

# The Four-Letter Word

*The Haiku Hillbillys give dreaded folk music a makeover*

For the past year, the Haiku Hillbillys have been slowly infiltrating the local scene with an unlikely toe tapping, train-chugging sound. Some people would call it folk music—we prefer to call it a folk *movement*.

"Folk music is a kind of curse word in music," said Randall Rospond, lead singer, guitarist and mastermind of the eight-piece ensemble.

## Randall Rospond CD Release

Saturday, 7:30-11 p.m. at Café Marc Aurel, Wailuku. With the Haiku Hillbillys and special guests. No cover.

Most nightclub owners are hesitant to book "folk" bands, or opt to stick them on a low-crowd night and not pay them—especially in an area besieged with demands for more Hawaiian and reggae grooves. But surprisingly, the Haiku Hillbillys have a down-home appeal that transcends genres.

At a recent show at Stopwatch in Makawao, Rospond greeted a raucous, packed bar and introduced the band's latest original song, "West Kuiuaha Waltz."

"It's technically not a waltz but I have some punk rock roots and refuse to call it anything else," he said. "It could be a great dance song or great song to drink your beverage to!"

But what is "hillbilly" music, exactly? Bluegrass is part of it. Fliers tout the band as "funky, groovin', poetic folk." But as far as the Haiku Hillbillys are concerned, it's also just as likely to include tunes by Lou Reed, the New York Dolls or Iggy Pop.

"Don't let the name fool you," said Rospond. "Like that band, the Brazilian

they weren't [all] girls. I want people to ask, 'Who is this? What are they doing?' I'd rather they try to think about it."

The current lineup of Rospond's Haiku Hillbillys includes Rand Coon on guitar, banjo and vocals, John Pollock on violin and mandolin, Geoff Coolidge on bass, Jimmy Coulter on drums, Don McClellan on dobro and pedal steel, Klaus Simmer on keys, and Troy Grow on electric guitar and vocals. Rospond writes most of the "ambiguously spiritual" songs and also has an eclectic folk show on Mana'o Radio, every Sunday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

During one recent on-air stint, he opened with a Frank Zappa riff, segued into some bluesy Muddy Waters, which then led to the cigar-and-whiskey growl of Tom Waits, Jerry Byrd's Hawaiian steel guitar, the jazzy down-tempo of Wax Poetic with Norah Jones, Little Feat, the Latin Playboys featuring members of Los Lobos, and so on.

Rospond even plans to do a live music series called "The F-Word" at Café Marc Aurel, on

the last Thursday of each month. Along with various local songwriters and musicians, he will host an experimental session designed to blow apart the notoriously dowdy concept—and often, contempt—of traditional "folk" music. This month on March 30 he's featuring Teri Garrison, a local musician whose song "The Eyes"—produced by Willie Nelson—recently won Nashville's Embassy Music Songwriter's Contest.

"I once went to an Alan Jackson concert in Iowa," said Rospond. "I'm not a fan of mainstream country but it was impeccable musicianship, a great show. My hope is that people won't be prejudiced about our shows."

Rospond is from Canada and has traveled as a troubadour of sorts from Florida to Toronto, Chicago, Alberta, California and then, for the last 13 years, Maui. Along the way, he's opened for John Prine, Kris Kristofferson, Los Lobos, Hot Tuna, Valdy, Vin Garbutt, Stephen Fearing and, oddly, *The Vagina Monologues*.

"I hate to admit it but I've been performing

since 1982," said Rospond. "So that means I started when I was four! No, I'm just kidding."

Although he's now embracing the challenge of redefining folk music, Rospond started as a poet and lead singer in a rock band, along the lines of Jim Morrison. At the time, he idolized Jim Carroll, Patti Smith and other great Beat-rock poets.

"Not that I would put myself in that group," he said. "But they're my heroes."

Rospond used to listen to the music of his parents—Glen Miller, the Mills Brothers and others—then got into Sex Pistols, The Clash and L.A. punk bands. He had some friends who were hardcore rastas. And he used to tour with the garage punk, Rolling Stones-influenced band called Dead Flowers.

And all of that goes into the XXX-marked, moonshine clay jug of the Haiku Hillbillys' music.

"I just ask people to listen with an open heart and mind," he said. "Hopefully, you'll like it and we'll fit into something you can deal with—or not fit in, if that's what you like." **MTW**

