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[ FEELIN' THE BEAT ]



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Natural Vibrations' members, from left, Kayton "Sly Mongoose" Macariola, Peni "Big Penz" Pua'auli and Stacy Medeiros, will join the rest of the group to perform at tonight's "Reggae in the Crater" concert at Volcanoes Nightclub.

## 'The Circle' builds Vibes' appeal

By John Berger  
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What do Natural Vibrations and those huge old Boeing B-52 bombers have in common?

It's Peni Pua'auli who sees the parallels. "You let 'em sit on the ground and they leak and there's all kinds of problems, but you put 'em in the air, and get 'em up near mach speed, and everything tightens up and they just lean into the wind. That's us. We're the bombers," Pua'auli said last week as we were catching up in the offices of the Mountain Apple Co., the distributor of the Vibes' recently released fourth album, "The Circle."

Pua'auli had come into town from Kahaluu accompanied by Vibes drummer Stacy Medeiros and percussionist Kayton "Sly Mongoose" Macariola. Pua'auli and Medeiros did most of the talking. Macariola watched, while the band's road manager, Roman Gaspar, enjoyed some well-deserved down time on a couch in the reception area.

"The Circle," was released to rave reviews last month, and the band has been out working it every weekend. The big event tonight is Turk Cazimero's "Reggae in the Crater" concert at Volcanoes Nightclub, where Natural Vibrations will be sharing the stage with a mixed bag of major players (B.E.T. and Ho'onu'a), roots reggae master Maacho, and a hodge-podge of other reggae and island music acts. The show is scheduled to start at 6 p.m. and go until 4 a.m. tomorrow.

Then, on Oct. 17, the Vibes host the official CD-release party for "The Circle" at the Beach House. The group will be on stage almost from start to finish, with an array of guest artists joining it on stage.

"We've done shows with so many other bands (on the bill) that the change-over between bands took longer than we were allowed to play. For us, with four albums, there are a lot of songs that people want to hear, and it's easier if it's just our band for two hours or whatever it is," Medeiros said.

"It's important to the band to let the people know ... how the band has evolved from 10 years ago 'til now. It's a big difference, and I think it's important for the band just to showcase all the songs, and it takes a lot of time," Pua'auli said.

Are they surprised that "The Circle" is doing as well as it is? Medeiros says the answer is no, and yes.

"I think we expected a positive response. We spent a lot of time test-marketing these songs, and we were hoping we could capture that emotion and the feeling that people react to ... but I think it may end up going beyond what we expected," Medeiros said, explaining that the group observed fans' response to new material before the studio work started. This helped the band members to refine their writing skills, and they become so familiar with the songs that they took less time to record.

Picking his words carefully, Medeiros explained that the group wants to expand its appeal beyond the limits of Hawaii's "island music" scene. After working with most of the major reggae acts that have

played here, and performing on the mainland, the band members have learned that the tastes of the two markets touch but don't overlap as much as many local Jawaiian artists think they do.

"Jawaiian" music -- an amalgam of Afro-Jamaican music and cultural stereotypes with an overlay of contemporary Hawaiian and mainstream American pop styles -- is popular in Hawaii and in scattered places on the mainland where expatriate islanders congregate, but isn't generally taken seriously as reggae elsewhere. The flip side of that has been that local "roots reggae" bands have often seemed to get more support on the mainland than they find here.

The Vibes appreciate where both sides are coming from. The band started off "playing backyard" in Kahaluu, Macariola said. They started by playing remakes of other artists' hits, but quickly realized there was more challenge in writing and recording original music. It took time, but they gradually developed their own style. "Balls Rolling" launched them as recording artists in 1996. Natural Vibrations' follow-up, "All Natural," gave the group Hoku Award-winning status when the Hawaii Academy of Recording Arts added a "Reggae Album" category in 1999.

Natural Vibrations had already opened for many of their idols and inspirations by the time it played the prestigious Reggae on the River festival in California in 2002, but the group returned home determined to bridge the chasm between Jawaiian and mainstream reggae music, and to reach out to the world.

"We want to reflect that we're proud that we're from Hawaii, and that we will always respect that, but the way to share that seems to be to have a message that more people find in common," Medeiros said. "A lot of time songwriters are restricted by trying to write to the guys on their street ... but someone in Idaho doesn't know your street. As much as our hearts will always be in Hawaii, we want to sell records in other places and bring a positive message to places that do not have enough of that."

SO THE music is straight reggae rather than Jawaiian, the songs address general topics, and Medeiros describes the entire album as an invitation to come together.

"We had that in mind with our logo, the way we write our music, the way we structure our shows, even with the design of our album cover ... the smaller circle we have is the band members, and we're like a family. The arrow on the logo points in, and it's inviting people to join us and have a good time," he explained.

"We didn't let nobody tell us how to create our songs," Pua'aui added. "The band sat down and created them together. To me, that's what makes this album so special -- there was no (outside) influence, and with the wonderful, wonderful, wonderful help of Wendell Ching at Studio One ... we had somebody to listen to our music and then mix it the way he did. This is also the first time we used live horns."

"We had a lot of people counseling us (to do remakes), but Natural

Vibes is about doing original music," Medeiros said.

It's a successful concept. Medeiros says that a spokesperson for Mountain Apple told them that "The Circle" is getting play on the mainland, including Michigan and Wisconsin, and in locales as far away as Vienna, where "Reggae on the River" can be heard on Austrian radio.

"I'm hoping we can all push through the door in the mainland together -- not just Natural Vibes but us as a state, for them to notice that here in Hawaii, we're rockin'. We take mainland influences a lot, for sure, but we're rockin' on this island," says Pua'auli, who thanks the power brokers at Honolulu's two "island music" radio stations -- "Augie, Lanai and Frederico at 98.5, and Davey D at FM100" -- for "going way beyond the responsibilities of being radio personalities. That means a lot to the band."

"We really respect everyone in the business," he continued, including music directors, disc jockeys, and music writers on all islands.

"We all share an awe of the power of music," Medeiros says. "It's taken us a long way and it seems to reach people in places that they need to have touched these days. I'm definitely an admirer of that power. It keeps us together, it keeps people thinking of us in a positive way, and it keeps us enjoying our job. I couldn't really ask for more."

But more important than the 10 years of commercial success, Pua'auli adds, are the ties to family and friends that keep them grounded and humble.

"(We) never think that we're above anybody else. We're always at the same level, because we still got grandma to give you a whack. Get out of line and grandma will hook it up quick. We can be a B-52, (but) grandma will still hook it up."

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### 'Reggae in the Crater'

Featuring Natural Vibrations, B.E.T., Free Sound, Ho'onu'a, Hot Rain, Maacho & Cool Connection, Ookla the Moc, and Stir Crazy

**Where:** Volcanoes, 1130 N. Nimitz Highway.

**When:** 6 p.m. today; for 18 and older

**Tickets:** \$10

**Call:** 223-6100 or e-mail [cazimeros002@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:cazimeros002@hawaii.rr.com).

**Also:** Natural Vibrations' CD-Release Party, with B.E.T., Ho'onu'a and Sudden Rush at 8 p.m. Oct. 17 at The Beach House, Aloha Tower Marketplace. Must be 21. Information: [www.naturalvibrations.com](http://www.naturalvibrations.com).

