

Cyril Pahinui

6 & 12 String Slack Key

Cyril Pahinui was born April 21, 1950, second to last of ten children of Charles Philip "Pops" Gabby Pahinui, who remains one of the most popular and best loved figures in Hawaiian music. With both a distinctive touch of his own and a solid grounding in his father's style, Cyril continues to proudly maintain his family's celebrate association with *ki ho'alu* (Hawaiian slack key guitar).

Cyril grew up in Waimanalo on the windward side of O'ahu. As he recalls, "We often had backyard parties with Pops and Ma, my brothers, sisters, aunties, uncles and many friends like Leleand "Atta" Isaacs and Sonny Chillingworth. Music played to the wee hours of the morning." By the age of seven, Cyril began picking up guitar and 'ukulele. "I used to watch my dad, Atta, Sonny and my brothers when they would jam," he says. "They were so awesome you didn't want to miss anything. You didn't even want to blink your eyes!"

In traditional Hawaiian fashion, Cyril learned by watching, listening and doing. Instruction came by example and direct experience rather than role drill. "Daddy never pointed at our fingers or grabbed them," Cyril says. "If you missed the chord, you missed it but the next time you'd get it. You could ask him, 'Daddy, how was that?' and he'd always take the time to listen. Music was so important to him. It was his life."

Cyril began playing at Honey's Tavern in Kane'ohe and other local nightspots at around the age of twelve. Soon Pops began asking him to sit in with his group on bass or rhythm guitar. Throughout his teenage years, Cyril performed with his father, Atta Isaacs, Sonny Chillingworth and other slack key masters. "If it weren't for them," Cyril says, "I wouldn't be here today. They were the ones that showed all of us young ones the way."

In 1970 Cyril left Hawai'i for a tour of duty with the U.S. Army. On his return to Hawai'i in 1971, he resumed playing with his father, who was at the peak of his popularity. As part of a wide ranging renaissance in traditional culture, an entire new generation of local musicians had taken up *ki ho'alu*, elevating Gabby, Atta, Sonny, Auntie Alice Namakelua, Leonard Kwan, Fred Punahoa, Raymond Kane and others to the status of folk heroes and role models. With older brothers Bla and Philip and younger brother Martin, plus Atta, Sonny and Joe Gang Kupahu, Cyril performed on Gabby's five groundbreaking albums for the Panini label, providing many of the distinctive, improvised introductions for the songs. He also was a founding member of the legendary trio, Sunday Manoa, and contributed to Palani Vaughan's project chronicling King David Kalakaua's music and times.

In the mid-1970s Cyril formed the Sandwich Isle Band, which featured steel guitar and many jazz-inflected songs of the 1920s and 1930s. Next he joined Peter Moon's band, which performed a diverse spectrum of music. After that Cyril maintained a low profile for a few years, expanding his playing in the C major tuning he learned from Atta Isaacs, until around 1988 when he again recorded.

The self-titled album of traditional and original compositions won him Na Hoku Hanohano Awards for Best Contemporary Hawaiian Album and Best Male Vocalist from the Hawai'i Academy of Recording Arts. Cyril returned to live performing, both under his own name and in support of others, such as Teresa Bright, Diana Aki, the Brothers Cazimero and *kumu hula* (hula teachers) Frank Hewett.

With his brothers Bla and Martin, as well as Ry Cooder, David Lindley and others, Cyril contributed to a long-awaited, critically acclaimed Pahinui Brothers album in 1992. Presently he continues to tour; solo, with his own trio and with other slack key guitarists, such as Led Kaapana. The recordings on this release showcase Cyril's rarely heard talents as a soloist. While refreshingly individualistic, the material clearly reflects the training, advice and love Cyril's father bestowed upon him. As the old proverb puts it, *He keiki mea makua* (It shows that the child has a parent).

ABOUT THE SONGS

Set One

1. ***Panini Pua Kea*** (instrumental)

Closely identified with Gabby, this favorite attributed to mandolinist, composer and bandleader Johnny Almeida describes the effects on the heart of tasting the honey of a white cactus flower. Cyril plays it in the C Major tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E, from the lowest pitched string to the highest) on a 12 string Martin. He enjoys both 6 and 12 string, and plays basically the same on both instruments. " I like the 12 string for the octaves," he says. " The 12 string was my dad's favorite. He did more magic on it." Like jazz musicians, many *ki ho'alu* players like to quote from other songs when they notice a similarity in melody or structure. " In this recording," Cyril says, " I added some licks from *Hame Pila*. The two are pretty close in melody, it's just going back and forth with a lot of triple plucking and single plucking. Just go with the flow."

2. ***Moani Ke 'Ala*** (vocal)

Traditionally, the *ali'i* (royalty) have played an active role in Hawaiian music and dance. Like his three royal siblings, Princess Likelike, King David Kalakaua and Queen Lili'uokalani, Prince William Leleiohoku (1854-1877) created many songs still popular today. In *Moani Ke 'Ala*, he poetically compares a desirable but elusive companion to the famous Pu'ulena wind of Kona.

Cyril plays this well-known flirtation song on the 12 string in C Major tuning, often muting the strings with his right hand to create his trademark powerful percussive sound and rhythm, with spontaneous lead phrases flying out of the guitar in between the rhythms and the bass lines. He learned the song by ear from his father. Perhaps because Hawaiian culture has always placed a high value on oral tradition, many anecdotes circulate about Hawaiian musicians' ability to remember melodies and to distinguish between minute degrees of pitch. "My dad had such a good ear," Cyril says. "We would be playing, he would stop the music and point to a person, tell him, 'Tune that second string.'"

3. **Marketplace** (instrumental)

This composition by Cyril originated in the recording studio in San Francisco, off Market. Recorded here on the 12 string in his D tuning (D-A-D-F#-B-E), Cyril has also recorded it in the G Major tuning on the 6 string. I always remember what my daddy used to tell me, 'No get lazy, Son. When you're playing your music, you should always try to find something new to say. If you look, you can always change the melody line a little or add some coloring.' Thanks to my dad, I can always keep adding things and it's comfortable for me."

4. **Ipo Lei Manu** (vocal)

An achingly beautiful love song by Queen Kapi'olani, *Ipo Lei Manu* (also known as *He Mana'o He Aloha*) compares her husband King David Kalakaua to the 'iwi bird, whose delicately beautiful feathers were used for the highly prized 'ahu 'ula (feather apes). This evocative air grows all the more poignant with the realization that King Kalakaua is described in the final verse as *hele loa* (gone forever). He died on January 20, 1891, in San Francisco during an official visit.

"My dad recorded this," Cyril points out. "Palani Vaughan did a nice version too. They both inspired me." While this beautiful song is performed extensively, this is the first time it has been recorded as a solo. "It was hard at first for me," Cyril admits. "I'm not so used to that. I usually play with a bass and rhythm guitar player, steel player." Tuning: C Major on the 12 string.

5. **Young Street Blues** (instrumental)

Played on the 6 string Martin, this is another piece created by Cyril in the recording studio on Young Street in Honolulu in 1991. "We were in the studio doing some recording," Cyril recalls, "and I came up with a melody then and there. I started adding things and going on and on with it. Melodies are my thing. I like to try out different picking styles and different tunings and try to play like an orchestra adding variations, harmonies and things." Tuning: G Major (Taro Patch) (D-G-D-G-B-D), a very popular tuning among slack key guitarists occasionally used by Cyril.

6. **Noenoe** (instrumental)

Cyril learned this popular waltz medley by watching his dad and Sonny Chillingworth play it at parties. Cyril remembers it especially for the way it made people sit still and pay attention. "Back then," he says, "they never used microphones or amps, so everybody would listen more closely to what they were playing."

Noenoe, also known as *Ua Kea O Hana*, is attributed to Edward Pu'ukena and was written when the waltz was a very fashionable foreign import to Hawai'i. It describes the gray fog (*noenoe*) of East Maui and the famous white rain of Hana (*uakea*), perhaps using *kaona* (layered meaning) to describe people the composer knew.

Remember, Be Sure and Be There, attributed to J. Elia and Charles A.K. Hopkins, is included, as it almost always is when Hawaiians play *Noenoe*. This *mele* (song) describes the Moa'ula waterfall in Halawa Valley on Moloka'i, and explicitly centers on romance, as someone special is asked to do what the title says. Many lovely vocal renditions of this medley have been recorded. In this instrumental version, Cyril's high phrasing on the top two pitched strings is reminiscent of his

dad, and the jazz-type chord progressions at the beginning and the end and between some of the verses are reminiscent of the late Atta Isaacs, one of Cyril's main influences. Cyril plays this on the 12 string guitar in a C Mauna Loa tuning (C-G-E-G-A-E) Gabby often used.

Mauna Loa tunings are based on a major chord with the top two (thinnest) strings tuned a 5th interval apart. These two strings can then be played in 6th intervals (as the 1st and thicker 3rd string usually are in several tunings), producing the recognizably sweet Mauna Loa sound. The top two strings can also be "frailed" (strummed) rapidly with the index finger, producing another characteristic sound of this tuning.

7. ***Ka Makani Ka'ili Aloha*** (vocal)

This very *nahenahe* (gentle) song attributed to Matthew Kane communicates the feelings of a heartbroken husband whose wife has left him. The title tells us she's been taken away by the wind. A *kahuna* (medicine man) gave the heartbroken husband a potion which he threw into the sea at a place where his wife often fished, and she later returned to him. The title phrase also names a popular quilt pattern, like the song, originally from Maui.

Although many people perform *Ka Makani Ka'ili Aloha*, it invariably reminds Cyril of Kui Lee (1932-66), the influential composer, dancer and singer who recorded it near the end of his life when he was battling cancer. "I was still in high school when I heard it," Cyril says, "and to me he sang it like he was leaving and never coming back, like he put everything he had into it." Cyril adds his own special touches to the song. "I sustain the words," he says, "and try to delay my chord changes a little to make the mood linger. When I'm singing, my voice can go one way and my guitar another." Cyril plays it here in C Major tuning on the 12 string.

Set Two

8. ***Moloka'i-nui-a-Hina*** (instrumental)

Mele pana (songs of place) retain a special place in the hearts and repertoires of many Hawaiian musicians. Cyril's version of this well-known tribute to Moloka'i expresses for him the good times and excellent treatment he has always received on the friendly island. Recorded here in D tuning on the 12 string, *Moloka'i-nui-a-Hina* exemplifies the march tradition, which has been a part of Hawaiian music since the 1830s when a brass band, The Royal Hawaiian Band, was created by Kamehameha III. "The way I started this version," Cyril says, "it was like a banjo." Like *Ka Makani Ka'ili Aloha*, this well-known, frequently recorded composition is popularly attributed to Matthew Kane.

9. ***Hilo E*** (vocal)

Sometimes attributed to Mary Heanu, this *mele pana* takes us to the east side of the Big Island, paying special attention to Waiakea and Pana'ewa. It also reminds us that at Hilo you find the lehua blossom, which residents often string into a lei for visitors. "I love Hilo," Cyril says. "I did 'Hilo E' with my dad in mind." Tuning: C Major on the 12 string.

10. **Hanauma Bay** (instrumental)

By the beloved Hawaiian language and music scholar Mary Kawena Pukui, and her frequent musical collaborator, Maddy Lam, this *mele pana* is for one of O'ahu's most beautiful scenic areas. It praises the peaceful bay under encircling cliffs, the white surf on brilliant blue water, the shade under dancing kiawe branches and the sand that contains green crystals. "I used to do it back in the 1970s," Cyril says, "with a group called Mauna Loa. It's always so nice to hear the old ones." His powerful 12 string version in the C Major tuning represents the first time it has been recorded as an instrumental.

11. **Lei 'Ohu** (vocal)

Meaning "adorned with a lei," this George Akiu composition takes us to the Big Island, Maui, O'ahu and Kaua'i. We receive, in turn, leis of lehua (representing the Big Island), roselani (Maui), 'ilima (O'ahu) and mokihana (Kaua'i). "My dad did this one on 'the brown album' (GABBY - Panini 1002)," Cyril says. "My version is a little different than his. Because I'm all by myself, I have to play the rhythm and melody parts on one guitar. Also my voice sounds kind of husky." Cyril plays "Lei 'Ohu" on the 12 string in C Major tuning, slacked down to the key of A.

12. **No Ke Ano Ahiahi** (vocal)

Mele inoa (name chants/songs) comprise a large and honored part of popular Hawaiian music. Composed as gifts, *mele inoa* become the property of the person for whom they have been written. He or she acquires the *mana* (power) in the sounded words and may then pass it down within the *'ohana* (family) as a treasured, often closely guarded heirloom. While in traditional Hawaiian culture everyone received at least one *mele inoa*, *ali'i* (royalty) frequently received many. This traditional *mele inoa* honors King William Lunalilo (1835-1874) and describes the bittersweet moments of recollection before a trip to mainland America. It is a very evocative and haunting chant celebrating the evening hours. The song was rediscovered by the great 'ukulele player and documentarian, Eddie Kamae.

"When Daddy recorded it with Eddie Kamae and the Sons of Hawai'i (Panini Records 1001)," Cyril says, "it was uptempo. When we did it as the Gabby Band (Panini Records 1008), it was slow. So here I decided to do it medium tempo." Cyril plays this beautiful piece in C Major tuning on the 12 string.

13. **Lullaby for Pops** (instrumental)

In D tuning on the 6 string, this beautifully conceived and rendered original by Cyril developed over two sessions three years apart. "To me all my music, whatever I'm doing, it's Pops and me. I feel his presence."

Notes written by Jay W. Junker and George Winston.

Cyril Pahinui's Tunings:

On this album:

C Major (C-G-E-G-C-E) - all songs except the ones indicated below.

C Mauna Loa (C-G-E-G-A-E) - top two pitched strings tuned a 5th interval apart for *Noenoe*.

D tuning (D-A-D-F#-B-E) - also known as "Ni'ihau" or "Old Mauna Loa" Tuning for *Marketplace*, *Moloka'i-nui-a-Hina* and *Lullaby for Pops*.

G Major "Taro Patch" Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D) for *Young Street Blues*.

Other Tunings:

G Wahine (D-G-D-F#-B-D)

C Wahine (C-G-D-G-B-D)

Produced by George Winston.

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