

Hawai'i's Sonic Exports

The Creative Lab Hawai'i Music Immersive helps artists realize their full potentials and attain success in the music industry.

TEXT BY EUNICA ESCALANTE

IMAGES BY MEGAN SPELMAN

The strumming of a bass guitar broke the silence of the Doris Duke Theatre, followed by the steady pulse of the drums and the plucking of a guitar. Then Isaac Moreno, the musician known as Izik, stepped up to the microphone and hummed an opening note. His voice, deep and soulful, filled the cavernous theater. By the end of the song—a pop-infused

rumination on a past romance—Moreno had the crowd under his spell.

Comprised of four acts, with a flourish of costume changes in between each, the show, which Izik titled *Mimesis*, fell somewhere between concert and performance art, and displayed the singer as a charismatic performer whose artistry is bigger than the stages that hold him. Yet, just a year ago, in 2016, the Moloka'i born and O'ahu raised artist was far from this stage, gigging nearly every night at a bar or hotel, sometimes even playing two three-hour sets in a row. All of this was done in pursuit of a music career—a dream Moreno has had since the age of 4, when he would match pitch with his mother's vacuum cleaner. For him and many other Hawai'i-based artists, Moreno said, this rigorous lineup of gigs seemed to be the only path to success.

Then, at the behest of fellow musician Kimi'e Miner, Moreno applied for, and was accepted to, the Creative Lab Hawai'i Music Immersive, a program that aims to set up island musicians for success, teaching them the finer points of topics like songwriting, music

For more information, or to apply for the 2018 Creative Lab Hawaii Music Immersive in early 2018, visit creativelab.hawaii.gov.



Above, Streetlight Cadence at Brotman's Lava Tracks Recording Studio. Right, singer Olivia Cargile.

licensing, publishing, and intellectual property protection. Created by the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism's Creative Industries Division (CID)—an agency that advocates for and accelerates the growth of Hawai'i's creative clusters, including music, film, design, and technology—the Creative Lab Hawai'i Music Immersive is overseen by program director Charles Brotman, a Nā Hōkū Hanohano and Grammy Award-winning producer and president of the Hawai'i Songwriting Festival. "Our community of music and media entrepreneurs need access to decision makers to expand their opportunities to export globally," says Georja Skinner, chief officer of Creative Industries and founder of Creative Lab Hawai'i. "The synergies with Hawai'i Songwriting Festival, and with Charles and Julia Brotman at the helm, provided the rich foundation to grow this vision."

Together with the CID team, Brotman was selected to manage the intensive program, which aimed to bridge the gap between emerging artists and industry professionals. They began working with the late Jerome Spence, then the vice president of film, television, advertisement, and business development at the Los Angeles-based licensing and artist management company, Secret Road Music Services. Thus, and the Creative Lab Hawai'i Music Immersive was born.

Kicking off with a five-day immersive, held at the Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel and at music studios on Hawai'i Island, Moreno, along with nine other participating musicians, collaborated with professional songwriters, producers, and music executives from the mainland. As with Creative Lab Hawai'i's media and fashion immersives, the music program continued for a full year, with

participants receiving regular coaching.

Within a year of taking part in the immersive, Moreno had licensed two original songs to a major entertainment corporation, giving him the economic flexibility to focus on his art. He cut down his performances from seven nights to a couple of times a week. He, along with Miner, travelled to Los Angeles, New York, and Australia to perform as part of the Creative Lab Hawai'i Music Immersive's goal to expose new markets to Hawai'i's creative talents. Now, he is even working on his second album and will open for Grammy Award-winning Thundercat as part of FLUX Sound, a music experience made possible with the support of DBEDT and taking place at the Modern Honolulu in December 2017.

For Miner, the program planted a seed for her to found a new company, Haku Hawai'i. "Through this experience, I started thinking about



mentorships programs that I have been involved with,” she says. “After the Creative Lab Music Immersive, I realized I could take all the tools and the connections that I made through the program and combine all of us together to create this new sound for Hawai’i.”

In August 2017, Moreno and Miner returned to the Creative Lab Hawai’i Music Immersive, but this time to mentor a new cohort of aspiring musicians. The musicians that took part in this year’s immersive include folk trio Streetlight Cadence; singer-songwriter Amanda Frazier; 15-year old multi-instrumentalist Olivia Cargile; songwriter and producer Josh Jones; pop-folk artist Kimberly June; brothers Chase and Carl Kauhane; singer-songwriter Keilana Mokulehua; soulful songwriter Tim Rose; Nā Hōkū Hanohano Award-winning songwriter Chaz Umamoto; and Los Angeles-based Zoe Zelkind.

For Frazier, the direct connection to industry executives was invaluable. “I’ve been doing songwriting for ten years, but I’ve never had this kind of experience,”

she says. “People in Hawai’i, we have the passion, we have the talent, we have the drive, but we don’t necessarily have the tools or the opportunity to engage with those with such expertise. ... To bring people from the mainland, the outer islands, it’s such a unique opportunity that without the state stepping in and helping, it might not ever have been something we could have experienced.”

Streetlight Cadence discovered the Music Immersive at last year’s Hawai’i Songwriting Festival, intrigued by its intimate group of music industry professionals. The band began as streetperformers and built a fanbase through their charismatic performances and unique sound. “In the practical sense, we didn’t have an outlet to develop a music career other than what we could do by ourselves,” says violinist Jonathan Franklin. “Suddenly, by taking part in this immersive, we have a new resource that opens up doors for us in all aspects of the music industry. The program has played such an integral role in our development as a band.

→ Streetlight Cadence band members, from left to right, are Brian Webb, Jonathon Franklin, and Jesse Shiroma.



→ Participating attendees are coached by professionals in the music industry.



From early in the morning until late at night, the participants were immersed in a constant flow of conceptualizing, songwriting, recording, and producing. They labored over songs based on prompts delivered by music executives like Boyd and Mamie Coleman, senior vice president of creative music and production at Fox. One prompt called for crafting a theme song for a hit television show, while another requested a tune for a commercial featuring a major cellular phone company.

The prompts reflect the industry's demands for original music. "For young musicians in Hawai'i, a lot of them think that their options are limited—they can play in a hotel or they can go to Japan," Brotman says. "But there are so many more options available. The Creative Lab Hawai'i Music Immersive aims to create awareness for musicians, teaching them about the business side of the industry and letting them know of careers beyond cycles of gigs."

In addition to introducing aspiring artists to music licensing, the program serves as a link between Hawai'i's music community

and industries around the globe. Last year, three original songs created during the program were sold to a major entertainment company, two were licensed to a major cable network, and two were licensed for yearlong advertising campaigns.

For Secret Road founder, Lynn Grossman—whose company manages all the licensing of the music created during the program—mentorship is a crucial aspect of an artist's success. "The immersive sharpened our skills," says Streetlight Cadence accordionist Jesse Shiroma. "I can write songs—it's verse, pre-chorus, and chorus—but you can't just write blockbuster hits. You have to know what music executives want. ... Even if you write 100 songs, you can put them out into the web, and hope that somebody picks you up. But the immersive puts you in hand-to-hand, eye-to-eye contact with the people who want to place your music. I don't know of any other thing that does this besides the immersive."

→ The creative process as it unfolds between participants in Waimea, Hawai'i Island.



→ Musicians across genres collaborate to produce original works. Above, Streetlight Cadence joined by musician Keilana Mokulehua and producer Adam Zelkind.