



Interview September 21, 2015 Kevin Barber

Interview with Stephen Inglis

Grammy-nominated artist Stephen Inglis is back with a brand new album, *Learning You By Heart*. The thirteen-track album is personal, heartfelt and full of life as the Hawaiian born artist uses his native music, as well as outside influences to create a truly powerful effort. Inglis is currently on the road in Tokyo in support of the new album and we caught up with him recently to discuss the Hawaiian music scene and the new material:

Me: What was the music scene like growing up in Honolulu? Has it changed at all since then?

Stephen Inglis: It's always been quite a melting pot. Before I became a professional musician, I grew up with some legendary Hawaiian musicians as close family friends. This proved to be a blessing when I got into studying Hawaiian music; during a bout of homesickness while living in California.

The biggest change since I began cutting my teeth in the 90's has been the shrinking of the world at large, with the explosion of the internet/social media/YouTube. This has made for an even more diverse scene. Recently, Hollywood movies such as the *Descendants* and *Aloha* have given slack key a nice little spike of awareness.

Me: The new release, *Learning You By Heart*, has a very eclectic vibe to it. During the recording process, was it a conscious effort to have such a different mix of genre's or did that just happen organically?

Stephen Inglis: I had a good chunk of these songs before we hit the studio. My last couple of albums have featured instrumental slack key and Hawaiian language extensively. It was a conscious decision on this record to feature the whole spectrum of my influences outside of that. I was also long overdue to lay down some electric guitar and full band arrangements.

Me: When did you begin recording the new album and were there any entertaining stories (good or bad) that came from the sessions?

Stephen Inglis: I began recording in January 2014 and wrapped up in March 2015. My producer and friend **Chris Lau** and I are on the road together quite a bit, so we would hit his home studio on O'ahu whenever we were off the road.

It has been more than good, great in fact, and entertaining to collaborate with the renowned writer/historian/film maker, **Gavan Daws** on this record. The title track and three others are co-writes with him. He has some amazing stories, anecdotes and wisdom to share from his eight decades of living; among them tales from his year of work with his good friend **Jac Holzman** on Jac's autobiography, *Follow the Music*.

Me: Your fall tour will be taking you to some exotic places. What is your favorite part about being on the road?

Stephen Inglis: I'm in Tokyo as we speak. I'll be home for four days on Monday, then off to Texas and the Northwest. I love sharing music with people who love to listen, and I'm blessed beyond words to be able to do this for a living. Of course, there's the adventures and fun that being on the road provide. As I'm about to turn 40, I'm learning how to live much healthier on the road. It's also a challenge being a family man and missing my wife and six year old son.

Me: How did you meet Grateful Dead drummer, Bill Kreutzmann? How did his style of music influence your own?

Stephen Inglis: He moved to Kaua'i the year after **Jerry Garcia** died and a friend of mine became quick friends.

I had been to over 20 Dead shows before I met Bill, and Jerry was certainly my biggest influence. The way they took a jazz approach to rock and roll improvising was thrilling. But their songbook was also an

anchor. The way they meshed this shamanistic **John Coltrane** approach with this big tapestry of 20th century American roots inspired songwriting forever changed the way I thought about guitar playing and songwriting!