

In late 2015, **Keola Beamer** journeyed to the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu to record the soundtrack to "Tibetan Illusion Destroyer," the latest documentary by Maui filmmaker **Tom Vendetti**.

Premiered at the Maui Arts & Cultural Center in May, Vendetti's film will be presented by PBS Hawaii at a free screening at its Honolulu headquarters on Wednesday. Both the director and composer will participate in an audience Q&A session afterwards.

The fascinating film focuses on the Mani Rimdu Festival held at the remote Tengboche Monastery perched around 12,600 feet in the Himalayas and the Chiwong Monastery at 9,000 feet. This ancient Tibetan Buddhist ceremony is designed to cleanse and dispel the illusions that create so much suffering in the world.



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Having previously collaborated with musicians in South America and Africa in cultural exchanges sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, the Hawaiian slack key guitar master had the opportunity to create music for the film with a group of Nepalese musicians, which proved both rewarding and illuminating.

"It was very rewarding on a cultural and purely musical level, and also on a spiritual level because of the whole idea that illusion causes so many problems," says Beamer.

"We recorded the score in Kathmandu in two separate trips and I really wanted to do something to honor their culture and instruments. It was of course completely outside of my Hawaiian tonal palette. I learned so much, especially about the beautiful tonality of their native instruments."

So how did he navigate the cultural divide?

"I'm pretty sensitive culturally," he says. "It was good that I had a skill set of my Hawaiian sense of

communal music. There was no sense in writing anything down because they don't read traditional Western notation. I made notes to myself about what I wanted to happen when and communicated that on my guitar to them. So the guitar was the translator. I sat

down with them and shared my intent and the philosophy behind the movie which they were totally into. When you work around the world you might stumble a bit in translations, but people understand authenticity and that you are trying to do something good."

Working with Nepalese musicians, he also recorded a group of Tibetan Buddhist nuns chanting for the film score.

"I'm a Buddhist so I was familiar with a lot of the chants," he notes. "I was particularly curious about their instruments and what

# Visit to city of temples

Keola and Moana Beamer attended Kathmandu festival for film score



**Above photo:** Keola Beamer (left) and his wife, Moana, trekking through the Himalayas in Kathmandu.

**Left photo:** The Beamers arriving at Tenzing-Hillary Airport in Lukla, Nepal.

VENDETTI PRODUCTION  
photos

they sounded like and could create. In the opening there's a solo sarangi, which is like their string violin and it's gorgeous. I tried to learn a lot from them. Their expertise was pretty amazing."

Traveling to Nepal, the revered Hawaiian musician and his wife, kumu hula **Moana Beamer**, found the altitude a little challenging. It was a long way from their Lahaina home base.

"Hawaiians are ocean people and the Nepalese and Tibetans are mountain people so we have very different genetics," he says. "They're built for long treks up mountainous terrain. They have big hearts and great endurance. You're walking along a trail and some guy has four sheets of four-by-eight plywood strapped to his head. It was a challenge for us to get up the higher elevations. Going up the Chiwong mountain was like the stair-stepper from hell — it went on forever. But I had a Sherpa to make sure I didn't fall off the mountain. It was a full-on experience for Moana and I."

As to whether the Nepalese had ever met any Hawaiians before, he laughs.

"Most of them had no idea where Hawaii was. They would ask you where you're from, and you would say Hawaii, and you would just get this blank stare."

Performing in Vendetti's previous film, "The Quietest Place on Earth," Beamer's soundtrack work has also included the Oscar-winning movie "The Descendants," which featured four of his songs. Along with slack key guitarist Jeff Peterson, they were the only two artists invited by the film's director to record specifically for the soundtrack, which earned a Grammy nomination.

"I'm pretty sensitive about doing stuff that is culturally correct," he says. "Over the years I've had quite a few tenders to do music for stuff, and after I've had a general idea of the movie I've declined because they were embarrassing in a cultural sense. I'm not going to

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## KEOLA BEAMER

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add my name or talent to some boobs on the beach thing.”

No stranger to innovative collaborations, Beamer’s most recent album, the Grammy nominated “Malama Ko Aloha” (“Keep Your Love”), included musicians playing traditional Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese, Australian, classical European and American jazz instruments. His previous recording, the Na Hoku Hanohano-nominated “Keola Beamer & Raiatea,” included a track with Indonesian gamelan musician, Harry Willemssen, playing the Indonesian siter.

“I did a project in Amsterdam with a Javanese gamelan orchestra,” he says. “It was interesting to try to combine the elements that we have in Hawaiian music with the Indonesian elements, and then create a new sound that never existed before.”

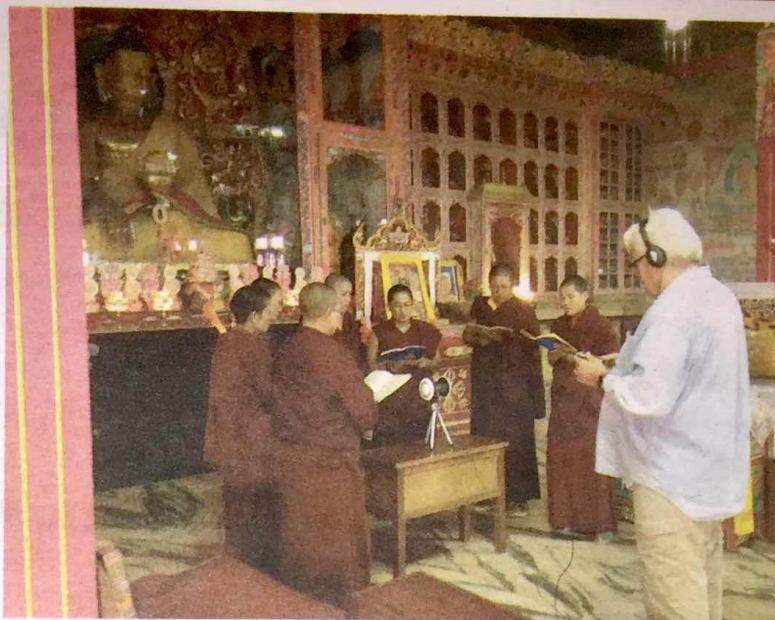
Last year on a tour of Japan, he performed with shamisen master Hiro Kurosawa at a concert hall in Isei.

“It was a wonderful blend of cultures and sound,” he says. “I have found it so interesting to explore the sounds and textures of world music.”

In previous years, the Beamers in tandem with Jeff Peterson, traveled around the world performing Hawaiian slack key guitar and hula, and collaborating with local musicians under the auspices of the U.S. Department of State in partnership with the non-profit American Voices organization. The trio journeyed to Brazil, Columbia, Venezuela, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

This unique cultural exchange program has expired under our new federal administration.

“The unfortunate thing is the positions of people who helped with those programs have not been filled and the State Department is decimated,” Beamer explains. “Half the people we worked with quit because they didn’t want to work with the Trump administration. It’s so sad.”



VENDETTI PRODUCTION photo

**Keola Beamer (at right)** recording a group of Tibetan Buddhist nuns chanting.

One of our most distinguished guitarists, singers and composers who established himself early in his career as an innovative leader of contemporary Hawaiian music, Beamer traces his roots to royal families of the 14th century.

A descendant of Chiefess Manono, who died at the famous Kuamo’o battle on Hawaii Island, he has dedicated the last few years to helping preserve the historic site. In 1819 it was the last battle fought in Hawaii to retain the old ways. As she was dying, the Chiefess is said to have called out, “malama ko aloha” (“keep your love”).

As president of Aloha Kuamo’o ‘Aina and in partnership with The Trust for Public Land, Beamer spearheaded a successful campaign to purchase the ancient battlefield and burial grounds.

“I’ve been doing a lot of work for our nonprofit Aloha Kuamo’o ‘Aina,” he explains. “It’s a site we’re preserving for the next generation. It was the ground zero for cultural trauma in 1819. We’ve placed it in conservation and protected it from any kind of development.”

Future music plans include teaming again with Henry Kaponu for a Mainland tour. He will also perform at Kaponu’s “Artist to Artist” concert series on Sept. 14,

at the Blue Note Hawaii on Oahu.

“We get along really well,” he says. “At the same time as my brother and I were playing the Territorial Tavern, C&K were at the Rainbow Villa and on our nights off we’d go and see the other guys and hang out.”

And it’s exciting to hear that Beamer is working on a new album, a follow up to “Malama Ko Aloha,” which was released in 2012.

“It’s premature to talk about it, but I’ve been in the studio,” he reports. “Life is great.”

Travel plans also could include a return to Nepal for a screening of “Tibetan Illusion Destroyer.”

“We’re hoping to bring the finished film to the Kathmandu Film Festival next year,” he says.

The documentary is currently being considered by American Public Television for national distribution as well as local airing on PBS Hawaii. The Buddhist International Foundation is also considering it for a limited theatrical screening.

“If American Public Television picks it up it will be offered to all the PBS stations,” says Vendetti. “‘The Quietest Place on Earth’ was picked up by almost 200 TV stations. This would be the ninth film that American Public Television has distributed. It’s quite an honor.”