



Liner Notes for “Hō`ihi (Respect) Traditional Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar”

Midnight Hawaiian Serenade

D Wahine Tuning. Another early and very traditional piece using finger rolls and a unifying phrase. The melodic line is pure and simple and utilizes the practical fretting associated with wahine tunings. This is the type of playing heard many years ago when there were slack key troubadours that has disappeared in recent times. Recorded by Tommy Solomon on the 49th State Record label.

Music for Dreaming

G Taro Patch Tuning. The title describes the essence of this piece featuring a somnolent and relaxing tempo and a moderate swaying rhythm. There are unique phrasings and vamps used by William Namahoe and there is much that modern day players can incorporate by learning them. The strong alternating bass pattern and extended phrases are notable features in this selection.

Ka Ua Noe

G Taro Patch Tuning. Originally from Atta Isaacs debut album, “Two Slack Key Guitars/ A Livin’ On a Easy” with Gabby Pahinui, I first recorded this collaborative composition on my very first recording, “Classical Slack.” The two great slack key masters combined to compose this beautiful instrumental that translates to “The Misty Rain.” Of course, I had to combine the duet into a solo arrangement and incorporated a Gabby ending that he once used. Although a bit progressive, it is still “traditional” on many fronts and retains a Hawaiian identity throughout by using characteristic statements and phrasings.

So Ti

Drop C Tuning (CGDGBD). Manu Kahaialii, played in the old slack key style called “haku`iku`i” which featured a tapping technique and according to the renowned late kahuna la`au lapa`au Papa Auwae, was heard in earlier times. The style can be seen in a documentary accompanying the “Two Step” dance and although the meaning of the title is unknown and is definitely not Hawaiian in origin, this is an early form of Hawaiian guitar playing and worthy of documentation. Also unique in execution!

Hula Medley

G Taro Patch Tuning (DGDGBD). Originally a recording from the earlier period of slack key development (before 1960) and released on the 49th State Record label. This upbeat cut features great use of slides and syncopation by Mike Ho`omanawanui to swing and move this piece along. I recorded this piece on my old “beach” guitar – an old classical with “a lot of character.” A fun piece to play!

Nani Ho`omana`o

D Wahine Tuning (DADF#AC#). “Beautiful Remembrance” is one of my favored Raymond Kane pieces played in the old style with traditional techniques and a pure simplicity that breathes soul into this composition. The song features the use of finger rolls and series of additions and hammers that reflects voicings unique to this tuning. I honor the late slack key master and ambassador who left us in 2008 leaving behind a legacy of wonderful recordings. He recorded this wonderful instrumental on his album, “Punahele” released by Dancing Cat Records.

Old Timer’s Hula

G Taro Patch Tuning. A classic from the past by Tommy Solomon that I play on a dobro. There’s also an interesting story as to how I obtained it. The instrument had been found in a trashcan by a couple of my students who saw the neck sticking out while cruising. They pulled it out of the trash, then had it reconditioned and repaired on the mainland (the neck has been eaten away by termites). It was given to me as a token of their appreciation for my sharing and will always have its place in my home to remind me of their kind gesture. I use it on this album for the first time.

Pua O Kāmakahala/Honolulu Harbor

G Taro Patch Tuning. This lovely traditional slack key arrangement with great phrasing and a steady bass line by George Nainoa embodies what slack key used to sound like. One of my all time favorites and still a joy to play. There are wonderful phrases and use of syncopation to move this medley along.

Wahine Slack Key

D Wahine Tuning. This great old style composition that was recorded and played by George Keoki Davis utilizes simplistic melodic lines and avoids the use of the sixth string to add a unique timbre to the arrangement. Quite unique and memorable from the early period of slack key recordings.

Waikahe

G Taro Patch Tuning. “Waikahe” translates to “flowing” and focuses on the use of “slurs” which is the secret to achieving the characteristic smoothness commonly associated with slack key guitar playing. I composed this song since the technique is closely associated with the playing of the bass line and quite obscure to many.

Hōlau Medley

G Taro Patch Tuning. One of the first early slack key pieces that I learned from listening to the great compilation of recordings called the “History of Slack Key,” released by Dancing Cat Records. This vintage piece features a sweet bass run and melodic variations. Henry Kaalekaahi, who I had the pleasure of meeting many years ago, went on to become an accomplished steel guitarist as well.

Holomua

G Taro Patch Tuning (up to C). I composed this song to push my students onward and upwards. The title of this lively piece translates to “move forward” or to “advance.” Using a requinto, another wonderful instrument that was so kindly given to me, allows for more attack on the nylon strings and a wonderful high-pitched voice tuned up a 5th.

Mele O Nāmakelua

G Taro Patch Tuning. Learned from a “field” recording of Auntie Alice Namakelua and her students, this song was called “The Beginning of the Modern” by Namakelua and reflects her staunch concern for the dilution of the style and her admittance and acceptance to the oncoming changes – little did she know where it would end up today. Auntie, rest assured that your music still lives amongst many players including myself.

E Lili`u ē

G Taro Patch Tuning (down to F#). Tom Kaulukukui displays his prowess and depth in the traditional or old style of playing slack key. His original phrases are tasteful and respectful without the flair of contemporization. I accompany him in the background.

Moana Chimes Tribute

G Taro Patch Tuning. To honor the late masters Sonny Chillingworth and Raymond Kane, Tom Kaulukukui created this tribute featuring elements of both artists’ renditions as well as his own beautiful additions. I lend the accompaniment to Tom on rhythm guitar.

Ho`ihi (Respect)

C Maunaloa Tuning (CGEGAE). A completely improvised, spur of the moment composition featuring traditional voicings and stylings that keeps it Hawaiian. Improvisation is one of the elements of slack key guitar playing and I feel strongly that by learning from the early recordings and listening to the older players, it connects one with the music and the tradition thus making such spontaneous music possible. It comes with “respect” for those who came before and solidifies my personal commitment to perpetuate this uniquely Hawaiian style of playing the guitar.

