

Khay's debut tells striking musical story

Review by John Berger

jberger@staradvertiser.com

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Evan Khay, with Imua Garza, delivers well-crafted original songs on the debut album, “Retrograde”.

Photo courtesy of Evan Khay Music

With “Retrograde”, multi-instrumentalist Evan Khay has partnered with Imua Garza to create what is one of the most impressive non-Hawaiian debut albums by a Hawaii resident in recent memory.

Although every cut is a well-crafted original, the album is more than a collection of memorable songs. Khay and Garza used the fixed order of presentation that a hard-copy, “physical” album can provide to tell a story. Several tracks reveal that Khay is confronting his own experiences.

The most striking thing about the album is the first track, a spoken-word piece titled “The End (Intro)” in which Khay tells the listener that the story is over. The final track on the CD is “The Beginning (Outro)” where Khay welcomes the audience to the story that he is about to tell. Does this mean that the songs are telling a story in reverse order? Khay and Garza don’t say.

Two “interlude” tracks add more opaqueness to the project. Multiple voices talk over each other in “Thoughts

(Interlude).” A single voice is heard apparently giving Khay advice on how to live a positive and honorable life on “Dearest (Interlude).”

The musical content of the other tracks should sell Khay to national audiences. Several are melancholy urban/pop slow jams that sound like a lot of national hits but not like any one hit in particular. In other words, Khay and Garza have their creative fingers on the pulse of what’s hitting nationally but are assembling proven ideas in their own way.

As a vocalist Khay delivers each song with 100 percent emotional commitment – intense and passionate or smooth and subtle, whichever fits.

His lyrics should be published as poetry. One song describes a relationship within which the woman in his life has her running shoes on and is running in endless circles while he waits patiently for her to stop. With another one he asks, “How does tomorrow look from the other side of freedom? How does joy feel from the other side of love?”

Song lyrics aren’t included in the liner notes, but “Save You” appears to be about a guy telling the woman who mistreated him that the next time she decides she needs him, “I won’t be there to save you.” Payback can be so sweet!

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