

LINER NOTES

Cyril Pahinui

NIGHT MOON PO MAHINA

Cyril Lani Pahinui was born April 21, 1950. He grew up in the small town of Waimanalo at the foot of the Ko 'olau Mountains on O'ahu's Windward coast. His father, the late Philip "Gabby" Pahinui (1921–1980), was Hawai 'i's best known and most influential slack key guitarist, famous for his beautiful and innovative guitar playing, his soulful vocals and falsetto, and his charismatic personality. The Pahinui home and backyard provided food, shelter, rehearsal space, concert hall and playground for many of Hawai 'i's foremost traditional musicians, including slack key masters Leland "Atta" Isaacs and Sonny Chillingworth, 'ukulele virtuoso Eddie Kamae, and many more. The jam sessions went on all day, sometimes all week. Neighbors came, tour bus drivers, even the police, but the music rolled on. It was an incredible experience and made a lasting impression on all the participants. It was especially inspiring for the young, aspiring players, many of whom went on to become today's leading slack key masters. Cyril counts himself among those inspired by his legendary father and his father's legendary friends. "All my music comes from my dad, Atta and Sonny," Cyril says. "If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be here. They were the ones who showed all of us young ones the way."

Cyril got started along the slack key path around the age of seven. His father offered encouragement, but mostly Cyril learned, in the traditional way, by observing. "I used to watch my dad, Atta and Sonny 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 slack key fashion, Cyril also learned from direct experience. From the very beginning, he was allowed to join the jam sessions, even to *pa'ani* (solo). "Daddy would say 'take one' and you would just go for it. No shame, just do what you could do. It was the best training, you learned all kinds of songs and styles." This method also sharpened listening skills, which were crucially important since everyone played by ear. "My dad had such a good ear," Cyril says, "nine of us would be playing and he would stop the music and point to a person, tell him, 'Tune that second string!'"

Though he strongly encouraged his children to play music, Pops avoided telling them what or how to play. "Daddy never pointed at our fingers or grabbed them," he says. "If you missed a 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 to you. He always encouraged us to play and when he liked what you were doing, he'd light up. Music was so important to him. It was his life and he was happy to share it with us."

Cyril began getting a few gigs in Windward area clubs around the age of twelve. By fifteen he occasionally sat in with his father's group in Waikiki. In 1968, Cyril made his first record with Palani Vaughan and The Sunday Manoa, a loose association of like-minded young people (including Peter Moon, Albert Kalima and Bla Pahinui) intent on helping perpetuate the classic sound of Gabby, Eddie Kamae, Aunty Genoa Keawe and other *kupuna* (elders). Two years in the army interrupted Cyril's performing in Hawai 'i, but when he returned to the Islands, his father was at the peak of his popularity. The all-star group affectionately known as The Gabby Band

was getting started and Cyril joined his father, brothers Bla, Phillip and Martin, upright string bass player Joe Gang Kupahu, and slack key legends Atta Isaacs and Sonny Chillingworth. Cyril played on all five of Gabby's groundbreaking albums on the Panini label, providing some of the distinctive, improvised introductions for the songs, and some noteworthy solos as well. He also joined Palani Vaughan's multi-album recording project chronicling King David Kalakaua's music and times.

In 1975, Cyril joined The Sandwich Isle Band, one of the first young bands to feature steel guitar and revive some of the older jazz-inflected songs. In 1979 he joined The Peter Moon Band, which also included his brother Martin, for four albums. Throughout the 1980s he gigged with steel player Greg Sardinha, his brother Bla and others, and continued to expand his musical horizons, especially in the C Major tuning he learned from Atta Isaacs.

In 1988, after many promptings, Cyril recorded a self-titled album of traditional and contemporary songs, which won Na Hoku Hanohano Awards for Best Contemporary Hawaiian Album and Best Male Vocalist from the Hawai 'i Academy of Recording Arts. In 1992 he joined brothers Bla and Martin for a long-awaited Pahinui Brothers album. The album reunited the brothers with former Gabby Band guest star Ry Cooder and gave them a chance to play with several other top Mainland players. Cyril also began recording for Dancing Cat as a solo performer. "It took time to adjust to playing solo. No rhythm, no bass and you've got to handle all the *pa'ani* (solos) yourself! But I'm very, very thankful for this chance to share slack key in this way."

Cyril has taken his unique brand of slack key and heartfelt vocals to Japan, Europe, and across the Mainland several times. "I'm happy that *ki ho'alu* is reaching the other end and that the people around the world are enjoying what we do. I enjoy all of them. I like to share whatever I can."

His debut release on Dancing Cat, 6 & 12 STRING SLACK KEY, won the 1994 Na Hoku Hanohano Award for Instrumental Album of the Year. It featured ten standards and three original compositions, some featuring his warm, leo nahenahe (gentle voice), all firmly in the Pahinui family tradition. For Dancing Cat, Cyril especially enjoys performing the same song in as many different tunings, style and tempos as possible. "I like to surprise 'em," Cyril says. "There's so many ways to play a song, it all depends on how you feel or what tuning you're in, or even who else is in the room. Some songs, there's five different takes, each one completely different."

On PO MAHINA, the emphasis, again, is on standards; especially songs Cyril learned from his father. "I tell you, all those old songs my dad did still have a lot of meaning for me and always will. I've been hearing them all my life. They're the first music I ever heard and I can listen to them again and again. I never get tired of hearing them or playing them. They're the songs that touch me the most."

ABOUT THE SONGS

SET ONE

1. ***Kowali*** (instrumental)

The title of this traditional slack key melody is a variant spelling of *koali* (Morning Glory). Cyril learned it from his dad and Atta Isaacs, who often performed duets together. He plays the song in a tuning that was created by Atta Isaacs, and that has become known as "Atta's C": C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E from the lowest-pitched string to the highest) slacked down to the key of Bb on a 12 string. Cyril likes to use the 12 string for its added resonance and tone. "My dad also liked the 12 string. They're harder to keep in tune and to solo on, but they've got a lot of power."

2. ***Po Mahina*** (vocal)

Po Mahina, by Charles E. King, describes and evokes the power of the bright, Hawaiian moon in the dark Pacific sky. It's one of Cyril's signature pieces. He's been playing it for years and enjoys doing it in a variety of tunings and styles, especially with a strong Latin feeling. He recorded it for this album both as an instrumental and a vocal in two different tuning and arrangements.

This first version is a vocal, accompanied by 12 string in C Major Tuning slacked down to A. Although this take leaves room for *pa'ani* (instrumental breaks), Cyril also enjoys playing the song in the *mele hula* style. An older and exclusively logogenic (word-based) tradition, *mele hula* uses choreography to visually express the text, which is chanted or sung by a *ho'opa'a* (hula musician). Cyril often assumes the role of *ho'opa'a* and says he was especially proud when *kumu hula* (hula teacher) Aloha Deleary called to ask if her *halau* (hula school) could perform his rendition of *Po Mahina*. "Some people thought it was too fast a tempo for hula," Cyril says, "but I had a dream about that." He adds that he likes dancers to feel free to play off of his music and to engage him in a dialog. Though keeping the movements tied to the words is, of course, an essential element of *mele hula*, there remains some latitude for creative artistic expression.

3. ***Hurrah Lani Ha'a Ha'a*** (vocal)

Most memorably recorded on GABBY PAHINUI WITH THE SONS OF HAWAII (Hula 503), this vintage march-type piece celebrates three famous things on Maui: the wind called Kilio'opu, the 'Iao Needle, a natural landmark and sacred burying place near Wailuku, and Lani Ha'aha'a, an old poetic name for Hana. The single verse opens with the English word "Hurrah," and dates back to the days when throwing a few English, or other foreign words into a Hawaiian song was considered very hip. Cyril sings the verse four times, but mostly uses the song to blast into some of his powerful and inventive improvisation. He plays in a tuning he created, which can be classified as Ni'ihau/Old Mauna Loa D tuning (D-A-D-F#-B-E) slacked down to C# on the 12 string. This tuning is so closely associated with him that it's known among slack key guitarists as "Cyril's D." This tuning is interesting because it is close to "Dropped D" (D-A-D-G-B-E), favored by his older brother Bla, but Cyril's third string is tuned a half step lower to F#. The F# note also relates it to D Major Tuning (D-A-D-F#-A-D), a common mainland tuning that Cyril uses on *'Opihi Moemoe*.

4. ***Ho'okena*** (instrumental)

This sturdy old Lot Kauwe air has been recorded by many artists, including in two different tunings by slack key great Led Kaapana, as well as by the Maile Serenaders. Cyril plays it in his D tuning, tuned down to C# on the 6 string. He remembers the song from the Bell Street jam sessions but also very much associates it with Led Kaapana. "Led's awesome," Cyril says. "A great player and good fun." The two sometimes perform together at local concerts and parties. They've also toured the Mainland together and taken a memorable trip to France and Switzerland. In the best slack key tradition, when they play together, songs become launching points for dazzling displays of improvisation, deep feeling and fun, often ending with laughter. "We'll pick a song and then just say 'okay, bruddah, I see you on the other side!'"

5. ***Mauna Loa*** (vocal)

Many Hawaiian songs, like many blues songs, comment frankly and ironically on adult relationships. Adult-oriented Hawaiian songs were, like the blues, traditionally kept away from children. They were performed at nightclubs or sung at parties only after the kids had been sent off to bed -- though pretending to be asleep or peeking around the corner was not unheard of!

A very adult song, *Mauna Loa* expresses the protagonist's desire that the ship named in the title return her lover to Ka`awaloa on the Big Island. Often attributed to the "Lark of Waimea", Helen Lindsey Parker, *Mauna Loa* is a slack key standard. Hula dancers also like its clear imagery and make playful use of the risqué situations described in the *mele* (lyrics). Cyril recorded the song once before with his brother Martin, when both were members of the Peter Moon Band back in 1981. Gabby also recorded it three times, all in the G Major "Taro Patch" Tuning, and it is most associated with him. It appears on THE BEST OF HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY GUITAR WITH GABBY PAHINUI (Waikiki 340), once as a vocal, and part of an instrumental medley on PURE GABBY (Hula 567), which is the best representation of Gabby's guitar playing. At over seven minutes, this version even more fully chronicles the slack key player's penchant for creative variation. Here, Cyril plays a 12 string in C Major tuning, tuned down to a pitch between the keys of Bb and A to match his vocal range.

6. ***Pu'u Anahulu*** (instrumental)

This *paniolo* (Hawaiian cowboy) favorite tells the story of a famous *pu'u* (hill) in the land of cliffs famous for its many hills, where reside the 'o'o birds with yellow feathers. Cyril plays it on 6 string in the C Mauna Loa Tuning (C-G-E-G-A-E) slacked down to B. This was also one of Gabby's favorite tunings. Mauna Loa tunings are based on a major chord with the top two (thinnest) strings tuned a 5th interval apart. These two strings can be played in 6th intervals (as the 1st and thicker *third* strings are usually played in several other tunings). This 6th interval sounding in the higher pitch produces 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.

Pu'u Anahulu was one of the Pahinui family's favorite late night jam session songs. It often came out about two a.m. when the ice in the cooler had melted and thoughts turned nostalgic. Gabby recorded a classic version for the celebrated GABBY PAHINUI HAWAIIAN BAND, VOL. 1 (Panini 1007), which featured Cyril playing an introductory solo guitar passage in the C Mauna Loa Tuning. Martin often sings this classic as well. Cyril's passion for his father's legacy also clearly comes out on songs like this.

SET TWO

7. *Hawaiian Cowboy* (instrumental)

Composed by Sol K. Bright (supposedly improvised on the spot at a California nightclub where some high rollers were pulling out big bills for the best yodeler!), *Hawaiian Cowboy* is a standard. It's most often played at a fast clip reminiscent of a *paniolo* boldly charging down a steep hill on his prize mount. *Leo ki'eki'e* (falsetto) masters The Ho'opi'i Brothers do a particularly popular vocal rendition full of virtuosic yodeling and remarkable breath control. "My dad, Atta, Sonny, Aunt Genoa, The Ho'opi'i Brothers, I tell you, that's the music I love; the old time stuff I grew up with."

In C Major Tuning slacked down to the key of A on 12 string, Cyril gives his instrumental imagination free reign here, illustrating why he is widely considered one of the leading virtuosos ever. He starts with a soulful, slow tempo, and gradually increases it, then finally goes to a faster clip for the last part of the song. He achieves that interesting muting effect by damping the strings with the side of his right hand as he picks away with flying fingers.

Cyril often records more than one version of the song for Dancing Cat. "I recorded several takes of this with Bob Brozman (acoustic steel guitar virtuoso) recently," he says, "I tell you, we smoke on those, sounds like Hawaiian astronauts, way out there."

8. *Po Mahina* (instrumental)

This second treatment of Cyril's signature song is an instrumental on 12 string in Cyril's D, slacked down to the key of C#. "It's completely different from the vocal version," Cyril says. "They're so many ways to play the same song. Everybody has their own style, plus each tuning has its own special features. Learning *ki ho'alu* is a never ending process. You'll never know it all."

9. *Hi'ilawe* (vocal)

A slack key guitarist who doesn't know *Hi'ilawe* is about as common as a country musician who can't play *You Are My Sunshine* or a jazz musician who's never heard of Charlie Parker. This classic love song uses the image of two waterfalls to describe a Big Island love affair in Waipi'o Valley between a local boy and an outsider from Puna. The reference to chattering birds apparently represents the gossip that resulted. Attributed to

Mrs. Kuakini or simply as "Traditional", *Hi'ilawe* has been performed by countless artists. Sonny Chillingworth does a great version on [SONNY SOLO](#) (Dancing Cat) and Ledward Kaapana recorded a beautiful uptempo version on [LED LIVE - SOLO](#) (Dancing Cat). Gabby's groundbreaking 1946 rendition marked the first time slack key was recorded for commercial release. It launched a revolution and can be heard on VINTAGE HAWAIIAN TREASURES, VOL. 7: THE HISTORY OF SLACK KEY (Hana Ola Records). Gabby almost always played it when performing live and recorded it four times. "It's the first song most people think of when they think of my dad," Cyril says. "I was pretty nervous about recording it solo, but he was with me in the studio. I could hear him telling me it was okay." Cyril plays *Hi'ilawe* on the 12 string in C Major tuned down to B.

10. *'Opihi Moemoe* (instrumental)

Written by the very influential slack key master Leonard Kwan in the late 1940s and recorded by him in 1960, *'Opihi Moemoe* has already inspired three generations of slack key guitarists and shows no sign of slowing down. A juke box hit in the early 1960s, the song returned in the 1970s as a staple of young players of the Hawaiian Renaissance, and was even recorded by Nashville guitar patriarch Chet Atkins. In the 1990s it enjoys a third round of popularity as slack key guitarists rediscover its complexities and soulful feeling.

Cyril's version, on six string, in Open D Major Tuning (D-A-D-F#-A-D, also known as "Mainland D Tuning"), marks the first time this classic has been recorded in a tuning other than Open G Major "Taro Patch" Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D). Cyril has also experimented with it in the C Major Tuning. The masterful syncopation and driving rhythm would, one imagines, give good dreams to the *moemoe* (sleepy) little *'opihii* (shellfish) of the title.

11. *Kawaihae* (vocal)

Cyril's distinctively warm vocals and use of a uniquely haunting A minor chord beautifully frame this *mele pana* (song of place) for a charming old village on the Big Island. Again, he uses it as a springboard for improvisation. "That's how I project myself, my style. I cut way up and down the neck." *Kawaihae* is played on the 12 string in C Major Tuning, slacked down to B.

12. *Sanoë* (instrumental)

Played in Cyril's D Tuning on 6 string, this classic serenade describes a first date in the court of Queen Lili'uokalani in the 1890s. Like many of Hawai'i's *ali'i* (royalty), Lili'uokalani was an accomplished and versatile musician. She trained in traditional chant, *himeni* (hymn/choral singing), piano, organ, 'ukulele and guitar. With her sister, Princess Likelike, she also directed a glee club. Like all three of her royal siblings, including King David Kalakaua and Prince Leleiohoku, Lili'u was a prolific composer, and she is often considered the greatest composer in Hawai'i's illustrious music history. She wrote about 157 songs, hymns and anthems as well as an opera. Hawai'i's last

reigning monarch (so far!), Lili'u remains dearly beloved and her songs continue to circulate widely. *Sanoë* was revived first in the early 1960s by The Sons of Hawai'i. Since then, the song has become a favorite for performers and audiences alike. Parents have even named children after it.

"This song is so wonderful," Cyril says. "It's so touching. It reminds me of the strolling musicians who used to serenade." Cyril plays *Sanoë* with a very special *nahenahe* (soft and sweet) quality he loves. "People say, 'Cyril, everybody's gonna fall asleep.' I tell them that's alright, it must be good because their bodies are relaxed! Hey, they play a slow song, you can connect with a woman. They play a fast song, you start dancing far apart."

Liner notes by Jay W. Junker with technical assistance by George Winston.

TUNINGS USED BY CYRIL ON THIS ALBUM

C MAJOR "ATTA'S C" TUNING (C-G-E-G-C-E) for *Kowali*, *Po Mahina* (vocal version), *Mauna Loa*, *Hawaiian Cowboy*, *Hi'ilawe* and *Kawai Hae*.

C MAUNA LOA TUNING (C-G-E-G-A-E) for *Pu'u Anahulu*.

D MAJOR "OPEN D" TUNING (D-A-D-F#-A-D) for *'Opihi Moemoe*.

D MAJOR 6/9 TUNING, also known as "Cyril's D" or "Ni'ihau/Old Mauna Loa Tuning" (D-A-D-F#-B-E) for *Hurrah Lani Ha'a Ha'a*, *Ho'okena*, *Po Mahina* (instrumental version), and *Sanoë*.

MAHALO

Cyril would like to thank the Pahinui family and all the hardworking people at Dancing Cat, Windham Hill and BMG.

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