

## LINER NOTES

### Cindy Combs

#### SLACK KEY LADY

The music scene on Kaua'i, though not as well known as those on the bigger and more populated Hawaiian islands, has always produced more than its share of talents. Some, like Ray Kane, Andy Cummings and Bill Kaiwa, have left for the bright lights of O'ahu. Others, such as Jacob Maka, the Mahuiki family and, more recently, Na Pali, have opted to stay home in a place described in song as "*nani maoli no mai 'o a 'o*" (truly beautiful from point to point). Slack key guitarist Cindy Combs is one of the many who stay put, keeping her *ki ho'alu* style strictly Garden Isle since 1985. "I've been playing this little vegetarian restaurant, the Hanapepe Cafe, Friday nights for years," she says. "Since November 2000, Michael Barretto and I have been sharing Saturdays at the Kaua'i Coconut Beach Hotel in Wailua." And there's always lots of music at special occasions, including the wonderful private music made at home, which has always been at the heart of slack key.

Unlike other slack key artists on Dancing Cat, Cindy was not born in Hawai'i. She came with her family and has stayed by choice. Born April 20, 1953, in San Diego, she was packed up while still very young to travel the world with her parents and sister. The four globetrotters eventually settled in the Canary Islands. "Our intention was to remain," Cindy recalls, "but one day a song came on the radio. My mother started to sing along, 'Ha'ina 'ia mai ana ka puana...' and I asked her, 'How do you know the words to that song?'" It turned out that Cindy's parents and sister had lived on O'ahu before she was born. Her father was a Pearl Harbor survivor, in fact, and they were homesick for Honolulu. They returned, with Cindy this time, in 1963. "When we arrived," recalls Cindy, "my mother kissed the ground on the street by the Aloha Tower."

After a short stay in the small town of 'Ewa Beach, Cindy and her family moved to Honolulu where she attended the Royal School. Her music teacher Mrs. Beckhart inspired her to learn 'ukulele. Santa Claus noticed Cindy's interest in the instrument and surprised her on Christmas with a beautiful Martin. "I loved that thing," Cindy says. Folk music was becoming popular at that time, and Cindy latched onto it. "When I discovered Joan Baez," she says, "I borrowed a Stella guitar from a neighbor and proceeded to learn every Joan Baez song I could. By my sophomore year in high school, I had quite a repertoire including **With God on Our Side** by Bob Dylan. Hoo, lots of words to remember!"

Cindy's parents, auntie and uncle also filled the house with music. "Mom could read music and played piano and organ," she says. "Dad played by ear and could get a tune out of almost anything including the violin. He owned a wide variety of instruments, including clarinet, harmonica (chromatic) and claviata." Her older sister also played piano, and her grandmother loved to sing. It's the hymns grandmother sang that Cindy recalls with the most fondness. She would do **The Old Rugged Cross, In the Garden**, beautiful songs in her high sweet voice.

By the late 1960s, the guitar was Cindy's main instrument. "I used to love a bunch of obscure singer/songwriters," she says. "[noted Hawaiian record collector and historian] Harry B. Soria,

Jr. would scope them out, then turn me on to them. Thanks Harry!" One day, in 1971, Cindy spotted an ad in the local paper advertising slack key guitar lessons taught by Keola Beamer. "I did a double-take," Cindy says. "I could hardly believe the synchronicity of it. You know that feeling that this was meant to be. I got on the phone right away and wound up taking six lessons in six weeks."

In six weeks, Cindy learned a great deal, including the G6th and C Wahine Tunings she favors today, and six songs, all of which remain special favorites. "Those six weeks changed my life and put me on the road to where I am today," she says, "still playing, still in love with slack key." 1971 also brought graduation from high school, a semester of Hawaiian language at Leeward Community College, and the Martin guitar she still plays. "It's a 1934 0-18," she says. "I bought it at Hawai'i Guitar Piano Limited from Harry Suzuki."

Armed with a Martin guitar, slack key lessons from Keola Beamer and a deep love for local culture, Cindy was ready to become part of the Hawaiian music renaissance taking place in the early 1970s. "I could not get enough of Hawaiian music," she says. "Jerry Santos was a big influence and I love to sing along with him, any kine song, but I especially enjoy the Hawaiian ones. He sings and you're drawn in." Cindy's friendship with Jerry led her to be invited to play on *LIKE A SEABIRD IN THE WIND* (Seabird Sound), the groundbreaking first album by Olomana, Jerry's duo with Robert Beaumont. "I got to add some slack key to the song **O Malia**," she says. "They credited me as 'and a sweet touch from Cindy Combs,' which was a real thrill and an honor."

Local radio was also booming at the time, and Cindy immersed herself in the airwaves of KCCN, 1420 AM. "I was glued to that station," she recalls. "Leina'ala Haili, Myrtle K. Hilo, the Isaacs, Gabby Pahinui, Sonny Chillingworth, Marlene Sai, the Kahauanu Lake Trio, Charles K.L. Davis, Olomana, Auntie Genoa, Myra English, Sunday Manoa, Hilo Hattie, so many I cannot name them all. I learned by osmosis. I got the book, *NA MELE O HAWAI'I NEI*. I dog-eared and coffee stained several Puku'i and Elbert Hawaiian dictionaries. I dug up all those 49th State Records my mom used to dance hula to. John K. Almeida became my favorite composer. I discovered Lena Machado and Alfred Alohikea. So much beautiful music, so many wonderful words that touch the heart."

Inspired by her favorite composers, Cindy also began writing a little. Most of her songs pay tribute to Kaua'i, her home since 1985. In 1993, **Ka Nani O Koke'e** won the Kaua'i Composers Contest. Several years later, **Uluhaimalama** tied for first place in the Friends of the Royal Hawaiian Bands' Ho'okuku Mele Contest. "I can't wait to hear the band play that one," she says. For *SLACK KEY LADY*, she recorded her beautiful vocal composition **Kipu** and her evocative instrumental composition **Ke Welina**.

In return for all the inspiration she has received from radio, Cindy serves as a part-time DJ on 720 KUAJ, an AM station in 'Ele'ele, Kaua'i ([www.kuairadio.com](http://www.kuairadio.com)). "My handle is 'The 'Ukulele Lady,'" reports Cindy, "and I play my 'uke a little with my intro and after public service announcements." Since 1993, she has also helped coordinate a Hawaiian music workshop called "E Kanikapila Kakou" on Mondays from February through May. Composers and performers of Hawaiian music, including many slack key masters, come and teach songs

and share their understanding of the music.

Although she has been in the studio before, Cindy is especially proud of SLACK KEY LADY, her first Dancing Cat album. "So many talents pulling together to bring slack key to the world," relates Cindy. "My hope is that it helps bring peace to what can be a very rowdy planet." For the liner notes to this album, Cindy said she wanted to come up with a mission statement to explain her reasons for playing slack key. "The best thing I've come up with so far," she says, "is 'to brighten someone's day with music.' If I can do that, it's all good!"

## THE SONGS:

### PROGRAM 1

1. *Hi'ilawe* (instrumental)

*Tuning:* G6th (D–G–D–G–B–E, from the lowest pitched string to the highest)

A traditional love song named for the famous waterfall in the Waipi'o Valley on the Big Island of Hawai'i, **Hi'ilawe** uses nature imagery to tell of a love affair that sparked local gossip. This song is most associated with the late, great slack key guitarist Philip "Gabby" Pahinui (1921–1980), the founder of the modern era of slack key guitar. He made the first ever slack key recordings in 1946, and is the father of the great slack key guitarists Cyril Pahinui and James "Bla" Pahinui, and the great vocalist/bassist Martin Pahinui.

Cindy's unique instrumental version takes **Hi'ilawe** to a completely different place musically. While most performers stay fairly close to Gabby's classic arrangement, Cindy transforms the song into a highly personalized display of the G6th Tuning, which is one of the two tunings she uses the most. In the G6th Tuning the highest string is pitched to E, creating a unique and sweet sound. "Cindy is the person who has gone the furthest with the G6th Tuning," says George Winston. "She does things in it that other players normally do with G Major 'Taro Patch' Tuning, and beyond. Historically, she is one of the greatest slack key guitarists ever."

Cindy says Keola taught her the G6th Tuning in those six weeks of classes way back in 1971 and inspired her to play **Hi'ilawe**. "I really owe him a lot for that short time we spent together," she says. "I just hope he knows how much aloha we all have for him, and that what he shared with us students back then still lives on."

2. *Kalena Kai* (instrumental)

*Tuning:* G6th (D–G–D–G–B–E)

A *mele pana* (place song) for the island of O'ahu, **Kalena Kai** is a standard from the early 20th Century, when writers like Charles E. King created many classic Hawaiian songs. Describing the cold chill at Malamanui, lofty Mount Ka'ala, O'ahu's highest mountain, historic Ka'ena Point and other famous spots, the song remains especially popular with *leo ki'eki'e* (falsetto singers). Cindy says she can't remember how or when

she learned it. "It must have slipped in by osmosis," she jokes. "There are so many great versions. I love them all." Cindy plays beautiful soulful variations on the simple melody, expanding the song into an instrumental odyssey, one of her fortes.

3. ***Sweet Leilani*** (vocal)

*Tuning:* C Wahine ("Keola's C") (C–G–D–G–B–E)

A *mele inoa* (name song) composed by Harry Owens on October 20, 1934, **Sweet Leilani** commemorates the birth, one day earlier, of his first daughter. After being personally selected by Bing Crosby for WAIKIKI WEDDING (the same film that launched **Blue Hawai'i**), **Sweet Leilani** became, in 1938, the only Hawai'i–composed song (so far!) to receive an Academy Award for Best Song. It has been performed and recorded by countless local and international artists and helped reignite a craze in mainland America for songs about Hawai'i. (The first craze took place in the teens).

Cindy sings in a jazzy style reflective of some of her favorite singers, including Marlene Sai, and pianist Richard Kauhi and others. "I really came to appreciate this song after having a child of my own," she says. "Harry really expresses that love so well in this song." Cindy dedicates this song to her own heavenly flower, Raina Kamelenahenaheokekai.

This is the first time **Sweet Leilani** has been recorded with slack key accompaniment, and Cindy's slack key guitar brings out a sweetness that makes this arrangement beautifully unique. She plays in a C Wahine tuning, a tuning that contains a major 7th chord or, as in this case, the major 7th note, here the B note on the second highest pitched string. (This tuning is only one note different from the G6th tuning, with the lowest pitched sixth string tuned down to C.) This particular Wahine Tuning is often called Keola's C because it has been most prominently recorded in by Keola Beamer.

4. ***Roselani Blossoms*** (instrumental)

*Tuning:* C Wahine (C–G–D–G–B–E)

A favorite of many singers, including Cindy's friend and fellow Kaua'i DJ, Manulele Clarke, Johnny Almeida's **Roselani Blossoms** celebrates a lei and deep affectionate love on Maui. "The great group Kaimana's version, with slack key guitarist and vocalist Haunani Apoliona, bassist Aaron Mahi [now leader of the Royal Hawaiian Band], vocalist and composer Haunani Bernardino and slack key guitarist Eldon Akamine inspired me for this one," Cindy says. "Also I wanted to do at least one of the many great Almeida songs." To ornament the melody, she uses beautiful sixth intervals waving down, inspired by Gabby Pahinui's use of them for his Mexican–inspired version of the Hawaiian standard **Lei Nani** on his 1972 album GABBY ("The Brown Album") on Panini Records.

5. ***Kipu*** (vocal)

*Tuning:* C Wahine (C–G–D–G–B–E)

A beautiful and evocative original composition by Cindy, **Kipu** evokes the beautiful Kaua'i ranch where Cindy used to live. "I'd like to dedicate it to Anuheia Springwater Kanoho," she says. "He always encouraged me to play and he gave me my first mokihana lei. The song always reminds me of the morning when we used to walk up the road with the scent and sound of the Norfolk Pines." Her use of the guitar to play the same notes as the vocal (C, B and C) at the ends of the verses is particularly haunting, as are her instrumental solos, as well as her use of the double E notes, which she plays by fretting the next to highest pitched second string (B note) on the fifth fret and playing the open (unfretted) highest pitched first string (E note) simultaneously or right after it.

*He nani ka home o Kipu, la.*

*I ka ua noe,*

*Ka ala a la'au paina, la,*

*Kilakila i ka malie. Kilakila i ka malie.*

*He 'olu'olu na kupa o Kipu, la.*

*Ua ma'a wale i ka lima hana.*

*Ko uka ho'alohaloha, la.*

*Aloha ia no lakou. Aloha ia no lakou.*

*A he nani na manu o Kipu,*

*Me na mele nahenahe,*

*He u'i lakou i loko lele, la,*

*Lelelele apo Hule'ia ana. Lelelele apo Hule'ia ana.*

*Ha'ina 'ia mai ana ka puana, la,*

*O ka home nani o Kipu,*

*Me na mino'aka o na kupa, la,*

*He nanea mai ho'i kau. He nanea mai ho'i kau.*

Beautiful is the home of Kipu.

In the misty rain,

The road lined with pine trees...

Majestic in the calm.

The folks of Kipu are very gracious.

Always hardworking.

The upland folks are friendly.

My aloha goes out to them.

And the birds are beautiful,

With their sweet soft songs.

They are lovely in gliding flight,

Fluttering and flying around Hule'ia.

That's the song about

The beautiful Kipu home

With the smiles of the people,

So fascinating!

6. *(The old name for Hule'ia was Hula'ia - Kamapua'a ravished Pele there!)*  
© Cindy Combs 1976

7. **Ke Welina** (instrumental)

*Tuning: Open D Major (D–A–D–F#–A–D)*

Another beautiful Cindy original, **Ke Welina** inspired by her home in Kalaheo, around 1997, where the wind blew through the bamboo, creating a speaking sound that seemed, Cindy observed, to offer the welcome that never ends. "There's a touch of bittersweet in there too," she says, "Since after every hello there's always, at some point, the illusion of goodbye."

Cindy says she created the melody during her earliest explorations of the D Major Tuning, which, since the 1880s, has been used much more often in Mainland America than in Hawai'i, although, since the mid-1990s, it has been used prominently by the great slack key guitarist Cyril Pahinui. The great composer and slack key guitarist Dennis Kamakahi has also used this tuning, though less often, since the 1970s.

## PART 2

8. ***Makani 'Ula'ula*** (instrumental)  
*Tuning: G6th (D-G-D-G-B-E)*

An evocative instrumental composed by Keola Beamer, **Makani 'Ula'ula** describes the red wind caused when the volcanic ash is blown on the Big Island of Hawai'i. "It's another one of the six songs Keola taught us back in 1971," Cindy says. "Here I am still loving it and still learning how to play it a little better than I used to thirty years ago." This song often employs the "Portuguese bass," popularized by the late, great slack key guitarist Sonny Chillingworth, and often used by slack key guitarist/composer Dennis Kamakahi. The low bass note is played by the thumb on the fifth or sixth string on the first beat of the measure and the fourth string is played with the thumb on the beats "two and" and four.

Notice the whimsical slowing down to a stop after the fourth verse. Cindy again plays the same note on two different strings as in **Kipu** (song #5) and at the end of **Whispering Hope** (song #12). Sometimes she plays the second string B note with or just after the third string G note which is fretted on the fourth fret to produce a second B note; sometimes she plays the third string G note with or just after the fourth string D note fretted on the fifth fret; and, in Cindy's added section, she does the same thing with the first string E note and the second string B note fretted to the fifth fret to yield an E note.

9. ***Ku'u Home O Kahalu'u*** (vocal)  
*Tuning: C Wahine (C-G-D-G-B-E)*

One of the great songs of the 1970s, **Ku'u Home O Kahalu'u** eloquently addresses the conflicting attitudes toward change and memory at the heart of traditional culture. Like many of the most successful pop songs, it is at once both candidly personal and strikingly universal. Cindy's friend Jerry Santos wrote it and first recorded it with the late Robert Beaumont as the popular duo Olomana on their 1976 album **LIKE A SEABIRD IN THE WIND** (Seabird Sound). As reflected by the song, the group Olomana has always been involved in deep community issues, combining political, social and artistic ideals of the highest order. "I've been in love with this song since the first time I heard Jerry sing it," says Cindy. "For the album I was trying to create an arrangement in C Tuning and just couldn't get what I felt it needed. Something seemed to be missing and I was getting kind of frustrated. Then, driving into the studio the next day, the Olomana recording came on the radio and that did it. Hallelujah, it was like a

sign and after that, things just flowed." The Hawaiian word *'o'opu* refers to Gobi fishes, Ko'olau refers to the Ko'olau Range on O'ahu; and the last phrase of each chorus (and the song title) "*Me ke aloha ku'u home o Kahalu'u*" means "Love for my home, Kahalu'u." Cindy dedicates her version *me ke aloha pumehana* (with warm aloha) to Jerry.

10. ***Kaulana Na Pua*** (vocal)

*Tuning:* C Wahine (C–G–D–G–B–E), played in the key of G

Written by Ellen Keho'ohiwaokalani Prendergast in 1893, ***Kaulana Na Pua*** protests the overthrow that year of Queen Lili'uokalani by the American forces and businessmen who created the Republic of Hawai'i for their own selfish (and illegal) purposes. A formal apology was finally made by the American president in 1993. Blending traditional Hawaiian poetics, an open call to resist annexation and a stirring melody, the song quickly became a rallying cry for the Queen's supporters. Its popularity was spread throughout the Islands and beyond, especially by the Hawaiian National Band, a brass band under the direction of José Libornio. Formed by members of the Royal Hawaiian Band who refused to sign loyalty oaths to the new regime, the group performed at rallies, fund raisers and even toured the Mainland, offering musical testimony of support for the deposed monarchy. This *mele ku'e* (song of resistance) continues to resonate with supporters of Hawaiian sovereignty more than a century later. "It's another one Keola shared with us thirty years back," Cindy recalls. "It really hit home then and still does now." It is the ultimate Hawaiian blues and lament. Cindy adds a beautiful section of her own at the end, turning her arrangement into another extended odyssey piece.

11. ***Wahine 'Ilikea*** (instrumental)

*Tuning:* C Wahine (C–G–D–G–B–E)

Composed by the great and prolific composer and slack key master Dennis Kamakahi, ***Wahine 'Ilikea*** describes eleven waterfalls veiled by mist at Kamakou, a mountain on the island of Moloka'i. Dennis recorded it on his album PUA'ENA - "GLOW BRIGHTLY" (Dancing Cat) in the C Mauna Loa Tuning (C–G–E–G–A–E). Cindy performs it in her C Wahine Tuning in an unique instrumental version that attempts to capture the song's beautiful images without using the words. "Normally I sing it at gigs," she says, "but hearing it this way I hope people will notice what a pretty melody it is." Cindy says the first time she tried recording this song, she almost stopped in the first eight bars. "I'd just started rolling when in walks Dennis, unannounced. Talk about pressure."

12. ***Sweet Memory*** (vocal)

*Tuning:* C Wahine (C–G–D–G–B–E)

In the late 1970s, Cyril Pahinui, Brian Hussey and Larry Lindsey Kimura composed this gentle reverie. Full of timeless warm feelings and the modern, jazz-influenced harmonies pioneered by Kui Lee in the 1960s, ***Sweet Memory*** debuted, with vocals by

Cyril, on the 1978 album THE SANDWICH ISLE BAND (Seabird Sound). It has since gone on to find favor with many local musicians, especially late in the evening when thoughts blow softly back to times gone by.

<i>I ke Kaiaulu</i>	When the Kaiaulu breeze
<i>A pa ahe mai</i>	Blows softly
<i>He leo nahe ia</i>	It's gentle voice
<i>He haliu nou iho</i>	Bids you to listen
<i>E ho'i mai 'oe</i>	Return to me
<i>E ia nei</i>	Darling
<i>Ku'u Sweet Memory</i>	My sweet memory
<i>O 'oe</i>	You
<i>Ku'u moemoea</i>	Are my dream
<i>He hali'a</i>	A longing
<i>Ina wa apau</i>	All of the time
<i>He ha'upu nui</i>	A special memory
<i>E ho'i mai 'oe</i>	Come back
<i>E ia nei</i>	Darling
<i>I o'u nei.</i>	Here to me

*There are days that I dream you'll be mine all of the time,  
How I wish you were here, so very near to me because I love you.*

13.

Translation by Larry Kimura  
Consultation by Kimo Alama Keaulana

14. **Whispering Hope (Soft as the Voice of an Angel)** (instrumental)

*Tuning:* G6th (D–G–D–G–B–E)

**Whispering Hope** reflects Cindy's precious memories of family singing. Subtitled **Soft as the Voice of an Angel**, this durable old hymn was composed by Alice Hawthorne. "It goes back to my mother and grandmother," Cindy says. "It's for them. When my mom was sick and dying, that's when I learned it and started to play it for her." Note the haunting ending where Cindy plays the B notes on the unfretted second string and frets the third string (tuned to a G note) at the fourth fret to produce a second B note.

Liner notes by J.W. Junker and George Winston

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Liner notes edited by Corrina Burnley  
Hawaiian language consultant: Frances Frazier

*Aloha e na ko 'oukou kokua apau* (Aloha for all your help)...Keola Beamer, Jerry Santos, Harry B. Soria, Jr., Mitchell Yanagida, Robert Beaumont, Wayne Jacintho, George Winston, Howard Johnston, Porter Miller, Liko Martin, Dave Millington, Joanie Komatsu, Cindy Powell, Jay Junker, Hella Kihm, Nathan Kalama and The Kaua'i Mokihana Festival ([www.kauai.net/mokihana](http://www.kauai.net/mokihana), email [KMFKauai@webtv.net](mailto:KMFKauai@webtv.net)), Walter & Marie Bengston, & the Waimea Foreign Church...and...the new singing sensation... "THE SPARROWS." *Mahalo nui* to everyone at Dancing Cat, RCA, Windham Hill, BMG and BMI.

*Aloha mae 'ole a Mom & Dad*, Phillip John Watts, Ry and Rain (You da bes!), Kenny Wilson, Steve "BB" Choi, Berry Andelin, Keith Boutte, the Akamines, the Regos, the Barretts, the Raimondis, and the Parkers, and Linda Kohler. The Hanapēpē Cafe (808-335-5011)! KUAI, KKCR, Ka Nalu...24/7 Surf...& all the stations playing music and all the people listening. (Aloha to Aloha Joe!). Special thanks to Auntie Rita and Nancy Dawson (Good eye girl!) for helping me and Wayne Jacintho with the shoot. Yo Ernie... Wassup? \* *Mahalo nui loa a me ke aloha pumehana. Ke akua pu!* (Thank you very much and my warm aloha. Together with God.) —Cindy

\*da antennas?

This recording is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Alice Fern Miles Combs, "Miss Alice" (in her Alice blue gown) 11/13/21 to 6/20/99.

## **SEEING AND HEARING CINDY**

Cindy plays regularly at the Hanapepe Cafe in Hanapepe on the island of Kaua'i (808-335-5011) and on Saturdays from 7 to 10 PM at the Kaua'i Coconut Beach Hotel. (Please call ahead to make sure dates and times have not changed.)

She broadcasts as "The 'Ukulele Lady," with many different musician guests from around the Islands, on 720 KUAI in 'Ele'ele, Kaua'i on Wednesday through Friday from 9 AM to 2 PM. For more information, see KUAI's website at [www.kuairadio.com](http://www.kuairadio.com) or email the station at [kuai@hawaiian.net](mailto:kuai@hawaiian.net).

For more information about Cindy, her recordings and her tour schedule, see her website at [www.slackkeylady.com](http://www.slackkeylady.com).

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