

Suzuki prodigy Stephen Inglis releases his debut CD

## Method man

JAMIE WINPENNY

Just 28, Honolulu guitarist Stephen Inglis has already played with Grateful Dead drummer Bill Kreutzman, worked at one of San Francisco's top commercial recording studios and this week he sees the release of his debut solo CD.

He's been at it since he was 5 years old, when he made his first public performance on piano with Shinichi Suzuki at Orvis Auditorium at the University of Hawai'i music department. Whether it's under the monkeypod tree canopy of the Inglis family's Pālolo home or under the stage lights, Inglis has been captivating audiences since, well, his hanabata days.

He began studying music under the Suzuki Method, the educational theory that focuses on hearing and pitch rather than on traditional staff reading. He still uses that method today, says Inglis.

His first gig as a professional was picking up the bass for local act Red Session. Although he's a guitar player, the band members were so confident in his musical ability that they bought him a bass.

After a one-year stint with the ska outfit, Inglis broke off to form the jam band Palolo Jones with his brother Daniel and childhood friend Chad Paet.

With a repertoire that leaned toward noodling, meandering Grateful Dead songs and a handful of like-minded originals, the Joneses developed a large and loyal following at Anna Banana's. It was an ideal situation for Inglis to hone his skills as a phenomenal lead guitarist, and to improve his singing.

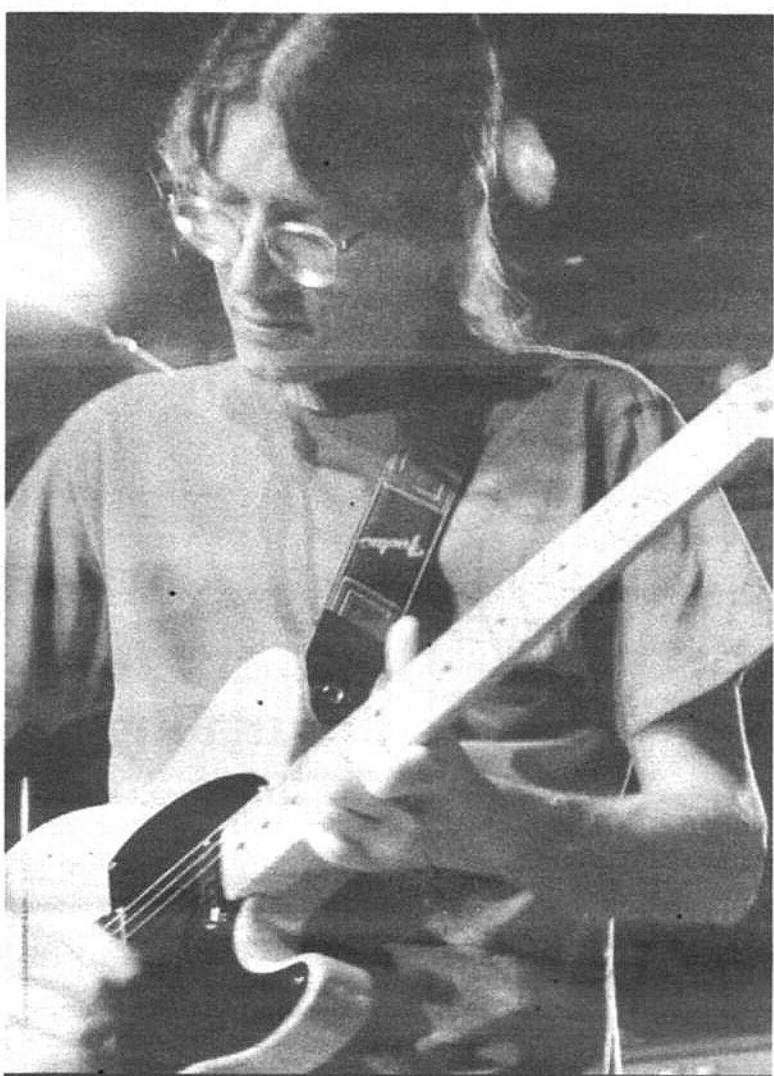
Inglis's playing became eerily similar to that of Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia, as did his appearance. He wore glasses and black T-shirts; he got girthy and smoked cigarettes like a fiend. Soon, however, his playing began to exceed the expectations of his audience, and crowds grew as word of the Palolo Jones prodigy spread.

When the band took an indefinite hiatus, Inglis hooked up with Honolulu journeyman Eric Petersen to form Reign Cheq'd. Sharing the spotlight with Petersen, the guitarist's abilities as a rhythm player blossomed.

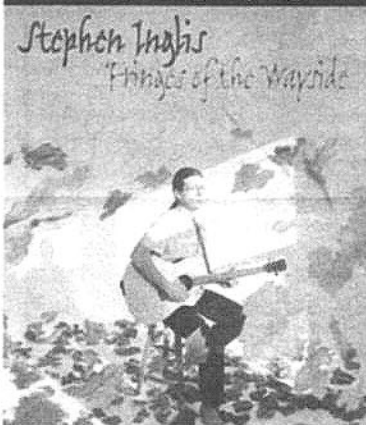
Possibly because of his Suzuki Method background, Inglis was able to incorporate a variety of styles into his playing. His songwriting continued to mature.

Then came his "big break"—in the form of every Deadheads fantasy since the Acid Tests of the 1960s. Grateful Dead drummer—and Kaua'i resident—Kreutzman asked Inglis to front his band House of the Spirits. To Inglis's family and friends, it was a matter of destiny manifested. He was onstage with a member of the band that he had emulated for so long.

But Inglis had talent and aspirations beyond being an itinerant Jerry



Not so long, strange trip: Inglis makes it with natural talent and hard work



Garcia impersonator. After marrying his sweetheart Christa two years ago, the couple moved to Berkeley to explore musical opportunities beyond these shores.

### Beyond Jerry

"It has been such a learning experience," says Inglis. "I've always just had to show up with my guitar and play gigs. I knew nothing about booking or promotion, about what it takes to a working professional. Basically, I've learned that you have to bust your ass."

Gone is his music-biz naiveté. He has worked with people from Bill Graham Presents on the promotional and marketing aspect of his career and he recorded his debut solo acoustic album, *Fringes of the Wayside*, at San Francisco's Closer Studios. He used analog equipment to capture the warmth of tone and timbre of voice that is lost in the digital record process now most commonly used in the industry.

"All this time I've been in California, I've really been exploring the acoustic guitar and all sorts of differ-

ent tunings," says Inglis. "Doing that really opened up my songwriting."

The acoustic album features slack-key sensibilities combined with jazz, folk and bluegrass. His lyrics are laced with metaphor and literalism. Often humorous and ironic, his words are full of imagery and wisdom unexpected from a man in his twenties.

"His talent is so natural, so innate, that he has absolutely no attitude about it whatsoever," says Honolulu singer-songwriter James McCarthy.

### Artistic arrival

Because of frequent Honolulu appearances, with Makana and other Hawai'i notables, Inglis's two-year absence may have escaped notice.

And that's why Friday night's CD release party for *Fringes of the Wayside*, at Hard Rock Cafe, will be more of an artistic arrival than it will be a personal homecoming.

The show will feature special guests, including opening band Mary's Meltdown. Inglis will be joined onstage by bassist Mykhal Compton and renowned percussionist Petro Bass, who has done tour and studio work with the Four Tops, the Temptations and the late Gregory Hines.

But the night will be all about a young musician who had the courage to strike out on his own. And whatever follows, Inglis's career trajectory appears to have one direction: up.

CD release party, Hard Rock Cafe, 1837 Kapi'olani Blvd, Fri 7/16, 6-9PM