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Island Mele

John Berger



REVIEW

"Five Years and Many Miles"

Darin Leong
(Hawaii Guitar)

Darin Leong isn't the newest member of HAPA, but HAPA's Nathan Aweau brings his distinctive Na Hoku Hanohano Award-winning talents to this beautiful all-instrumental calling

card. Leong quickly proves his command of the acoustic guitar; Aweau, his primary sideman, adds bass, percussion and piano.

The two get off to a strong start with an uptempo number, "Gratitude," that makes excellent use of Aweau's talents on bass. Leong comes back solo on "Sunday," and then welcomes Aweau back on bass and piano for "On This Journey."

Although Leong doesn't include information on the people or events that inspired these melodies, he evidently has broad musical horizons. There's a slight hint of "Stand By Me" in the first bars of "On This Journey," and a distant echo of "Jennifer Juniper" in "Manoa Morning" -- just enough to catch the ear. Leong's blending of slack-key techniques and mainstream folk guitar stylings makes his work more than background music or acoustic Muzak. There's a hint of the blues to be found in one song, and an attention-grabbing demonstration of his feel for the ukulele on others.

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John Berger, who has covered the local entertainment scene since 1972, writes reviews of recordings produced by Hawaii artists. See the Star-Bulletin's Today section on Fridays for the latest reviews. Reach John Berger at jberger@starbulletin.com.

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