## Living on the Earth

## Jah Kings and Sovereign Sol Society create in Crestone

by Mary Lowers

Our community continues to flower and produce creative expressions to inspire and move us through these challenging times. The Jah Kings, who have been sending out their musical message under the creative leadership of Alexander Kofi Washington since their debut album Jah Frequency came out in 1995, are in production on a new musical collection made in the shadow of our mountains, involving many community members, and honoring the Earth. When I asked Kofi if this new album had a specific message/theme he said in the title cut, a song titled "You," the message is clear.

ter. He told me that SSS "founded a grassroots movement known as the Conscious Creators Initiative

preciators, venues, and businesses who operate with integrity and humanitarian efforts at heart." The new Jah Kings release will be an example of this Conscious Creators Initiative at work.

David, who was mostly raised in Crestone, says of growing up here, "It gave me early exposure to the myriad of theologies and cultures that are represented here and allowed me to develop a deeply rooted connection to nature." As partners in birthing the latest Jah Kings compilation, Kofi and David



Music producer David Swain at the board mixing Faith for the Jah King's album at Deb photo by Titus Irizarry's "Izario" music production studio.

"You came here to help change the world, but you can't do that effectively from your couch. We all have Divine power in us and now is the time to co-create a better reality."

I visited with Kofi and his producer/manager David Swain of Sovereign Sol Society (SSS), an underground, independent record label which is David's brainchild. "I was determined to have a musical life from a young age," David said, yet it wasn't until after learning about sound production in film school that he decided to take the plunge into production. "What started as a home-baked studio in the basement of a band house in Colorado Springs has grown into a situation where we have access to professional facilities and righteous creative partnerships, in a pristine mountain setting" and David says things are just getting betare ideally suited. Kofi said, "I connected with David when I first met him. We were ceremonial brothers praying together." David who often plays bass with Kofi said, "Something profound happens when we work together. We get the sense that it's not the first time we've done this, and our respect for each other allows our diverse backgrounds to create synergy." The Jah Kings and SSS see music as part of building a sustainable community.

Kofi grew up in Gary, IN, living in the same neighborhood as the multi-talented Jackson family of Jackson 5 fame. He jokes that the Jah Kings came to the "San Luis Valley (SLV) via Gary, IN." The project formed as the Jah Kings in 1989 and in all its incarnations over the ensuing thirty years it has been known for "compelling, socially conscious, and highly dance-



Jah Kings: Kofi Washington on lead vocals and drums, Tony E. on percussion, Olajida on bass and Hunter Bogush on keys.

able funk-influenced roots reggae performances." In the band's early years the Jah Kings opened for the Four Tops and Journey among others and toured internationally. Powerful influences on Kofi's music include his training and dedication to become an Olympic-caliber high hurdler, a stint as a youth counselor, and a trip to Ghana, Africa in 2010 through the Joseph Project whose aim was to bring the African diaspora back to their homeland. Kofi told me he played music for three months in Ghana in a multitude of venues.

Kofi found his way to Crestone in 2013 playing at the Laughing Bhudda. He met his wife, inspiration, sometimes musical collaborator and love Isaline here, and with her daughters formed a family. Kofi says being here brings his music and spirit together with nature. "Reggae has lots of natural elements. It has the sense and power of nature."

Kofi became part of the Sundance community in 2009. Having performed at Wounded Knee, SD he was invited in 2009 to support Richard Foote as a Fireman, where his role was "to keep bringing the rocks into the lodge, to keep the fire going no matter what nature brings, with a male and female warrior spirit." Appropriately, Kofi's Lakota name translates to "Walks with Fire". In 2012 he was invited into the arbor to Sundance, and Isaline joined in to support the

following year to present, embraced by Crazy Horse and Black Elk's family. This new album, the first since Kofi committed to Sundancing, will rock with this energy of purifying and honoring the Earth and the creatures that walk on her. Jah Kings, Kofi says, is now more than ever "a voice for the Earth, for the unification of all people." David added, 'Jah Kings have had many opportunities to take the shortcuts, but Kofi's resolve to walk in integrity, the harder longer path, has produced a mature, timeless sound and message that marks a turning point in both his career, as well as our human history. Their time has come."

The current incarnation of the Jah Kings include a stellar group of gifted musicians. Sublime conga master and percussionist Tony E is originally from Spanish Harlem. His career took off after moving to Denver in 1997. Tony was a "fourteen year staple on the Denver music scene." Tony connected with Kofi in 2013. His sound is a distinctive part of the Jah Kings sound. Inspired by his parents, Olajida, from South Jamaica, Queens, sang for Moon Ska Records, Tommy Boy Records, and Atlantic Records. His accomplishments also include a stint in the Navy and working in film. Kofi was honored when he agreed to play with the Jah Kings. Keyboardist Hunter Bogush was

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Lift off! Jah Kings at the Crestone Music Festival.

photo by Lori Nagel

## Jah Kings

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raised in Colorado. Kofi said, "we are blessed to be in a position to support this amazing young talent." With this lineup and SSS production the new Jah Kings album, which David and Kofi say is currently slated for a Fall release, may just be the best yet.

Though there are too many to list here, Kofi and David want to acknowledge some of the Conscious Creators in our community who have empowered this musical journey. Local Renaissance woman Deb Irizarry and her music production studio right in the heart of Crestone provide a creative center for the Jah Kings. David said, "The studio is her 'field of dreams'. Deb is a musical philanthropist and patron of the arts. Her contribution of an affordable, high quality studio is invaluable." Both musician and producer agree Deb's beauty and energy contributes to the success of their recording. More information on Izario Studio can be found on their FaceBook page.

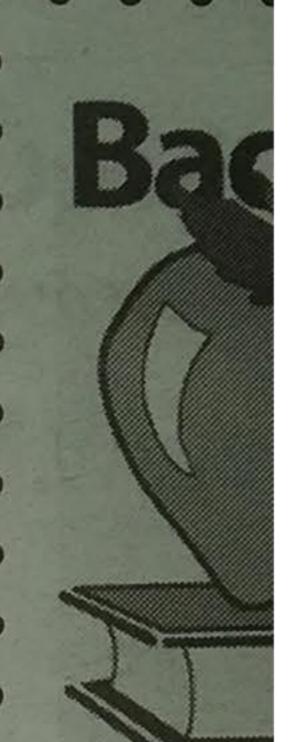
Jah Kings thank Crestonian
Juniper Ureh and his Temple of
Nature for his continuous love and
support. You can go to Temple of
Nature's FaceBook page for behind
the scenes footage of the band's recent video shoot. Local eco-activist
Chris Canaly holds a special place
in Kofi and David's hearts for her

work through the San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council to preserve and protect our environment. The video shoot could not have happened without the additional support of Pete Van Horn's equipment loan, Eric Maki's drone videography, and Sarah Winter's Dreambox Workshop animation. Kyle Grote, local yak rancher and Darren and Nicole Smith get a big shout out from the band for his help with provisions, equipment, and location with Happy Yaks. A big thank you to Alamosa/Taos Radio KRZA DJ Zara helps get the Jah Kings sound out around the SLV and northern NM. Benjamin Byer and the Cloud Station have been there for them from the venue's inception. Much love and thanks go out to Isaline Simms, Kofi's "Queen" for her support through Crestone Baca Grande Accommodations, musical accompaniment, and sheer inspiration.

The Jah Kings will be performing in Crestone at the Crestone Energy Fair September 7 and 8. I can't wait. It promises to be a high energy, inspiring performance! Kofi told me, "Concerts are a mutual baptism of all." Cloud Station entrepreneur Benjamin Byer put it well, "We are so lucky to have an artist like Kofi in our community... Jah Kings' performance is world class, family-oriented, and never fails to draw a crowd." More about the band, the new album, and all

Jah King news at their website

http://jahkings.com.



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