

# All Glow On

The Color Festival Hawai'i Returns for its Second Jubilant Event

**Coachella, Outside Lands, Lollapalooza—The Color Festival Hawai'i? Certainly, if Dean Wong has any say in it.**

BY ROBYN RUSSELL

And that he does, if not the last word. As the Executive Director of Imua Family Services, Wong has garnered more than a few rounds of applause for throwing some of the most epic and essential fundraisers on Maui. He's the brains behind 2018's Bollywood Ball—complete with a Maharaja Cocktail Reception and Indian Fair, no less—and this year's Carnival de Venice Mascheranda Grand Ball.

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The masquerade party, spotlighting Down Syndrome, will see the likes of Tony-nominated performer Denée Benton and Hawai'i Opera Theater.

But, talking story with Wong in his

cherry-red office in Kahului, it's clear that The Color Festival Hawai'i holds a special place in his heart. In a word? The children.

The contemporary, Westernized color festival is derived from The Festival of Holi, or Phagwah, an Indian tradition of greeting spring's arrival. It's a notoriously boisterous event brimming with laughter and dancing as attendees of all ages and standings splash (and smear) color on each other from water balloons, water guns, and powder. Some celebrations boast cultural enhancements, such as the reenactment of the dance between Lord Krishna and his lover-Radha. Others unfold to the backbeat of drums. Outside of India the Hindu custom has acquired celebrity status among global festivals: New Zealand's 2017 affair drew 9,000 revelers to Wanaka; London's Iteration saw

upwards of 100,000 attendees. Pumping with live music, vibrating with energy, and, most of all, marked by staggeringly-bright explosions of color, the festival makes merriness a physical, tangible thing.

Whether it's held in Utah or Munich, the underlying and unifying theme of color festivals, though—and the quality that attracted Wong to the idea—is that differences in gender, race, class, special needs, abilities, and more cease to exist when everyone is caked in technicolor shades. In Wong's mind, it could be an exuberant gathering that would celebrate, if not epitomize, Imua's overarching goal of inclusion.

A glance at last year's success proves that he was right. Roughly 1,500 partygoers arrived to support Imua while simultaneously savoring music, 'ono eats from food trucks, keiki activities that ranged from glitter tattoos to a photobooth—and, of course, that spectacular shower



color. "We are all children of the rainbow," Wong says, reflecting the ethos of the organization he's been with since 2011. Imua Family Services, which got its start in a small reeksville cottage in 1947, was established to supply services to children with polio and cerebral palsy. The institution has continued to assist Maui County children with special needs, disabilities, and developmental delays with the express aim of helping them reach their full potential. Today, the 72-year-old institution is the largest single provider of early childhood intervention and development programs in Hawai'i, furnishing more than 17,000 hours of direct services annually.

While Imua offers a number of programs—including Imua Autism Services, Camp Imua, and Imua Inclusion Preschool—The Color Festival Hawai'i goes down as a unique opportunity for its children and families to come together with their community for the sole purpose of having fun. Other "friend-iser" events to benefit Imua, after all, aren't suitable for the whole mana. Paddle Imua, those aforementioned galas, Roy's Restaurants of Classic—all (understandably) are only available to some. The Color Festival Hawai'i, on the other hand, is one occasion that's accessible to all. What's more, it allows children to participate in an experience they might not otherwise find on the Valley Isle. Wong, a Honolulu native who did stints in New York, San Francisco, and Africa (among other locales), says he likes to push the progressive envelope."

He also notes that he's always keen on educating the community—not only in the realm of fresh forms of entertainment but, more importantly, in what Imua is about. And what better way to do so than with a one-of-a-kind party that has its roots in denouncing that there are any "kinds" at all? In the end, Wong reminded me, this will be a good old-fashioned music festival. Nonstop tunes will play from afternoon to evening. Those taking the stage will include Yum Yum Beast, DJ Boomshot, and Shea Butter & The Cream. The headliner will be Nashville original Rayland Baxter, whose indie-country fusion has led Relix to call his new album *Wide Awake* "modern American rock music at its finest." Wong is hoping that



Rayland Baxter

Baxter's presence in the line-up will urge others to see that Hawai'i is perfectly primed for a spot on the list of international color festival destinations. Mauipalooza? Perhaps—and there's no better way to find out: April 13, 2019, Maui Arts & Cultural Center, 1-6pm. ■

Imua Family Services  
PRESENTS

COLOR FESTIVAL HAWAII

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