

MUSIC CULTURE

WAS IT WRITTEN IN THE STARS?

Pali Ka'aihue: Discovering Life's Nonstop Adventures

Lois Kajiwara

At the age of five, Pali Ka'aihue was introduced to music and KIKU-TV, two key elements that would later become huge influences in his life. Fast forward to today, Pali wears many hats. He is a recording artist, songwriter, entrepreneur, director, producer and creator/host of TV programs. Multitalented and successful, he has been sharing his love of music and Japan for the past 15 years.



Pali welcomes the people of Japan back to Hawai'i in a video message that was filmed at the Halekulani in February 2022. (Photos courtesy of Pali Ka'aihue)

Music Album of the Year for "...with Aloha" (double CD); and the 2015 Instrumental Composition of the Year for "1,000 Crystals."

A Link to the Past

The year 2007 continued to be an eventful year for Pali. After winning his first Hōkū, Hawai'i Tourism Japan invited him to play music in Tōkyō, Hokkaidō and Ōsaka. Being back in Japan after 14 years made him realize how much he had missed the people and culture. Reminiscing about the shows he had watched on KIKU, Pali came up with the idea of doing a modern-day version of "Soko ga Shiritai." His idea became a reality with the creation of a weekly TV show called "Doko Ga TV: JapanMania." Pali's program was a hit and led to a joint production on a second show, "Love Hokkaidō," which features must-see attractions, cuisine, history, and other interesting topics.

Back to the Present

Before the pandemic, Pali traveled to Japan on a monthly basis to film his programs and attend meetings. Although the pandemic halted his travel schedule, he worked on other projects such as the "Oishii 808 Series," a show that features local restaurants. Recently, he graciously chatted with me for almost three hours! He is incredibly down-to-earth, which made the time pass by too quickly. Read on to find out more about Pali and his journey!

Switch on KIKU!

Like many local kids growing up in the '70s, Pali watched "Kikaidā," "Kikaidā 01" and other Japanese superhero programs shown on KIKU. His dad loved samurai shows while his mom enjoyed family dramas, which meant that the only program they all watched together was "Soko ga Shiritai." This program was one of KIKU's most popular shows as it introduced viewers to people who had intriguing stories to share and featured fascinating places in Japan. "Soko ga Shiritai" left a lasting impression on Pali; one that would have special significance for his future.

Music, the Universal Language

Thanks to his parents and older brother, Pali was exposed to a wide range of music, including songs by Elvis, the Doobie Brothers and the Brothers Johnson to name a few. It is quite amazing that he can still remember these "firsts:" DJ Sound City, the first music store he went to originally located at Ala Moana Center; "Stars on 45," the first 45 rpm record he bought; and Queen's "Flash Gordon" movie soundtrack, the first cassette he owned. He also remembers he had fun doing air guitar and air drum back then, although the thought of actually playing music as a career never crossed his mind.

That all changed in eighth grade. Pali said his mind was blown when he heard his brother's friend play "Linus and Lucy" and the theme from "Cheers" on the piano. Then, during his sophomore year, his interest in drums and guitar was inspired by Van Halen's "Live Without a Net" concert video. Determined to learn those songs and techniques, Pali taught himself how to play the piano, drums and bass guitar. After graduating from high school, he accepted a two-year contract to perform music for a variety show in Nagoya. Working on various projects as a studio musician, he ended up staying an additional year in Japan.

The Sweet Sound of Success

At his parents' request, he returned to Hawai'i to attend college, but his passion for music couldn't be denied. In 2000, he released his first CD, "PALI," consisting of nine original songs and three cover songs. He won his first Nā Hōkū Hanohano Award in 2007 for Contemporary Album of the Year, "Pali Presents a Tribute." He subsequently won four more Nā Hōkū Awards: the 2009 "...with Aloha" Album of the Year, "Island Days" Song of the Year, Island



Performing at the 40th Annual Nā Hōkū Hanohano Awards, May 2017

LK: How did you get involved with the Hawai'i Academy of Recording Arts (HARA)? Which accomplishments are you most proud of?

PK: Recording artists, composers and people in related industries can join HARA, so I joined in 2000. After my group and I won our first Nā Hōkū Award, Board Member Lea Uehara asked if I wanted to join the HARA Board of Directors. I was voted in and became a volunteer board member in 2007. I became president in 2011 and served until terming out in 2019.

I'm not sure I'd call them accomplishments, but I'm happy that the board and I were able to establish relationships and help with opportunities that brought hundreds of artists, hālau and kumu from Hawai'i to perform at high profile concert venues in Japan. In addition, we noticed that there were as many as 400 to 500 more attendees from Japan at the annual Hōkū Awards Show.

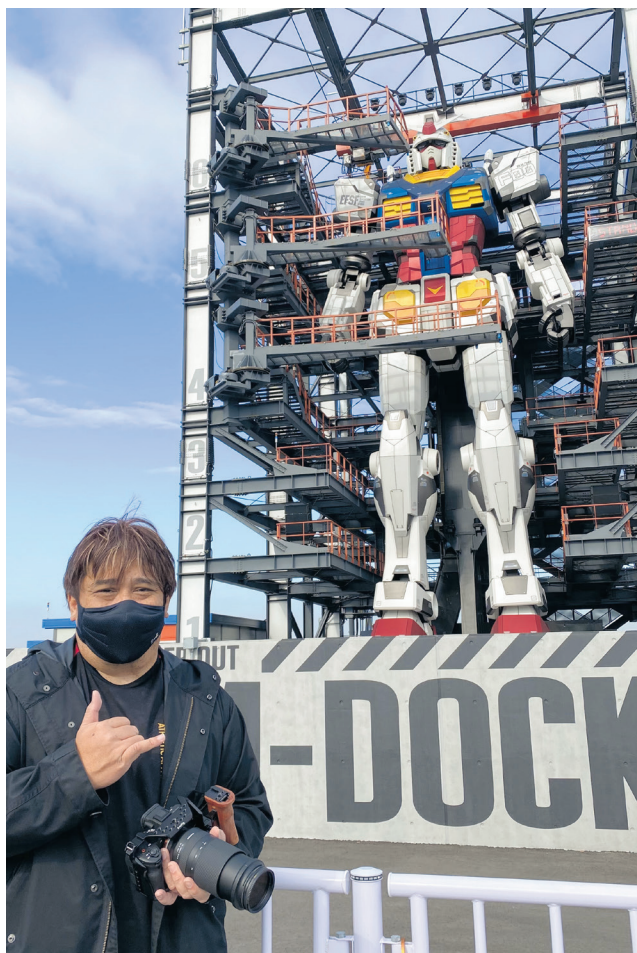
LK: The season premiere of "Doko Ga TV," which is currently in its 14th year of production, aired on July 24. What are your thoughts on the past 13 years?

PK: The show was a sweat equity project and hobby that later became a career for me. It has provided some of the most memorable and life-changing events that I've documented. Filming "Doko Ga TV" has also led to other production, directing and editing opportunities.

Initially, the show was only about Japan and Japan-related stories in Hawai'i. Thanks to a partnership with Non-Stop Travel, we've expanded to documenting travels to Korea, across Asia, Alaska and recently, Europe. It's awesome to be able to share my wonderment and passion for Japan with other people and make new friends along the way. I count the seconds before they react to some superbly *oishii* dish, like their first taste of Hokkaidō king crab, Japan soft-serve ice cream, or *gyūkatsu* (beef cutlet). It's equally magical for me to be there to witness their initial reactions and to document those experiences on the show.

LK: How did you become a co-producer of "Love Hokkaidō"?

PK: On my second visit to Hokkaidō, while filming "Doko Ga TV" during the annual snow festival, my guide Johannes mentioned that his wife Isis worked at Hokkaidō Television Broad-



Pali visited the Gundam Factory Yokohama in January 2021. The Mobile Suit Gundam moves and is 18 meters (59 feet) tall!



Delicious *taraba* (king crab) awaits you at Kita no Gurume, a popular seafood specialty shop.



Filming the Sapporo Snow Festival in Ōdōri Park with “Doko Ga TV” co-host Yuchi, February 2018.

casting on a show called “Love Hokkaidō.” Isis and Li Qiang, the show’s co-hosts, were very interested in broadcasting in Hawai’i/US, so I met with them to discuss ways we could work together. I presented the idea to John Fink, then KFVE general manager, and the show found a home here on KFVE and KHNL. Li Qiang, Isis and I started filming together, and the rest is history.

LK: Where is your favorite place to visit in Japan?

PK: Since my first visit in 2007, I have always felt connected with Hokkaidō. I love ALL of Japan, but Hokkaidō has several charms that I immediately fell in love with. The people there are extremely friendly and warm. While Sapporo features great shopping, eateries and nightlife, it’s still mellow compared to other metropolitan areas like Ōsaka or Tōkyō. Hakodate and Otaru are charming port towns. Breaking through glacial ice in Abashiri or walking through Furano’s

gorgeous lavender fields are unforgettable experiences. Anywhere you go in Hokkaidō, you’ll be able to enjoy a very different experience.

Being named a Hokkaidō Smile (Goodwill) Ambassador is definitely another reason why Hokkaidō holds a special place in my heart. I received this official title during a ceremony here at the Japanese Consulate with Hokkaidō senior government representatives in attendance on October 21, 2016.

LK: Who did you turn to when you needed advice?

PK: I’ve been very fortunate to have a number of people who have inspired and helped me quite a bit over the years. First of all, there would be no “Doko Ga TV” without the genius of Joanne Ninomiya. Joanne is a pioneer who connected people in Hawai’i to Japan via the Japanese TV programs that she aired on the original KIKU. These shows fueled my love and passion for all things Japan.

Jun Maeda, former general manager of Kintetsu International Hawaii, taught me a lot about doing business in Japan and the importance of *nomikai* (after-hours drinking with co-workers, potential clients, etc.). Jun was a very old-school *samurai*; he was bold, brash and stubborn at times, but if he liked or respected you, there’s nothing he wouldn’t do to help and support you. After retiring from Kintetsu, Jun moved back to Japan due to illness. Since my last trip to Japan in January 2021, I kept waiting for Japan to reopen so I could visit him, but he passed in July 2021. I will always cherish our memories, and miss him and his very *kolohe* smile.

David John “DJ” Pratt was a mentor in my foray into music. One of the founders and guitarist of Kalapana, DJ was a multiple award-winning performer and engineer. He was intimidating, not only because of his trademark look (dark glasses and black jacket), but also for being a shredder on guitar and a sonic genius in the studio. Trying to record guitar solos with him looking on was beyond nerve-racking. He’d give advice, offer alternative ideas and if you nailed the take, he’d nod and just say, “cool.” He was so generous with his knowledge and his time.

I’m so grateful that I had a chance to talk to him the night before he passed on September 7, 2021. From initially being terrified of his presence to becoming very close friends, I will try to be as giving as DJ. Reading DJ’s eulogy at his funeral was one of the hardest yet most fulfilling things I’ve had to do. I missed him so much, but was happy that I could remind all in attendance how great DJ was and what he meant to me.

As a HUGE fan of “Kikaidā” and “Kikaidā 01,” I always thought Ichirō (Kikaidā 01’s human form) was so cool because he would play his trumpet, jump off a cliff and beat up all the bad guys and monsters. In fact, I thought he’d be the coolest dad in the world, so tough yet kind. Because Joanne Ninomiya kept the “Kikaidā” series alive over the years, she’d bring both Daisuke Ban (Jirō/Kikaidā) and Shunsuke Ikeda (Ichirō/Kikaidā 01) to Hawai’i to meet the legions of fans. I would’ve never imagined meeting Ikeda-san, but I was able to meet him and his wife during one of these events and had given them one of my CDs. They were avid Hawaiian music fans, so he and his family would always attend my concerts in Japan, and we became very close. Ikeda-san always supported and encouraged me with what I was trying to do in music and “Doko Ga TV.” Sadly, he passed in June 2010. He had asked his wife and daughter not to tell me he was ill as he didn’t want me to worry. I’ll never forget his kindness and sincerity. He started out as a childhood hero and became an actual father figure.



While on the “Doko Ga TV” & Non-Stop Travel New Year’s 2020 Tour, Pali poses with Gene Miyake and Colleen Miyaki in front of the Kamakura *Daibutsu* (Great Buddha), a National Treasure of Japan.

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LK: What was one of the life-changing events that you experienced in Japan?

PK: The 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami. We wanted to do whatever possible to help, so we hoped that filming the challenges people there were going through would be of assistance with soliciting donations and continued relief efforts. With thanks to my friend Kazuyuki Sekiguchi, bassist of Southern All Stars (aka SAS, one of the biggest rock bands in Japan), and Amuse Entertainment (management company for SAS), they helped facilitate our Tōhoku visit, working with the mayors and various city halls. Sekiguchi-san and I worked on fundraising and purchased bikes, food, water and other goods. My band and I also performed at other fundraising shows in Tōkyō.

Driving through the devastation in each city was gut-wrenching. There were barely any houses still standing and according to our guide, over 18,000 lives were lost in Sendai alone. I'd walked past children's bikes and toys, all the while hoping and praying they were able to escape. At the Shichigahama shelter, we saw people using cardboard boxes for beds, hanging what little clothes they had grabbed as their homes were being destroyed.

We continued through other areas of Tōhoku and came across what used to be a train station. The only thing left was part of a staircase. As we filmed more footage, I stumbled across a KIKI Radio cooler bag. I remembered having one in the '80s and wondered if the owner had been in Hawai'i when these were available. After dropping off supplies at another shelter, my band and Sekiguchi-san performed for the people there. They were so thankful and in tears, as we were. An *obāchan* (grandmother) came up to us and explained that she lost her husband, children and grandchildren when the tsunami hit. She wondered why she survived and told us how much she appreciated us being there.



Dining with "Doko Ga TV" co-host Olena Heu on board the Norwegian Cruise Line Bliss to Alaska, September 2019.

As the day progressed and after hearing stories from some of the survivors and volunteers working at each shelter, I couldn't fathom what the next step would be for everyone there. I participated in several outreach projects across Tōhoku for a few more years afterward. Each time I was amazed and inspired by how much the people in those cities were able to rebuild. It's a true testament of the resilience of the people of Japan.

LK: What is the most fulfilling aspect of your career?

PK: I think the fact that what started as a hobby turned into a career, one that's allowed me to share my passion and love for Japan. I asked the Hawaii News Now folks for some numbers to get an idea of how many people tune in. For the 2021 season, "Doko Ga" episodes ran a total of 194 times (KFVE, KHNL and KGMB), and the number of views we'd gotten was over 12 million for the year. I'm very humbled and a bit nervous because I'm hoping that everyone will continue to watch in 2022 and beyond, and I am incredibly thankful.

LK: How about a fun fact about yourself?

PK: I rarely sing or go to *karaoke* places here when friends invite me. For whatever reason, this is the complete opposite in Japan. Af-


ter a long day of filming or even while on tours, I love going to karaoke. It's funny; no matter how *majime* (serious) or *hazukashii* (shy) some of our crew or tour counterparts are in Japan, once a few beers have been downed, they turn into howling coyotes. I love that! So I join in. I enjoy singing late Shōwa era (late '80s) Japanese songs from artists like Southern All Stars and Tatsurō Yamashita. I'm in no way fluent in Japanese and am *kanji* reading impaired, but I can read *hiragana* and the more I sing Japanese karaoke, it actually helps with my reading ability! Win-win! I also love singing '80s songs that were popular back in high school and lots of rock stuff that I'd never dare perform live.

LK: Can you tell us about some of your upcoming plans and special projects?

PK: The "Doko Ga TV: EuropeMania" series started airing on July 24, documenting my April 2022 travels in Spain and Portugal. I have four tours to Japan slated from September with Non-Stop Travel and Hawaiian Airlines. In between tours, I plan to film more "Doko Ga" and "Love Hokkaidō" episodes.

In addition, I'll be working on the third annual 2023 Hokkaidō Hawai'i High School Girls Softball Goodwill Games. I created this event in 2018 so that my niece and her friends could participate in a goodwill sports competition in Japan. It was previously held in 2019, so we're looking forward to next year's event. I really would like to create and foster more cross-cultural exchanges and events like this. One of my stealth projects from 2021 was executive music and video producer for Hawai'i boy band Crossing Rain. We're working on their second album release and they will start touring in 2023.

Be Someone's Reason to Smile

As I reflected on Pali's childhood story, I wondered if perhaps destiny had played a role in it. Curious, I asked him at the end of our phone call if he believes in destiny. Without hesitation, he said, "Yes, absolutely!" For a guy as accomplished as he is, he remains very humble. In any case, Pali's achievements certainly would not have happened without his talents, work ethic and perseverance. With the hope of making a positive difference, Pali invests his artistry and creativity into all of his projects. His unwavering dedication assures audiences and fans alike that he will continue to entertain us in the years to come. 



DJ Pratt, Lihau Paik (of the duo Kūpaoa) and Pali at the Willows for Mark Yamanaka's CD release party, November 2018.

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