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Music

Boston-based local combo updates the exotica sound

Way of Waitiki

TIMOTHY DYKE

Jazz is a language with the deepest of histories, but listen to 2001 Waipahu High School graduate Abraham Lagrimas, Jr., and you will understand that this is not old music. Jazz is not a thing. It does not wither and decay. Jazz is an action, a complex response to the condition of living, and when Lagrimas plays drums, percussion, vibes or 'ukulele, he creates new music that reflects where he comes from, what he's listened to, and who he acknowledges as his teachers.

"My mentor is Noel Okimoto," says Lagrimas, who began playing with Honolulu's legendary jazz drummer in high school. He also cites as influences island artists Steve Jones and DeShannon Higa. His musical education continued in New England where he attended Berklee School of Music, graduating this past May. Lagrimas is back in town to play music with Don Tiki, De Shannon Higa and with his own group Waitiki this weekend at the Hawai'i International Jazz Festival (see Concerts & Clubs, page 12).

Waitiki plays exotica, a musical

hybrid of jazz that owes much of its existence to Martin Denny to whom this year's jazz festival pays tribute. Exotica, with its jungle sounds, space noises and references to 1960s tiki-lounge style, is a kitsch nostalgia trip, but it's a living sound to be reinvented and reinvigorated by young players. "Waitiki started as just a fun thing, but then it took off," says Lagrimas.

He co-founded the group in Boston with fellow local boy Randy Wong, the band's bassist and brainiac—he has degrees from the New England Conservatory and Harvard University.

Lagrimas is a jazz multi-instrumentalist who speaks enthusiastically about contemporary New York players like Joshua Redmond. Lagrimas is a child of Hawai'i, and his music reflects the influence not only of the thriving local jazz scene, but of all the diversity that a typical island kid is exposed to. "I listen to stuff a lot of jazz musicians wouldn't consider: hip-hop, Hawaiian, singer-songwriter stuff." Singer-songwriter? Lagrimas laughs. "I just threw that out there, but yeah, I like Jack Johnson. John Mayer. I give it



all a listen."

Lagrimas weaves his influences into the music he's creating for his first solo CD to be released in the fall on Pass Out Records, the label he co-created in 2003 with his brother Eric. It's jazz from a Waipahu boy who grew up feeding on mixed musical plates. "I try to utilize all kinds of music. I seriously listen to everything. They are all musicians. We are all trying to do the same thing." ■