

**WANTED: Paula is looking for an 11-foot board. She loves to surf and wants her own board to get in the water more often.**

## THROUGH LIFE AND LOVE Hawaiian Recording Artist Paula Fuga

**IF YOU HAD TO PEG PAULA FUGA INTO A CERTAIN MUSIC GENRE, IT WOULD BE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE.** But if you had to? Something like modern Hawaiian soul might suffice. Paula is fueled by the grit and glamour of love. She is as tortured by it as she is inspired. And this is why everyone can relate to her. She is complex, intelligent and real with the depth and passion to become an icon. In May, Paula released her debut album, *Lilikoi*, a blend of tradition and evolution: soul and jazz-infused lyrics sprinkled with Hawaiian language, organic instruments like the nose flute and 'ukulele, and a voice filled with so much mana, you're guaranteed to get chicken skin while listening.

Internationally, Paula is known as the Hawaiian songstress wearing the "Big Girls Rock" shirt, strumming her 'ukulele all the way to Hollywood on *American Idol*. Locally, she is known as Paula, solo artist and singer for band Dubkonscious, slam poetry regular at First Thursdays, educational interpreter at Bishop Museum and active member of Hawaii's cultural community. In the recording industry, Paula is a rising star who has been likened to a Hawaiian Jill Scott and is endorsed as a fresh sound by established artists like Jack Johnson and Nick Hexum of band 311. Paula's performance at the 2006 Kokua Festival induced chicken skin throughout the audience. She recently recorded a song with Jack Johnson called "Country Road" for the *Mana Maoli* CD, which benefits Native

Hawaiian public charter schools. She is a representative of Hawaiian culture in her music and daily life, but at the same time possesses a unique sound that is universally appealing.

Her title track, "Lilikoi," is a proverb about tending her *lo'i* (taro patch) before catching a fish—a metaphor for tending to one's personal growth and self-love before being able to find someone to love. "Lilikoi is about believing in yourself and not letting other people's opinions determine your thoughts about yourself," she says. "You have to be happy by yourself before you can be happy with anyone else and share that."

Of Filipino, Hawaiian, Chinese, Samoan, German, French, Spanish and English descent, Paula's multi-ethnicity is quite representative of Hawai'i nei. "That's why I feel so connected with everyone," she jokes. Paula Hiltrudis Fuga was born Dec. 30, 1978 in Fort Polk, Louisiana, where her father was stationed with the military. Her parents moved back to Hawai'i soon after, and although they split up when she was five, she always had her grandparents' place to call home.

"It was my foundation," Paula recalls. "My grandparents always lived in Waimānalo, so no matter where I lived—and I grew up all over—I always had their home to go to. That was home to me, too."

It was in the Waimānalo school band that Paula learned how to play the flute and 'ukulele, studying under master 'ukulele artist and Ka'au Crater Boys producer Roy Sakuma for two years. By her junior year in high school, Paula was writing songs and poems, strumming on her 'uke. "My first song was about this guy I had a crush on, but it ended up being about Waimānalo," she laughs.

After graduating early from Kailua High School, Paula attended University of Hawai'i-Hilo where she went overboard with the freedom and laidback attitude of the Big Island. "My whole life I was always the responsible one, taking care of everyone else, so when I went to school in Hilo I just kinda didn't take it seriously," she remembers. "I didn't really know what I wanted to do and kinda blew it. But everything is a learning experience." One of the biggest lessons there was falling in love for the first time. "Love makes everything better," Paula smiles.

Upon returning to O'ahu, Paula received a certificate in Hawaiian Studies from Windward Community College and in addition to working for Bishop Museum, Paula worked for Native Hawaiian charter schools (Nā Lei Na'auao) around the island, and she continues to volunteer her time in any way she can. "I'm a common face in that group of people," she maintains. "Whatever they need, I'm with them."

As an active member in the community, Paula has a lot of opinions and dreams for the issues that face modern Hawai'i,

and the world collectively. "I'm kind of anti-development because I believe in aloha 'āina, love of land," she says. "We are connected with this land, this earth, every single one of us—and we're connected to each other. Our actions

**A little known fact about Paula Fuga: She has made the chili for the VIP pro surfer AllBus Kickball tournament for the past two years—all by herself. She plans to make it again this season but is definitely passing the baton after because it's a lot of work to stay up all night making chili, sing with her band at the tournament and play kickball all day.**

affect all of us in the bigger picture. If we keep building and building, there will be no more beautiful places left for our children to enjoy. They won't appreciate or understand the beauty of nature because there won't be any for them to experience."

Paula has only one rule she teaches her students: *e mālama kekahi kekahi*. It's a Hawaiian proverb that means, take care of each other, one to one. I'm a big believer in what goes around comes around and what you put out in the universe will definitely come back to you," she explains. "That proverb goes a long way. It's important because we're all connected to each other so we need to take care. Our well-being is dependent on that."

A lover and a fighter. A teacher and an entertainer. Paula Fuga is a Hawaiian Queen of the millennium.—Tiff Hervey