembers. “He was loving it.” Shimabukuro and Esquire have played together a number of times, and there’s even been talk of a future collaboration.

Esquire has also collaborated with Gregg Allman, performing with the Allman Brothers at a 2007 Beacon Theatre show in New York. That led to an appearance on Allman’s 2011 solo album, *Low Country Blues*.

Looking to the future, Kanekoa hopes to continue exposing its inventive ukulele-based music to a wider audience. “We were just in North Dakota, and these teens were coming up and asking if they could sample our music,” says Kaulana. “They wanted to mix it with their music. It was great.”

“As we’ve been honing our style, we’ve been watching how the popularity of the uke has grown. We’re so excited about the uke being more legitimized now, and it makes it easier for us.”



[BAND](#)

[BIO](#)

[STORY](#)

[MUSIC/MEDIA](#)

[CONTACT](#)

MUSIC - MEDIA

CLICK FOR VIDEOS



Ukulele Magazine
Studio Performance



Live at Lumeria



Another Brick in the Wall



Bustin Rock

[CLICK TO GO TO KANEKO WEBSITE](#)

[CLICK HERE FOR PRESS](#)

[CLICK HERE FOR SCHEDULE](#)

[CLICK HERE FOR MUSIC](#)



[BAND](#)

[BIO](#)

[STORY](#)

[MUSIC/MEDIA](#)

[CONTACT](#)

CONTACT - BOOKING

To book Kanekoa please email kanekoaband@gmail.com

Stay connected with us by clicking the links below

WWW.KANEKOA.BANDCAMP.COM

WWW.REVERBNATION.COM/KANEKOA

WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/KANEKOAMUSIC

WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/KANEKOA

WWW.TWITTER.COM/KANEKOAMUSIC

WWW.KANEKOAMUSIC.COM

MANAGEMENT:

The DEA

Rick Davis

808-239-5867

bopr@hawaii.rr.com

TOUR MANAGER

Tom Littell

206-200-4632

tommlittell@gmail.com



[BAND](#)

[BIO](#)

[STORY](#)

[MUSIC/MEDIA](#)

[CONTACT](#)