



New band Kioea has some familiar faces

By Christopher Hislop

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On Friday, Aug. 16, brand new band Kioea featuring Carand Burnet, Jonathan Blakeslee and Jim Rioux will play its second show ever at the Book and Bar in downtown Portsmouth.

Who is Kioea? Glad you asked. EDGE caught up with the entire band to ask that very question ...

EDGE: Let's talk about Kioea. How'd this band come together? Why'd this band come together?

Carand Burnet: Jim hosts weekly music jam sessions at his studio. This is where I was introduced to Jonathan. Last February, the three of us recorded an album for the RPM Challenge. We enjoyed playing music as a group and decided to make Kioea an ongoing project.

Jonathan Blakeslee: The three of us had played in larger spontaneous groupings in Jim's barn, but once we connected for the RPM Challenge, a unique trio voice came through, so we had to keep going.

Jim Rioux: I've been looking for a band where I can just be a drummer and improvise some, stretch out a bit. This fit the bill. Both Carand and Jonathan are amazing musicians.

EDGE: How would you describe the music to someone who hasn't heard it before? What's the elevator pitch?

Burnet: Kioea is mix of psychedelic, surf, jazz and more. There are elements of 1960s guitar reverb, deep double bass, and rhythmic beats inspired by dub.

Blakeslee: Music that takes you to another place. A soundtrack to one of your best weekends.

Rioux: It's like huffing gasoline without the harmful side effects.

EDGE: Where do you draw inspiration from? Who or what informs or informed Kioea's music?

Burnet: I appreciate music from across the globe. Lately, I've been listening to Mdou Moctar, Erkin Koray, Shin Joong-hyun, Mulatu Astatke and Gétatchèw Mèkurya. We have a shared admiration for the Texas-based band Khruangbin. While I'm drawing inspiration from these groups, I also look to surf and psychedelic music from the early 1960s.

Blakeslee: Musically I dig DJ Spooky, the Mattson 2, late John Coltrane and Miles Davis, reggae dub, world music, soundtracks and found sounds. Music with heart, soul and a pulse.

Rioux: I grew up with a jazz musician as a father. He was my first teacher. I fell in love with reggae and ska music in my teens, even had some dreadlocks back in those days, so those rhythms have always informed my playing. I listen to a lot of hip-hop, too. Mostly, though, the inspiration comes from Carand and Jonathan.

EDGE: What's the power of instrumental music? How do you shape your stories utilizing your instruments as the "voice"?

Burnet: One of my favorite bands, Dungen, sings in Swedish. I can sense the emotion they are conveying without knowing the language. I think that good instrumental music sets a mood, creates atmosphere, and connects with the listener's psyche. I remember first hearing Alice Coltrane's Journey in Satchidananda and noticing how the instruments sounded as if they were in conversation. Instrumental music can strike a deep personal meaning with the listener.

While I have been a guitarist for a long time, I feel like I am always learning when I play the guitar and that I am still finding my voice as I continue. Even though I contribute the guitar chords that communicate a particular mood, the bass' melodies and drums' pacing is what transforms the song into a soundscape.

Blakeslee: I have a deep love for instrumental music. I think that the "voice" in instrumental music (as Carand mentioned) is a musical conversation between players. Part of the conversation comes from the song itself as written, the rest

comes from the players and their individual interpretation of a song.

Rioux: It doesn't have the limitation of words. It's just vibrations--a set of bodies creating waves that affect the listener's body. Very physical. You're literally moving the water around inside of other people, making it dance, and they don't have to think so much about "meaning."

EDGE: Riffing on that further... You've all had your hand of creating music that contain the voice. Do you think about things differently or walk down a different line of musical thinking when you set out to construct instrumental songs - or does it all come from a similar space?

Burnet: When I am composing instrumental music, I consciously seek out a melody that emerges from the guitar chords. In the past, when I have written songs that include lyrics, the guitar's melody is less pronounced and embedded in the rhythm.

Blakeslee: Most of the tunes we are playing have been written by Carand and we seem to find a collective voice. In all honesty, it feels like whatever we play emerges naturally. We all have our own individual ideas and preferences, yet the power of three seems to bring out something special.

Rioux: I love the written word, but this is much more liberating and "in the moment."

EDGE: There's a bird element to the music. I read that the word "kioea" means to "stand tall." How does this sentiment work its way into the inherent makeup of the band?

Burnet: "Stand tall" is my motto, a reminder to focus on one's personal path. Kioea also comes from the name of a Hawaiian bird that went extinct in the 1800s. Little is known about this animal, allowing the band to re-imagine its life through music. Hawaii's tropical landscapes, volcanic mountains, and seascapes where the Kioea once lived are interpreted in the music. The songs are supposed to be an uplifting experience for the audience: a celebration of nature before ecosystems started rapidly changing.

Rioux: I'll be sitting for the gigs, which I like ... This was all Carand's idea, and I've fallen in love with it. I really do think of this mysterious bird when we're

playing. And I don't even have to smoke a joint, though I imagine such an activity might enhance someone's experience of the music.

EDGE: Is it nerve-wracking gearing up for a first string of performances as a band? If yes, how do you cool those nerves? If no, how do you cool those nerves?

Burnet: We've been regularly practicing, so we feel comfortable with our set. We're very much looking forward to sharing our music with the public!

Blakeslee: It is a blast playing with Carand and Jim. We look forward to sharing all our work at making interesting, instrumental music with everyone..

Rioux: A lot less so than performing as a singer-songwriter. What really cools the nerves is having great bandmates you can trust in the moment, especially when a large part of what we do is improvisational. I trust Carand and Jonathan without reservation.

EDGE: Speaking of gigs, your second gig ever (I believe) is Aug. 16 at the Book and Bar in downtown Portsmouth. What excites you about the show? What can folks expect?

Burnet: We're especially excited for this show because we will be performing a longer set. Some of the songs will extend, allowing for more prolonged guitar solos and other musical additions. Also, there is no stage, so it will be an intimate performance.

Blakeslee: We are excited to play with Sifter, an indie band of friends originally from Brooklyn, N.Y. Portsmouth Book and Bar is one of our favorite venues. Books, beer and coffee, how can you go wrong??

Rioux: Love the vibe in the Book and Bar. I can't wait to throw some sounds around that room. People should be warned that our music might create feelings of disorientation and euphoria. We're trying to hypnotize people really, and then we plan on starting a cult.

EDGE: What are you hoping folks take with them when they experience the music?

Burnet: A take-away to remember to honor the natural world and remain

dedicated to one's own personal path.

Blakeslee: I hope that some folks might leave our shows feeling uplifted and optimistic.

Rioux: A connection to something larger than themselves.

EDGE: Is there a record, or series of recordings in the works? What are the "goals" for this band?

Burnet: We are currently recording an EP at The Electric Cave. We hope to release music later this year or early next year.

Blakeslee: Yup.

EDGE: What's a book that best sums up Kioea? What's a bar beverage that should be in hand whilst flipping the pages of said book?

Burnet: "Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life" by William Finnegan and a Piña colada.

Blakeslee: "The Rincon Notebooks: Before the Storm" by Brian Unger and (a preferably cold) beer.

Rioux: "Miles: The Autobiography." Miles just talks and Quincey Troupe is his amanuensis. A scotch on the rocks.

Go & Do

What: Kioea with special guest Sifter

When: 8 p.m., Friday, Aug. 16

Where: Book and Bar, 40 Pleasant St., Portsmouth

Admission: \$5

More info: Visit www.bookandbar.com