

Kimo was born in Amityville, New York, and spent much of his childhood divided between Air Force bases, urban neighborhoods of Baltimore, and rural Mississippi on his grandparents' sharecropper farm in North Carolina. After school hours, his routine day was picking tobacco, plowing fields, hauling water, and tending livestock. His experiences at the age of fourteen in Biloxi, Mississippi, made a deep impression on him as he witnessed first-hand the racial segregation of the South. He credits this experience as the origin of his life-long ambition to persevere regardless of obstacles and led to his passion for creating his own identity and career as a musician and educator.

In 1968, he moved to Hawaii, living with his alcoholic father, and attended Leilehua High School. He always had a guitar with him and played his favorite songs in the school hallways. He also took up sports and was an all-star football performer with a scholarship invitation from Arizona State and setting the triple-jump record on the school track team.

In May 1969, just before enlisting in the US Army, he attended his first major music concert: Jimi Hendrix playing at the Waikiki Bowl. He was so inspired by this concert and the music of Jimi Hendrix that he dedicated himself to music and playing guitar.

After basic training, he was sent to Viet Nam (the day after his 20th birthday), where he served with the 20th Combat Engineer Battalion in Lai Khe, building roads and clearing land in the jungle. An Army entertainment service director heard him playing guitar at one of the service clubs and suggested he form a band to perform for troops in the field. For two months, Kimo and his group, "The Soul Coordinators," traveled to remote areas throughout South Vietnam, setting up their drums and amplifiers in jungle mud, often with their music competing with artillery fire and his band performed in hospital corridors, in dayrooms, at officer club picnics and anywhere that would make a difference in the lives of those who were serving. Kimo received a special award directly from General Creighton Abrams for his service to the morale and well-being of soldiers fighting in Vietnam.

After leaving Viet Nam in November of 1970, Kimo returned to Hawaii and began playing with several local rock bands. In 1972, he left Hawaii (he adopted the Hawaiian name for Jim, Kimo, to keep his ties to his home. He applied to and was accepted to the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston using his GI Bill. During his four years at Berklee (starting as a guitarist who could barely read music), he developed considerable compositional talents and eventually created his harmonic concepts ("Diagonal Harmony"). He began composing music that combined jazz, rock, and classical styles. Also, while a student at Berklee, he formed his innovative 30-piece ensemble, the "Paumalu Symphony," (later renamed "Kimotion,") as a vehicle for his unique style of composing. After graduating in 1976 with a BA in composition, he spent a year teaching at Berklee.

In 1976 he met his music partner and future wife Carol, a fellow Berklee student. Kimo and Carol married in 1978 and together joined the Army Band program, spending a year with the 9th Infantry Division Band at Ft. Lewis, Washington. Kimo went on to attend Officer Candidate School and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in 1980. His first assignment brought him to Fort Sheridan, IL: close enough to Chicago that he and Carol could continue producing and performing with his large ensemble and their small-group "Williams and Williams" in local clubs and concert venues. In addition, they set up a music publishing company (One Omik Music) and launched their own record company (Little Beck Music). They rehabbed an old storefront in Chicago and built and operated a recording studio to record their music.

In 1983 Kimo earned his MA in Management from Webster University. He resigned his commission from the active-duty Army in 1987 to pursue music full time. He taught at Sherwood Conservatory of Music in Chicago and the Music and Management Departments at Columbia College Chicago.

Kimo completed his military service in the Army Reserves by becoming the Bandmaster for the 85th Division Army Reserve Band and retired from the Army in 1996.

As a composer, Kimo has released four CDs of original works, including two with his fusion ensemble "*Kimotion*." His symphonic works have been performed by the symphonies of Detroit, Atlanta, Savannah, Philadelphia, Indianapolis, Alabama, Lancaster, PA, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, Czech Republic, and others. His string quartet "Into the Liquid" was commissioned by the New York-based Ethel quartet and premiered at the 2013 *BAM Next Wave* Festival. His AT&T commission, "Fanfare for Life," was performed July 7th, 2018, at the Antietam Battlegrounds in Sharpsburg, MD, by The Maryland Symphony Orchestra to celebrate Independence Day.

Kimo wrote his first symphony, "Symphony For the Sons of Nam" (SFSON), in 1990. It has been performed by the Savannah, Detroit, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Alabama, Indianapolis, Nashville Symphony Orchestras, and others nationally and internationally. The score was regularly programmed on NPR's "Performance Today" during Memorial Day from 1991 to 1997. In 1994 his second symphony was commissioned by AT&T and the Chicago Sinfonietta, and he titled it "Fanfare For Life." Several of his string quartets have been performed by the well-known NYC-based "Ethel" quartet. As a Vietnam Veteran, many of his compositions are inspired by his experience and interest in the military, including the award-winning *Symphony For The Sons of Nam*.

In 1997 Kimo composed the music for the Steppenwolf Theatre production of "A Streetcar Named Desire." That same year he music-directed the Goodman Theatre's production of the August Wilson Play, "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom."

The Lancaster (PA) Symphony Orchestra selected Kimo to receive their 1997 Composer of the Year award, with a performance of his works and recognition for his contribution to American Music.

Kimo co-founded the *United States Vietnam Art Program* (USVAP.org) with his artist partner and wife Carol Williams in 1998 to create opportunities to promote communication through the artistic medium between the two countries. Since 2010, USVAP (renamed *United States Veterans Arts Program*) has directed all its' energies to provide Artistic Tools (computers, guitars, cameras, and art supplies) for veterans' therapeutic use within state and federal medical facilities.

In 1999, the West Point Military Academy commissioned Kimo to compose music to commemorate their 2002 bicentennial. For this commission, he wrote "Buffalo Soldiers." This composition is featured on the CD "Buffalo Soldiers," released in 2006. A review by Chicago Tribune critic John Van Rhein wrote: "*What Buffalo Soldiers sets out to do, it does most effectively. Both the musical layout and the uplifting tone of the 15-minute piece recall Aaron Copeland's Lincoln Portrait*". In addition, this work includes a narration (by the composer) from excerpts of a Colin Powell speech given at the dedication of the Buffalo Soldiers monument at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. Colin Powell personally gave Kimo permission to use his words.

Kimo has also completed a stage play and writing an opera based on the court-martial of *Henry O. Flipper*, the first black graduate of West Point.

He co-founded The "Lt. Dan Band" in 2003 with actor-musician Gary Sinise (Forest Gump, CSI: NY). Their primary goal was to perform USO shows for active duty service members. Through his band, he has traveled to Afghanistan, Kuwait, Korea, Singapore, Diego Garcia, Germany, and other military bases to support military members.

In 2007 and 2015, Kimo was selected as a *Fulbright Specialist*, and through this program, he provided jazz education and developed curriculum in Vietnam.

After 30 years of teaching, Kimo retired from *Columbia College Chicago* in 2015, an associate professor in the Management and Music Departments.

He has received numerous awards: the Vietnam Veterans of America's *Excellence in the Arts Award*; People To People International's *Presidents Award*; the Lancaster Symphony's 38th Recipient - *Composers Award for Contributions to American Music*; the League of Black Women's *Black Rose Award* among others. In addition, Kimo is a *Purpose Prize Fellow* (AARP recognition).

Kimo is an avid award-winning, (KimoPics.com) photographer. His images has won several awards dating back to the early 1980s. Featured in *The Smithsonian Magazine* and in the permanent collection of the *National Vietnam Arts Museum* in Chicago, where from 2003 to 2004, he served as its Executive Director. In August 2018, Kimo opened his photo gallery "KimoPics" in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. This gallery features his art photography through themed exhibits and a permanent display. In 2019 his work was selected as a *National Geographic* Editor's Choice. In addition, Kimo's photography has been jury-selected and curated at; *The Berkeley Arts Center* in West Virginia, *The Scarab Club* in Detroit, MI, the *Cooperstown Art Association Galleries* in New York, the *Delaplaine Art Center* in Frederick, MD, and chosen to exhibit at the 2019 *Outsider Art Inside the Beltway* at Art Enables in Washington DC.

He has been awarded:

- 1st place in the Wickford Art Association, Newport, RI., National Photo Exhibit (2020)
- 2nd place (from 11,500 entries) in the *2019 International Photo Awards (IPA)*
- Honorable Mention (4), 2019
- Honorable Mention (2), 2018

Recently his photography was selected for inclusion in the 2022 new Apple TV+ series, *RIPPLE EFFECTS*, starring Emmy Award winner *Elisabeth Moss*, with Oscar-winner *Leonardo DiCaprio* as executive producer.

In 2018 He was selected as a *National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences* (Grammy Organization) Advocacy member, representing the State of West Virginia to the 116th US Congress.

Kimo and his artist, partner, and wife, Carol, have collaborated on many works, including her contribution to several of his musical works. In addition, they have produced multiple recordings and have performed together since 1978. They live on a cliff overlooking the Potomac River in Shepherdstown, West Virginia.