

Maoli

Last Sip of Summer LP out June 27



Photo credit: Reggie Villa

Every singer-songwriter brings a sense a purpose to their music, but for Hawaiian-born rising star Maoli, the kuleana – or responsibility – is front and center.

Now breaking into the mainstream with his unique mix of island reggae and country soul, the golden-voiced artist seeks to put his people on the map like they've never been before. He is living proof of the common bonds between country folks and island lifers, and a torch-bearing link fusing both together.

“That island-boy country mix. It’s not a vacation, it’s a real lifestyle,” the big-hearted artist explains. “It’s very special to me because I’m very proud of where I come from, and I feel like Hawaii has something really special to offer the world – but until now you’ve had to live here to understand it. ... I feel like it’s my kuleana – my job – to share that with the world.”

A native of upcountry Maui on the island’s northern shore, Maoli now boasts nine independent albums and over half a billion global streams, driven by a nearly 15-year recording and touring career which has made him a fixture across the Pacific islands and American West, regularly spreading his laid-back joy to thousands of cheering fans. But his upbringing was more on-the-ground than on-stage.

Raised in a cultural melting pot of cattle ranches at pineapple fields which has attracted generations of families from Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, the Americas and beyond, hard work and farm life were central to Maoli’s early experience – and so was the deeply engrained value of aloha.

Most people know that term to mean “hello” or “goodbye,” but it also refers to the feeling of love, sharing and kindness which “really lives here in Hawaii, and it resonates not only just in the spirit, but in the music, the food, the culture. It is everywhere,” Maoli says.

Like most of his friends, Maoli did not know music as a potential career path – just that it was part of their tradition. Communities would often sing together during communal events, and the radio was filled with traditional Hawaiian music – the believe-it-or-not birthplace of steel guitar, before it made its way into country. Rock and reggae were also ever present, and so was the classic country Maoli’s grandmother loved, with Dolly Parton, Willie Nelson and George Strait speaking directly to the farm boy’s everyday life.

“It’s funny how the things they would talk about in country music, was everything that we did here,” Maoli says with a laugh. “I was like, ‘Man, that’s how we do things over here in the country, too!’”

Even so, it was a mix of island pop and roots reggae which gave Maoli his start. Discovering a smooth, sand-and-soul vocal with a ton of range during his seventh grade ukulele class, the singer went on to wow friends at parties and even form a band in high school, before leaving music behind to work construction. Years later his uncle encouraged Maoli to pick it back up, and

after recording a set of groove-laced covers, the singer hit the road, building a committed fan base that first stretched across the Hawaiian islands, then the whole of Polynesia, the American West Coast and as far east as Texas. It was there that Maoli rediscovered his country roots, setting the stage for a new chapter of creative growth.

Starting around 2018, Maoli’s mainland friends began pointing out the many similarities between his music and modern country – from the swaying melodies and solid rhythms to the tradition of simple-life storytelling ... and of course the steel guitars. Covering popular country hits in his roots-reggae style, he found new inspiration combining genres, and has since then carried the pride of his people everywhere. Maoli’s unique Hawaiian-country sound amplified an already-thriving career, letting the star tour the Eastern U.S. and rack up millions of new streams, while releasing a series of instinctively innovative albums.

Combining original tunes and adventurous covers, those albums included multiple viral singles – some of which caught the attention of their original artist. After matching his soulful voice and one-drop rhythms to emotionally-charged power ballads like Brett Young’s “Mercy” (18+ million Spotify streams) and “In Case You Didn’t Know” (10+ million Spotify streams), Maoli and the multi-Platinum country hit maker eventually met – and at Young’s

invitation, teamed up for a track with kuleana-sized implications.

Mixing Nashville know-how with Maoli’s heart-on-his-sleeve Hawaiian talent, the 2024 collab “Broke Heart Break” (written by Young and Jesse Frasure) paired breezy backbeats and brassy horns with a story of romantic caution, leading the way for more to come. Now working in Music City for the first time, Maoli has begun capturing his authentic island-country background with hit producers Dann and David Huff, and an upcoming project aims to add a new voice to the chorus of country styles – one that was only hinted at before.

“Nobody has brought the island-reggae feel to it yet,” Maoli explains. “The only ones that I’ve seen get close were guys like Jimmy Buffet and Kenny Chesney. But the thing is, the stuff they sing about is actually who I really am.”

With the momentum building and a path ahead open, Maoli plans to continue his international touring while releasing more new music in 2025. And as for his kuleana? That has never been more clear.

“I got blessed with this opportunity to showcase what my island and music and culture is really about,” he explains. “What’s most important to me is to make music that I love, and to bring people together. To share more love, more unity in the world. I just hope this music brings a lot of people together.”

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