



**James Ingram – Ukulele Festival Hawaii Legacy Award 2019 - In Memory and Recognition**

*The story behind a very special man's strong connection to Hawaii, a very special friendship and Ukulele Festival Hawaii's theme song. James Ingram, a great musician and singer blessed us with laughter, love and hope and filled our lives with his Aloha.*

Musician, producer, songwriter James Ingram, in a career spanning four decades, has been nominated for 17 Grammy Awards. He's won in 1981 for Best R&B Male Vocal for "One Hundred Ways", and in 1984 for Best Male R&B Vocal Group/Duo for "Yah Mo B There" with Michael McDonald. Ingram co-wrote "P.Y.T. (Pretty Young Thing)" one of the signature tunes on Michael Jackson's historic Thriller album. And he has supported and performed at Ukulele Festival Hawaii six times from 1994 to 2012. James Ingram loved the idea of the Ukulele Festival, a free event with hundreds of children playing music together.

It was 1993, when Roy and James first crossed paths at the University of Hawaii track field, where Sakuma was completing laps and Ingram had just finished his workout. Sakuma, who makes friends as easily as he smiles, didn't recognize Ingram, in Hawaii to perform at the NFL Pro Bowl halftime show. Sakuma was so taken by Ingram's warm genial presence and by the end of their conversation, invited Ingram and his family on a sunset dinner cruise.

Later, Sakuma went home to watch the Pro Bowl and at the start of the halftime show, he turned to his wife Kathy and said, "hey, that's the guy I met today!" She couldn't believe he didn't recognize Ingram was the artist of hits like "Just Once" and "How Do You Keep the Music Playing?" and "I Don't Have the Heart". From this act of aloha, a close personal and musical friendship evolved.

During the sunset cruise, Ingram asked Sakuma about the Ukulele Festival. Taken with the idea of a concert of 800-plus kids playing the ukulele and entertainers performing at no charge for an event that was free, Ingram offered to be a guest at the next festival. Turning to his road manager, he said, "make it happen."

In 1994, a year after their meeting on the track, James Ingram performed "Somewhere Out There" at the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Ukulele Festival accompanied by the Ukulele Band – hundreds of children on backup ukulele. Since then, James Ingram made return appearances five more times. Roy and Kathy Sakuma were always asked, "How in the world did you get James Ingram?!?"

Roy and Kathy Sakuma agree their friendship with James, his wife, Debbie, and their six children, is "like a dream." They still find it amazing that a musical luminary who's worked with greats like Ray Charles, Quincy Jones, Michael Jackson, Michael McDonald, Linda Ronstadt, Patti Austin, Carol B. Sager and Dolly Parton wanted to be a part of their ukulele festival. They like to think that's the charm of the ukulele - it brings people together, whether they play the instrument or not.

The Sakumas and Ingrams, linked by warm hearts and down-to-earth natures, enjoyed a friendship that extends beyond the festival. Over the years they shared trips together. And the two men have often talked about writing a theme song about the festival. In 2003, the day after Ingram's guest appearance with the Honolulu Symphony, Debbie Ingram got James and Roy together to compose the theme song. Ingram took a seat at the piano; Sakuma grabbed his ukulele. "The words just came so naturally to him, James hit it right on with the lyrics." In 2004, James Ingram's fourth appearance at the Ukulele Festival coincided with the release of the CD single "Come and Join Us, a collaboration of two longtime friends.