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Celebrating Food, Art & Culture

Asian Pacific American Heritage Issue
May 2014 • Edition No. 68

How sweet the sound



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How sweet the sound



"I think I've gone through nearly 10 (ukuleles) since I started playing back in 1994," says Ben Ahn.
Photos by Jerek Barcelona of Jerek Barcelona Vision Photography

You'd never guess what one gifted musician sometimes treasures the most at the end of the day.

"This may sound strange, and I'm curious as to whether or not other musicians feel this way, but ... when I have time to relax, sometimes the sound I value most is silence. Uncluttered, simple, reflective silence."

Yep, the highly dexterous Ben Ahn, who can strike up just about any type of tune on his ukulele, is also a sucker for silence. But Ahn's growing base of fans needn't worry about being deprived of the pleasure of his strumming and crooning. Ahn can't imagine a life devoid of music. After all, he dabbles "in just about everything that makes noise," including a broken rubber band.

Ahn, 33, arrived in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2013. "I was at a place personally where I was ready for exploration," he says about the move. "San Francisco has a great professional and artistic scene, and I'm really pleased with how" things have gone.

A 2014 article in Hyphen magazine said he planned to work on a recording in 2014, so we wondered where things stood with this project.

"Since moving to the Bay Area last year, I've had a lot of informal conversations with different studios, but the project is still barely past the genesis stage," Ahn told *Unity* earlier this year. "Still writing, still exploring and still looking for a means to get the sound I want down to production."

Half Chinese and half Korean, Ahn hails from a family of entertainers in Kauai. "My sisters, Jackie and Sara, are the same – and they both sing a lot better than I do – and my mama, Jennie, claims to have no musical talent, but she sang to us all the time growing up. My dad, Nolan, sings and plays just about every instrument you typically see on a rock stage."

On stage, Ahn dabbles in rock and nearly every other style and genre his audience members might favor. His YouTube video, "Ben Ahn: Versatility of the Ukulele," (www.youtube.com/watch?v=dX-hA5CEGUc0&list=UUdQDTvTc4g4NiE1YCbKzFw), capsulizes his eclectic range.

It's probably no surprise that this singer-songwriter has an affinity for storytelling. After all, he's an award-winning educator (he even taught English in Japan), with a master's in teaching and bachelor's in English and writing from Oregon State University.

But what are the sources of his storytelling talent? The first is "the culture of Hawaii. Back home in Kauai, we don't have much external stimulation other than the beach, so I think a lot of us really place value on *talking story*, or conversation. It's how we make a parking lot, a friend's garage or the supermarket such fun places to be."

The second source is "my inflated ego," he jokes. "I think I assume that people want to hear what I have to say, and being a musician only feeds that monster."

Some will surely argue that the only thing monstrous about Ahn is his talent.



"I love the dynamic about music in that there is no shortcut to excellence." - Ben Ahn