

Good to Go, musicians with heart - West Hawaii Today 2008

Like many children growing up in Hawaii, the band members of Good to Go said their first musical exposure was with family playing music kanikapila-style. Bo Waite, Good to Go's bass player said, "We started off doing Hawaiian music by listening to our Aunties singing in the garage."

Based in Kailua-Kona, the four-man band plays gigs at Oceans in Kailua town, the Korner Pocket in Kealahou, hotels and charity functions. Bradshaw Ellis plays ukulele, bass and guitar, Coran Kitaoka is the group's drummer and Jason Leleiwi plays guitar. "There's good camaraderie between us and we love to share our music," said Ellis. "We've been through many different groups, and all of us, we like being together."

All band members have day jobs and agree they play music for the enjoyment of it. Practicing together only once a week, Leleiwi said they turn down gigs if it gets to be too much. "At one time, we were playing sometimes three times a day, running from Waimea to Kona and back to Waimea," he said.

"If we wanted to play at Oceans, we could be there every week. But we don't want to work like that," said Ellis. "We all have regular jobs and don't want to make this a second job. Rather than just playing music, [playing regular gigs] becomes monotonous and no fun, that's why we arrange to play music at these venues."

Good to Go's (or G-2-G's as the members have nicknamed themselves,) repertoire includes everything from contemporary and old-style Hawaiian to reggae, Jawaiian to their own original music. Leleiwi said they gauge the crowd and play music that is appropriate for them. "If it's an older crowd, we do oldies or Hawaiian. If it's a younger crowd, we play roots and reggae," he said. When a younger set is present, Good to Go plays progressively faster music, eventually getting people up on the dance floor.

Family plays an important part of the men's lives, and Ellis said its due to the support of the families that has kept the band together this long. "When the band plays, they bring their family energy into it. "Whatever feeling we get with the family, we try to channel a positive feeling no matter what," said Ellis. Leleiwi said the band member's wives are big supporters and there is a great connection between the families. "If it wasn't for our wives, we wouldn't be together," he said.

Waite, who is 46, said when he first met Leleiwi and Ellis about seven years ago, they didn't know he played the bass. "I came in at the tale end of their second CD," said Waite. "I was used to playing only Hawaiian music, and wasn't really into reggae." Waite said he's come full circle, learning roots, reggae and other music genres, although he claims he doesn't have much rhythm. "When I try to make some cool moves on stage, my kids later say, 'Dad, don't try to get in the groove,'" Waite said laughing.

The synergy of the group is such that if a song is requested, and only one member of the band knows it, they are still able to blend in and sing as though they all know it. Ellis believes that it's the emotional connection between the members that makes their seamless blending possible. Amazingly, none of the band members know how to read music, they all play "by ear," and they excel at what they do. "We come from the heart," said Leleiwi.

As far as they remember, they have not had major disagreements. "If someone makes a mistake, we stop, look at each other and laugh," Leleiwi said.

Many times, the band is asked to play at various charity and church functions. "Even if there's no money in it, we still play," said Ellis. "Our friends call us the 'Free Band,' but that's what makes us Good to Go, we do this for the love of the music."

Good to Go wants to take their time before they create their third album. They have been approached by many island producers but Leleiwi said, "We want to do this thing right and make a CD on our own terms." Good to Go believes it's their responsibility to pass on their music and to share it with other generations. "The feeling I have is when we play, we bring our family energy into it, because we get big family," said Ellis. "We're all Hawaiian and this is really therapy for us. We share our mana'o with the people."