

BIOGRAPHY

James Kimo Williams was born in 1950 in Amityville, New York, and spent much of his childhood divided between Air Force bases, the urban neighborhoods of Baltimore, the backwards towns of Mississippi and his grandparents sharecropper farm in North Carolina, with no running water and his routine day was picking tobacco, plowing fields and tending livestock on their rural farm

His experiences at the age of fourteen in Biloxi, Mississippi (near Keesler AFB) made a deep impression on him as he witnessed first-hand the segregated lifestyle in the Southern states. He credits this experience as the origin of his life-long ambition to persevere regardless of obstacles, and further led to his passion to create his own identity and professional career as a musician and educator.

In 1968, he moved to Hawaii to join his father (a career Air Force Sergeant) and attended Leilehua High School. He always had a guitar with him (though he did not play it well) and played his favorite songs in the school hallways. He also took up sports and was an all-star football performer with a scholarship invitation from Arizona State as well as setting the triple-jump record on the school track-team. The night before enlisting in the US Army on July 4, 1969, he attended his first major music concert: Jimi Hendrix playing at the Waikiki Bowl. He was so inspired by this concert and the music of Jimi Hendrix, that he dedicated himself to music and playing guitar.

After basic training, he was sent to Viet Nam (the day after his 20th birthday), where he served with the 25th Combat Engineer Battalion in Lai Khe, building roads and clearing land in the jungle. An Army entertainment service director heard him playing guitar at one of the service clubs, and suggested that he form a band to perform for troops in the field: for two months, Kimo and his band, "The Soul Coordinators", traveled to remote areas throughout South Vietnam, setting up their drums and amplifiers in jungle mud, often with their music competing with artillery fire.

He and his band performed in hospital corridors, in dayrooms, at officer club picnics and anywhere that would make a difference in the lives of those who were serving. Kimo received a special award directly from General Creighton Abrams for his service to the morale and well-being of soldiers fighting in Vietnam. After leaving Viet Nam in November of 1970, Kimo returned to Hawaii, and began playing with several local rock bands.

In 1972, he left Hawaii (he adopted the Hawaiian name for Jim (Kimo), to keep his ties to his home) and using his GI Bill, he applied to and was accepted to the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston. During his four years at Berklee (starting as a guitarist who could barely read music), he developed considerable compositional talents and eventually created his own harmonic concepts ("Diagonal Harmony"). He started composing music that combined jazz, rock and classical styles. Also, while a student at Berklee, he formed his innovative 30-piece ensemble, the "Paumalu Symphony", as a vehicle for his unique style of composing. After graduating in 1976 with a BA in composition, he then spent a year teaching at Berklee.

In 1976 he met his music partner and future wife Carol, a fellow Berklee student. Kimo and Carol married in 1978 and together joined the Army Band program, spending a year with the 9th Infantry Division Band at Ft. Lewis, Washington. Kimo went on to attend Officer Candidate School and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in 1980. His first assignment brought him to Fort Sheridan, IL: close enough to Chicago that he and Carol could continue producing and performing with his large ensemble (now called "Kimotion") and their small-group "Williams and Williams", in local clubs and concert venues. They set up a music publishing company (One Omik Music), as well as launched their own record company (Little Beck Music). To record their music, they rehabbed an old storefront in Chicago, and built and operated a recording studio.

In 1983 he earned his MA in Management from Webster University.

In 1987, Kimo resigned from the active duty Army as a Captain to pursue music full time. He taught at Sherwood Conservatory of Music in Chicago, and in the Music Department at Columbia College Chicago. He completed his military service in the Army Reserves by becoming the Bandmaster for the 85th Division Army Reserve Band, and retired from the Army Reserves as a Chief Warrant Officer in 1996. In 1996, he accepted a position in the Arts Entertainment and Media Management Department of Columbia College. He is currently a tenured associate professor teaching the business of music.

Kimo released his Vietnam-themed cathartic symphonic-rock-big-band album called "War Stories" in 1991, which received critical acclaim from national publications such as Downbeat magazine (4 1/2 stars). His second album, "Tracking", was released in November 2001, and featured his friend Vinnie Colaiuta on drums (formerly with Sting), and actor/musician Gary

Sinise (CSI: NY) on bass, who co-produced the album. This CD also included a track dedicated to his second cousin Tupac Shakur.

Kimo wrote his first symphony *Symphony For the Sons of Nam (SFSON)* in 1990. SFSON has been performed by the Savannah, Detroit, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Indianapolis and Nashville Symphony Orchestras, as well as others both nationally and internationally. This score has been regularly programmed on NPR's "Performance Today" every Memorial day from 1991 to 1997. In 1994 his second symphony was commissioned by AT&T and he titled it *Fanfare For Life*.

In all, Kimo has written five string quartets, three symphonies, and composed the music for a Steppenwolf Theatre production of "A Streetcar Named Desire" in 1997. That same year he also directed the Goodman Theatre's production of the August Wilson play, "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom". In 1999 the Lancaster (PA) Symphony Orchestra selected Kimo to receive their Composer of the Year award, with a performance of his works, as well as recognition for his contribution to American Music.

In 1998, Kimo created the United States Viet Nam Arts Program (USVAP) to produce collaborative works of music and art with American and Vietnamese artists. He has returned to Viet Nam several times since 1998 and continues to lecture at conservatories there. Mostly on American Jazz.

In 1999, the West Point Military Academy commissioned Kimo to compose music to commemorate their 2002 bicentennial, for this commission he wrote *Buffalo Soldiers*. This piece was recently performed by the Chicago Sinfonietta, and is featured on the CD "Buffalo Soldiers", released in 2006. A review by Chicago Tribune critic John Van Rhein wrote: "What *Buffalo Soldiers* sets out to do, it does most effectively. Both the musical layout and the uplifting tone of the 15-minute piece recall Aaron Copeland's *Lincoln Portrait*". This work includes a narration (by the composer) from excerpts of a Colin Powell speech given at the dedication of the Buffalo Soldiers monument at Ft. Leavenworth Kansas. Colin Powell personally gave Kimo permission to use his words.

He has also completed a screenplay based on the courts martial of Henry O. Flipper, the first black graduate of West Point. Kimo's most current project is the "Lt. Dan Band", a classic-rock group he founded in 2003 with Gary Sinise, and which continues to perform for USO shows throughout the world. In 2007 Kimo was selected as a Fulbright Specialist and through this program, he is providing jazz education and developing curriculums in Vietnam.

Kimo lives in Chicago with singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Carol Williams, and after 30 years of marriage they continue to collaborate in all aspects of their creative endeavors. On flute and tenor saxophone, she has performed with his big band both on recordings and in concert, and is a featured soloist on his "War Stories" CD. She also has her own group that performs her original music and Kimo performs with her on electric bass and guitar. She help developed and has created program notes and titles for his orchestral, jazz, and concert works. Specifically she wrote the narrative recited by Gary Sinise on the recording of "American Soldier", and has contributed musical and harmonic structures for "Buffalo Soldiers" and other works. She was also a former sax and flute player in the "Lt. Dan Band".

Kimo is currently devoted most of his creative energies to film-making and photography. He is working on a film adaptation of an epic poem written and illustrated by his daughter.