

All in the `Ohana

CD to fight the problem of substance abuse on the Big Isle

By John Burnett
Tribune-Herald Correspondent

Seldom if ever has the impending release of a CD caused as much stir as that of "We Are `Ohana - Songs Of Hope." The 15-cut album is an eclectic mix of artists and music with a message; proceeds will go to fight the burgeoning problem of substance abuse and addiction on the Big Island.

Featured artists on the CD include, Auntie Nona Beamer, Keola Beamer and Kaliko Beamer-Trapp, Bruddah Kuz, Faith Rivera, Rupert Tripp, Jr., James McWhinney, Damon Williams and Glynn Motoishi. The simple yet striking album cover is designed by artist Wendy Duke. The two masterminds behind the project are executive producer Howard Shapiro and producer Gregg Perry.

The album has already been featured in its entirety on KHBC Radio and at least one of the songs, "Your Heart Will Lead You Home," a song written by Shapiro and sung by Williams, is already a local hit, immediately lighting up the request lines to the "Top Five at Five" on KWXX Radio.

There is a CD release reception tonight from 5 to 8 p.m. at Wailoa Center in Hilo. The CD will be played in its entirety and it will be an opportunity for the public to meet and greet the producers and artists. Billy Kenoi, mayor Harry Kim's executive assistant will be there, as will Andy Smith, East Hawaii Liason for Gov. Linda Lingle.

Perry said that "We Are `Ohana" was conceived over several months in stages of an ongoing conversation between him and Shapiro.

Last September (2003), a filmmaker from Honolulu named Edgy Lee had a documentary on the ice epidemic in the islands and Governor Lingle was so taken by it that she prevailed upon all the local



Gregg Perry and Howard Shapiro

network affiliates - ABC, NBC, CBS, PBS and FOX - to run it simultaneously," Perry recalled.

"Howard saw that and was really moved by it, and he wrote the song 'Your Heart Will Lead You Home.' 'Then in November 2003 he called me and said, 'I have a single I really want you to produce. I just want to give it away as an inspirational song to treatment centers, whoever wants it for free, just as an inspiring message about substance abuse and addiction.' 'Then Billy Kenoi heard about it and said, 'It would be really cool if we got all of these people together and did a whole album.' "Howard and I met with him a couple of times and then Howard and I thought that one way to make this work is to assemble all these people, make this inspirational record and make it phase one of three phases."

Phase two is an ongoing outreach program with the producers and artists going into the community targeting schools, communities, treatment centers and prisons. Phase three is the creation of ACT (Action-Community-Teens), a community volunteer program that provides substance abuse and addiction recovery information and promotes active participation of young people in projects that enhance the quality of life in local Hawaiian communities.

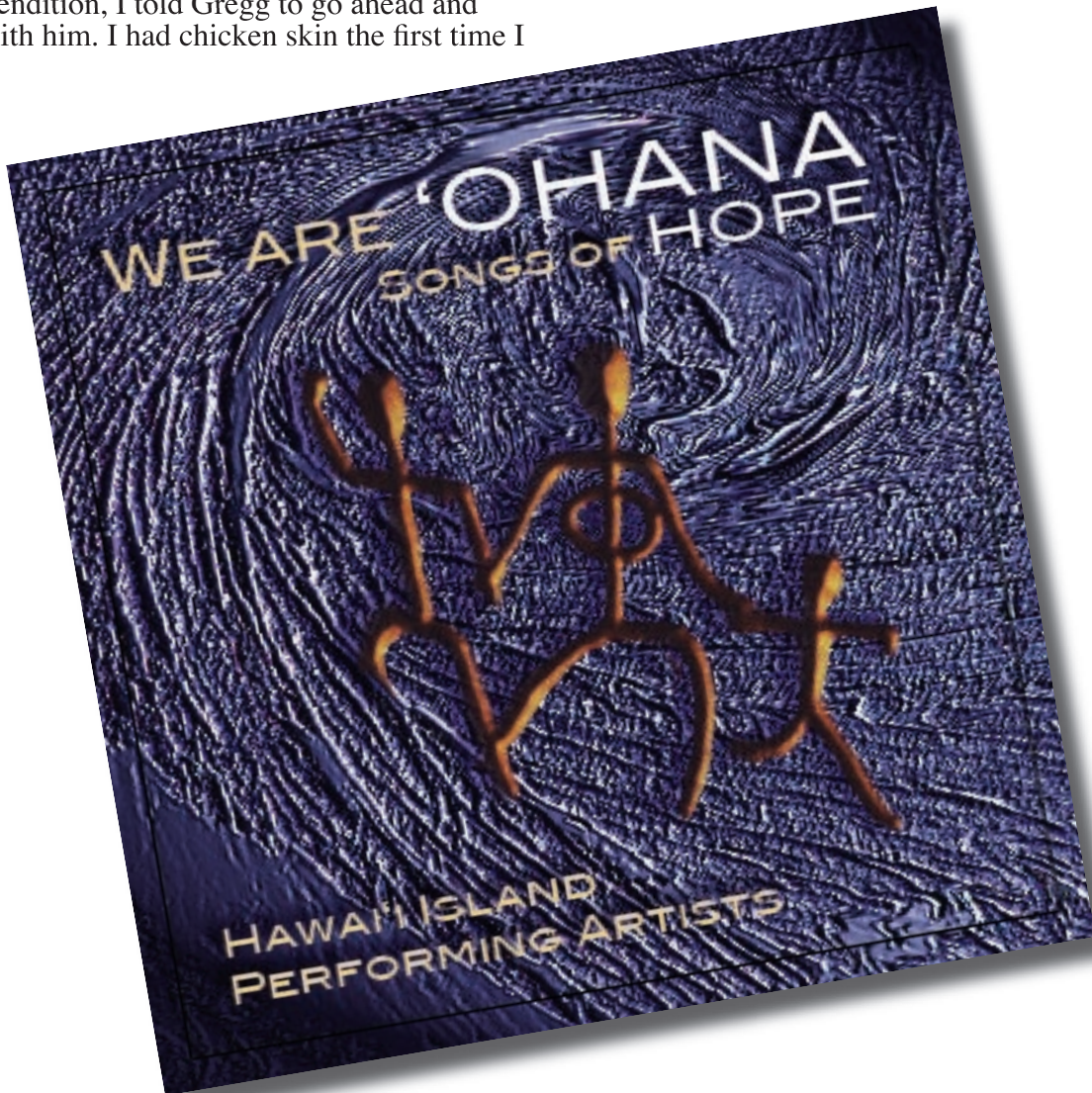
"That's how we approached this project, as something bigger than just the CD," said Perry, who is a recovering alcoholic and drug addict celebrating 17 years of sobriety.

Perry and Shapiro originally conceived that artists would just submit already completed recordings or written songs for recording, but in actuality, they

ended up writing or co-writing nine of the 15 songs on the CD and recording most of it at Perry's home studio. The result is both eclectic and electric, one of the best produced projects to date from the Big Island with styles including ancient chant, rap, hip-hop, reggae, rock, contemporary pop, country-rock, contemporary and urban R&B and Hawaiian slack key. Williams rendition of "Your Heart Will Lead You Home" has whetted local appetites for the CD. Perry wanted Williams to sing it; Shapiro admits an initial reluctance.

"That was difficult, because I had recorded it with Gregg and used it at some events addressing the issue of ice," he said. "I'd played it at candlelight vigils, so it was close to my heart. But when I heard Damon's rendition, I told Gregg to go ahead and record it with him. I had chicken skin the first time I heard it."

"I started writing music in 1975," Shapiro said. "I wasn't musical. I didn't play an instrument and all I wanted to do was hook up with good vocalists and younger Native Hawaiian friends in Waianae and Makaha. It never happened. So I was forced to go out and sing and record my own music. But almost 30 years later, what I wanted to do with my own music is happening now. When I hear Damon, James McWhinney, Glynn Motoishi, these phenomenally talented singers do our music, it's wonderful. They just take it to its very essence.



Other surprises on the CD include McWhinney, who was in America's most famous reggae band, Big Mountain, belting "Higher Ground," a rocker composed by Shapiro as well as Glynn Motoishi, front man of the hard-rock band Living In Question, crooning "Winds Of Change," a contemporary pop ballad co-written by Shapiro and Perry.

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