

Island Arts Concert Series to Launch this Saturday

Jessica Mei

From this weekend into the summer, Rhythmix Cultural Works, 2513 Blanding Ave., will host the Island Arts Concert Series to celebrate the traditions and culture of islands around the world. The concert series spotlights local artists with diverse backgrounds on four upcoming Saturdays at 8 p.m. The concerts will showcase dance and music of Cuba, Tahiti, Indonesia and Japan and feature Bay Area artists: Jesús Díaz, Mahealani Uchiyama and Hālau Ka Ua Tuahine, Gamelan Sekar Jaya and Maze Daiko.

■ This Saturday, April 27, Jesús Díaz kicks off the series with a fusion of modern and traditional elements of Afro-Cuban dance music to create a unique, signature sound. Díaz moved to the United States from Havana in the 1980s. He explores the role of music in cultural identity, history and geography of Cuba and the Caribbean islands. The concert will also feature local musicians: Edgar Pantoja-Aleman, Ernesto Mazar Kindelán and Colin Douglas. Audience members will experience a fusion of modern and traditional Afro-Cuban rhythms along with funk, jazz, rumba and more.

■ On Saturday, June 22, Mahealani Uchiyama and Hālau Ka Ua Tuahine warm things up with Tahitian dance, music and singing. Uchiyama — an award-winning dancer, composer and choreographer — specializes in Tahitian performing arts. Hālau Ka Ua Tuahine, a 25-piece member ensemble of dancers and musicians, joins Uchiyama in the performance. Uchiyama performed on numerous tours in Tahiti, New Zealand and the islands of Hawaii. She has also taught workshops in the U.S., Mexico and Canada.

She is the founder and teacher of Hālau Ka Ua Tuahine at Berkeley, and currently one of the artistic directors of the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival. Uchiyama advocates for celebration of diversity and cultural understanding through her performances, workshops and classes. The concert presents an experience of Tahitian music and dance, featuring live singing and traditional Tahitian drum orchestra and dance styles.

■ The series continues on Saturday, Sept. 21, with Gamelan Sekar Jaya, an internationally

acclaimed Bay Area-based ensemble, performing traditional Balinese music and dance.

Gamelan Sekar Jaya is a 60-member ensemble comprised of musicians and dancers. Beginning their journey in the Balinese arts in 1979, the group has performed more than 500 concerts in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, and offers workshops and classes in Bay Area schools and community centers. Gamelan Sekar Jaya's efforts to build artistic community and cultural exchange contributes to growing cultural diversity and understanding in countries across the globe. The group maintains a devotion to traditional repertoire alongside their passion for innovation, having created more than 60 major new works for Gamelan and dance since their founding.

■ Saturday, Nov. 9, marks the final concert in the series. The Rhythmix "house band," Maze Daiko incorporates a blend of East African Shona marimba, Persian santur and violin to Taiko drumming. The group's name offers an insight into its work. The word *mazeru* in Japanese translates into "to mix," and *daiko* is the word for drum. Maze Daiko showcases a new approach that creates culturally diverse music within traditional discipline and music of Taiko.

The members of Maze Daiko include: artistic director and Rhythmix founder, Janet Koike, Kathryn Cabunoc, Tina Blaine, Carolyn West, Elaine Fong, and Jeannie McKenzie. Maze Daiko creates an innovative and diverse mixture of music to create original music with inspirations from different cultures and islands around the world.

The Island Arts Concert Series honors traditions of performing arts from islands around world on the island of Alameda. The four-part series of concerts comes together on the theme of celebrating the diversity of island cultures.

"Take this journey of music and dance through the Caribbean and Pacific to the Java Sea and the Sea of Japan with us," said Rhythmix operations manager, Jennifer Radakovich. "You'll gain an appreciation and understanding of the variety of ways that peoples express and celebrate culture."

Rhythmix brings various cul-



Danny Tan

Jesús Díaz presents a blend of Afro-Cuban influences and dance music this Saturday, April 27.



Danny Tan

Members of Hālau Ka Ua Tuahine performs as part of the Island Arts Concert Series in June.

tures and expression of art on the performing arts stage to audiences of children, youth and adults alike.

Tickets to the Island Arts Concert Series are \$25 per person for each show, or purchase all four

for just \$70 for adults, \$40 for children. Learn more at www.rhythmix.org or 865-5060.

Jessica Mei is an Alameda Sun intern.