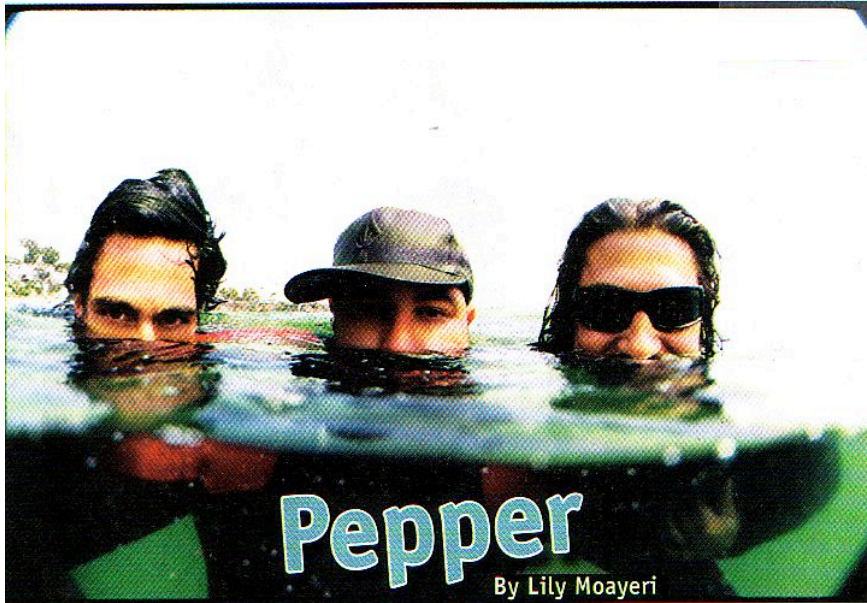


# CHORD

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## Sweet Home Hawaii

I love talking about it because we miss it every day," says Pepper's Yesod Williams of the group's home island in Hawaii. "The town's called Kona. It's on the west side of the Big Island. It's a real small place. There's no freeways or anything like that. There's a two-lane highway. It takes two and a half hours to drive around the whole thing. We knew each other for a long time before we started the band because there's only one high school, and we all went to school together. We grew up by the beach, went surfing, and to a lot of house parties. It was real mellow."

Hearing Williams' stories, one wonders how he and his fellow bandmates, Kaleo Wassman and Bret Bollinger, could leave this seemingly idyllic place for the increasingly aggravated atmosphere of Los Angeles. But according to him, after forming and exhausting their friends' ears by playing at every person's house throughout the island, they had no choice but to make the move.

In Los Angeles since 1999, Pepper still keeps true to the roots of where it's from. While its original sound was more along the lines of Bad Religion or Pennywise with a bit of ska thrown in, it's evolved into something far more laidback on the trio's fourth long-player, *No Shame*. The decided island influence is apparent with a combination of reggae and funk that rides along the occasional grinding guitar lick.

"There's a music called Jawaiian," says Williams. It's Hawaiian reggae, like Jamaican and Hawaiian mixed together. One of our biggest influences is our home. We represent the town we come from, 100 percent, every day. You can take the boy out of Hawaii, but can't take Hawaii out of the boy kind of thing."

For *No Shame*, Pepper enjoyed the involvement of a number of producers, among them 311's Nick Hexum, No Doubt's Tony Kanal, and Butthole Surfers' Paul Leary, all musicians in their own right.

"They can put themselves in your shoes very easily," says Williams. "There's no power trips or anything like that. There's just another musician in the room coming up with ideas. They know what it's like to be an artist and have a vision of something. It was a totally easygoing vibe in the studio. It was such a fun time making it. We think that shows through the music. Not to foreshadow the music or anything, but we put fun first and recording second. That, in turn, put the music to be the best it could be."

*No Shame* marks the first time Pepper is happy with an album as a whole. Having various people and studios to work in helps with the monotony of recording, particularly for a group that is so used to the dynamic of being on the road. Playing roughly 200 gigs a year, the live forum is really where Pepper shines.

To help stay connected to where they're from, the guys present the Kona Music Festival every December in their hometown. Currently in its fourth year, the idea behind the festival is to bring different types of live music to the island's inhabitants who A) don't get to see that much live music, and B) don't have the opportunity to witness some bigger name acts on a regular basis. The former intention tends to fall short, no matter how hard Pepper tries.

"People who have been living there forever, it's all the same to them," Williams says. "We didn't get MTV until 1988, just a bit behind. What may seem different to [mainland ears] seems the same to everyone that's lived there all their lives."