A Medical Benefit That’s Music To The Ears

“It’s rewarding to support the many praiseworthy causes in our community. We give to our favorite causes, from national organizations funding medical research, to our alma maters, to the neighborhood kids’ sports teams.

One of my favorite charities is Aloha Medical Mission. The organization draws from top-notch training and invaluable skills of the medical community, and provides health care in Asia, Central America, South America and the Pacific. Its doctors have performed more than 20,000 surgeries during their 140 missions. In Hawai‘i, AMM operates the only free dental clinic on O‘ahu, serving more than 2,000 patients a year.

The mission supports its work through financial donations, the giving of time by its dedicated corps of volunteer medical professionals, and assistance of the community at large. The group also raises money creatively through musical productions.

Just last month, it unveiled its latest artistic extravaganza, titled Aloha On A Mission II: Believe, at the historic Hawai‘i Theatre. Funds raised from the musical will support AMM and Aloha United Way.

The theme was about having hopes and dreams and the courage to believe in them as experienced through the lives of three local kids: Hope, Grace and Gabriel. It was penned by impresario AJ Halagao, who also was the producer and event chairman. The director and the evening’s featured star was Kristian Lei, who played Hope. The singer-actress is also the founder of Honolulu Broadway Babies, and played the lead role of Kim in Miss Saigon in Germany and Princess Nala in Festival of the Lion King in Hong Kong. Playing the role of Gabriel was Jared Ming, whose credits include the star role in The Last Five Years and Tony in West Side Story. Kathy Muneno, Emmy award-winner and former TV anchor and documentary producer, served as emcee and narrator, and playing Grace was Annie Yoshida, a teacher at Le Jardin Academy, who also served as choreographer. More than 20 cast and crew members ranging from school kids to adults from school kids to adults performed beautifully.

I’ve known the talented AJ Halagao for many years. He is an executive with Hawaiian Electric by day and his volunteer service includes finding him on the boards of the AMM and AUW.

AJ also wrote Aloha On A Mission I: Hope two years ago. His stories have been inspired by the goodness he sees in people from Hawai‘i, their giving hearts and their aloha spirit. In AJ’s latest creative piece, he exhibited a keen sense of great musical taste as he handpicked hits that the cast sang and danced to from Bruno...
Mars and Journey to movies, such as Aladdin, The Greatest Showman and The Lion King.

Kristian, meanwhile, has amassed numerous honors for her incredible abilities as an artist and contributor to our community. Kristian’s debut CD, Take My Hand, was nominated for a Nā Hōkū Hanohano Award, and she also founded a continuing education and performing arts school that benefits individuals who are developmentally and intellectually disabled.

I recall performing a duet with her for AMM’s benefit concert at Blaisdell Concert Hall back when I was mayor and was part of one of her Honolulu Broadway Babies productions. A fun fact is that she and AJ met at one of my Waipahu community events and have collaborated ever since.

Somehow, AJ managed to coax me to be a small part of his play in a surprise role. Outside of the cast, no one knew that I was actually going to appear. During intermission I changed and dressed in the role of the father, who descends from heaven to let his daughter Grace know that although they are physically apart, he is always with her through the song Remember Me from Coco. In our duet, Annie displayed her versatility as a first-rate singer.

Our islands have an exceptional cadre of talented individuals who do great work for great causes throughout the year. AJ and Kristian are just two of the exceptional folks who use their time and talents to not only entertain us, but help those in need. They serve as an inspiration and are quintessential “servant leaders.”