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Waikiki Dreams



From performing for grocery money to a
Nā Hōkū Hanohano Awards nomination, indie-folk band
Streetlight Cadence's unique sound
earns them the street cred that they deserve.

By Kristen Nemoto

The story of acoustic group Streetlight Cadence began five years ago when accordionist Jesse Shiroma perused through Craigslist to see if there were local gigs in need of his talents.

"No one wants to play with an accordion, right?" laughs Shiroma, as he recalls his "resort" to browsing through the online-classified site. By strange coincidence he stumbled upon a particular ad that got him to eagerly respond.

"It read: Looking for musicians who play interesting instruments," Shiroma points out. "I went out to meet them and I see these guys sitting on the doorstep and I thought this just might work out."

Those "guys" were violinist Jonathan Franklin and former band member and guitarist Daniel Duncan. A native of Houston, Texas, Franklin was on scholarship to play with the Hawaii Pacific University orchestra. After deciding to start up his own band and meeting with Shiroma, Franklin brought along fellow orchestra cellist Brian Webb to join the group.

Soon they were rehearsing and then quickly performing on the sidewalks of Waikiki's Kalakaua Avenue. Groups would corral around them in masses like a thick Cheshire cat's smile, intrigued by the trio rocking out to classic Mozart pieces and cover songs by Foster the People or Lady Gaga.

"I think deep down we wanted to be a rock band," Franklin chuckles. "But it just turned out we were making rock 'n' roll music with all these instruments. Therefore (our music) came off as nothing that you hear every day."

After a few friends came then parted ways with the band, guitarist Chaz Umamoto — who met the group while doing their sounds systems for an open mic event — was asked to join and thus became the eclectic four-member band that rapidly took over Battle of the Bands' competitions and local music events.

The college students and part-time musicians were soon looking into a potential full-time career in music, an eyebrow-raising decision that caused concern from each of the band member's parents even though they were the initial musical instigators.

"They say do what you love," recalls Shiroma of his parents' initial advice, which also rings true for all four members of the group. "As long as it pays the bills."

"Yeah I'd tell (my parents): 'Hey we played with Keali'i Reichel this weekend,'" chimes in Umamoto. "But it was no big deal to them. It wasn't until they saw me on O.C. 16 for a commercial we shot and suddenly (to them) we're famous."

They're famous — at least to local venues and a growing number of Instagram and Facebook followers — in their own right for being anything but the usual folk group or any music group in general. At any given Streetlight Cadence performance, you can watch Franklin strum his violin like an 'ukulele, Webb play the cello while dancing or Shiroma create the percussion with his feet while effortlessly pushing and pulling the accordion with his hands. Busker gigs in Waikiki have also exposed them to out-of-town fans, some of whom they've met again while on their first national tour last year. They've also gained attention from their peers with a Nā Hōkū Hanohano nominated album entitled after their very first home: Kalakaua Avenue.

Today the group hopes to expand their music locally and "hopefully" to audiences across the world.

"I think that 'unexpected excitement' from our music is what will get us really far," says Franklin.

"We have these huge dreams," Shiroma adds. "But we're going to tackle any obstacle that we have in our way and just go for it."

When they're not in Waikiki, Streetlight Cadence members take their show to the mainland, performing at such iconic places as New York City's Central Park.

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