

ISLAND MELE

By John Berger

REVIEW

'Higher Ground' The Songs of Howard Shapiro & Gregg Perry

Various Artists
(Perryscope Records)



Composer/performers Howard Shapiro and Gregg Perry seek to educate, empower and entertain with this anthology of songs culled from four previous projects. Perry wears the twin hats of producer/arranger and does a fine job applying the talents of various vocalists across several genres of music -- rock, pop, gospel and hip-hop.

James McWhinney is the voice of choice on the opening numbers -- "Higher Ground" and "Point of No Return." Both are up-tempo folk-rock songs with distinct calls for action against the status quo and the powers that be. Damon Williams joins McWhinney on "Earth Patriot," a third clear call for immediate political action.

Williams performs as a smooth soulful balladeer in "What Do I Have to Do" and shares inspirational messages with "Happy Today" and "Your Heart Will Lead You Home." The latter two have Christian undercurrents but are not aggressively "churchy." Williams, a Brown Bags to Stardom winner in the mid-'90s, sings all three beautifully.

Tioni Tam Sing is a delightful discovery as the voice on three other selections. She is impressive on all of them; "Innocence," the third of the three, shows her appeal as a gospel-style singer performing with a choir behind her. Tam Sing has the voice to go national.

A pair of bilingual hapa-haole songs are also notable: "Malama i ka 'Aina" combines an important social message and a funky mainstream rock. "Hawaiian Spirit" delivers a stronger statement of Hawaiian cultural pride over a hip-hop beat.

For more information and to hear, purchase & download the music of
Howard Shapiro & Gregg Perry,
please visit: www.pecktunes.com