

J. Kimo Williams Biography

On June 1, 1969, J. Kimo Williams was captivated as he witnessed Jimi Hendrix's spellbinding performance of "Spanish Castle Magic" at a Waikiki Shell concert in Hawaii. This transformative experience solidified his unwavering commitment to a life devoted to music. Subsequently, on July 4, 1969, he enlisted in the Army and was deployed to Vietnam. His service in Vietnam and departure from Sunset Beach, Hawaii, led J. Kimo to embark on a journey that saw him pursuing his musical aspirations at Berklee College of Music in Boston.

While at Berklee, his inspiration expanded as he encountered the music of the Jazz-Fusion ensemble Mahavishnu Orchestra. This encounter steered him toward honing his skills in music composition.

An educational milestone came in the form of a pivotal class titled "Styles and Analysis," where the classical compositions of Mussorgsky and Messiaen entranced him. This encounter introduced him to yet another avenue for musical expression.

Equipped with foundational harmony and arranging knowledge, J. Kimo began crafting compositions for jazz big bands, infusing them with elements from his days playing Jimi Hendrix songs in Vietnam, the Jazz fusion music of Weather Report, and the classical realm, including application using strings, French horn, tuba, and double-reeds. As Berklee's curriculum predominantly emphasized jazz and big band ensembles, he established his own musical collective to perform his distinctive compositions. The ensemble, known as "The Paumalu Symphony," drew its name from the street he resided on in Hawaii.

In 1980, transitioning into his next chapter, J. Kimo moved to Chicago with his musician and artistic collaborator, Carol Williams. They co-founded a recording label and studio, "Little Beck Music". He rebranded his music ensemble as "Kimotion," enlisting talented Chicago musicians as instrumentalists. With a lineup comprising 22 instrumentalists, including trumpets, trombones, saxes, guitars, keyboards, and various classical instruments, Kimotion performed a blend of contemporary jazz fusion with underlying rock influences.

His debut release, "War Stories," in 1991, garnered praise from critics, receiving 4.5 stars from Downbeat Magazine. This album was a therapeutic outlet that drew from his experiences during the Vietnam War.

As a Vietnam Veteran dealing with PTSD and disabilities, his compositions often drew inspiration from his military background, including his classical symphony "Symphony For The Sons of Nam."

A pivotal moment in his musical journey came with the 1991 premier, "Symphony for the Sons of Nam," by the Savannah Symphony. The work has garnered nationwide radio play and earned him multiple composer awards.

In 2001, his second album, "Tracking," was recorded and featured high-profile jazz-fusion musicians such as Victor Bailey, Vinnie Colaiuta, Michael Brecker, and even actor-musician Gary Sinise. Collaborating with Sinise led to J. Kimo's formation of the Lt Dan Band, previously known as the G&K (Gary and Kimo) Classic Rock Band.

The next release, "Kimotion Live 2002 With My Friend Vinnie," captured a dynamic live performance at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California.

From 2012 onward, J. Kimo retired from the performing aspect of his musical expression and engaged in extensive recording projects across Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and his Shepherdstown, WV Garage studio.

His artistic evolution led to the reimagining, re-recording, remixing, and remastering of prior works, culminating in multiple releases under the "J. Kimo Williams" brand.

Looking forward, J. Kimo Williams embarks on a new recording project, "The Red Summer 1919 - An Instrumental Opera." Set for release on Veterans Day, November 11, 2023, this project is rooted in his commitment to honoring Black WW1 Veterans. He states " In 2023, I decided to bring visibility to Black WW1 Veterans and wanted to tell their story. This Jazz-Fusion project, titled 'Red Summer 1919: An Instrumental Opera,' is my musical approach to imagining the historical events leading up to the riots. I composed new music and used themes from previous works to set each scene. I relayed the visual narrative to the instrumentalists who used their imagination to create a musical representation of each scene through their improvisation".

He views his music as a conduit for meaningful emotional connection and communication between himself and his audience.