

LINER NOTES

George Kahumoku, Jr. **HAWAIIAN LOVE SONGS** **(NA MELE HO'ONIPONIPO HAWAI'I)**

He's been called Hawai'i's Renaissance man: George Kahumoku Jr., master slack key guitar player, songwriter, worldwide performer, high school teacher, former principal, sculptor, storyteller and a farmer so in tune with his islands that he has won several state and national awards for his work with the land. He currently lives on Maui where he teaches the Special Motivational Program at Lahainaluna High School.

During his annual concert tours on the mainland, George holds slack key workshops as frequently as possible. In the summer of the year 2000 he also held the third annual slack key workshop at The Mauian Hotel on Maui with other Dancing Cat greats Ozzie Kotani, Led Kaapana and Keola Beamer. This workshop is one of the great musical experiences in the Islands today, and the result of George's belief in sharing and celebrating the music of Hawai'i.

George's music and voice have been described as "earthy and organic—one with the *'Aina* (the land)." His love and respect for Hawai'i and the planet Earth are embedded in his music, which he likes to think of as nature songs—songs of love, hope, desire and lament. George has deep memories of his childhood on the Big Island with his large musical *'ohana* (family) where he was exposed daily to traditional Hawaiian music and *ki ho'alu* (slack key guitar). At 13 he began playing professionally with the legendary singer/songwriter Kui Lee.

In his long musical career, George has produced and contributed to many albums including three well-known records with his brother Moses, as the Kahumoku Brothers, in the 1980s. So rooted in music, family and the soul of the Islands, it is no surprise that in 1979 George received the highest honor in Hawai'i's recording industry, a Na Hoku Hanohano Award, for his work on Auntie Edith Kanaka'ole's album HI'IPOI I KA 'AINA ALOHA (CHERISH THE BELOVED LAND) (Hula 568). Then, in 2000, he won the Na Hoku Hanohano Award again, with fellow slack-key artist Daniel Ho, for their album HYMNS OF HAWAI'I (Aire Music 88922). This moving, spiritual album includes songs written by great Island composers such as Queen Lili'uokalani, Lorenzo Lyons and George himself. THE HONOLULU ADVERTISER calls HYMNS OF HAWAI'I "as cleansing as a Sunday drive through God's country."

After graduating from Kamehameha Schools in 1969, George earned a BFA degree at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, California. Following a stint working on the Alaska pipeline, he returned to Hawai'i and plunged into farming and community efforts such as working with children in native language skills.

George has played slack key guitar in several documentary films about the music and cultural richness of the Hawaiian Islands, including the soundtrack for the David Kalama/Mele Anna Meyer film 'ONIPA'A (Kalama Productions), which chronicles the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, and focuses on issues that have affected Native Hawaiians since the overthrow of Hawai'i's last monarch, Queen Lili'uokalani, in 1893. George played several of Lili'uokalani's

songs in the film, which inspired him to release his first solo album, E LILI'U (Kealia Farms 1008), a heartfelt tribute to the Queen and her music.

Throughout his life of gathering expertise in many fields, George has always remained so "drenched by music" that those words became the title of his first Dancing Cat album ([DRENCHED BY MUSIC](#) – Dancing Cat 38038). "When I'm playing a solo instrumental piece," George says, "especially on the 12 string guitar, or when I'm playing together with other players, I often imagine in my musical mind's eye all of the people in my family—grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins—who have had a great influence on my music, that they're all playing or singing along with me. I hope that my grandchildren will one day come to understand and play this music."

A seasoned traveler, George has performed to audiences all over the world, including such dignitaries as the Queen of England and the Premier of China. He says that while walking out on the stage he knows he doesn't have long with those people out there in the audience, so he relaxes, has a great time, and gives them everything he can. At a concert or a gig, or when playing a CD, listeners are often unexpectedly moved by George's unpretentious manner, deep musicality and rich mixture of life experiences. An enthusiastic cook, Hawai'i's Renaissance Man is happiest when sharing music and food with a group of family and friends, down on the beach or out in back on the porch.

The Songs

PROGRAM 1

1. *The Queen's Prayer* (instrumental)

George: Taylor 12 string guitar in G Major "Taro Patch" Tuning (D–G–D–G–B–D), tuned down to F

The Hawaiian people of old were fierce warriors and cunning strategists of war, balanced perfectly by their extensive knowledge of peace and diplomacy. Theirs was a world of nature and gods (often one in the same), and a foundation of maintaining balance of *mana* (spiritual essence) throughout. The era of the Hawaiian monarchy, influenced by missionary introduced Western concepts, marked the beginning of the abandonment of traditional culture. Queen Lili'uokalani, a devout Christian, was the product of this period, embracing the very missionaries who were instrumental in the overthrow of her own government and her own imprisonment. In George Kahumoku's opinion, she was the original Hawaiian of Aloha, and she is Hawai'i's most beloved composer. She emphasizes the Will of God, forgiveness and cleansing of the soul in this song.

George attended the Kamehameha Schools from grades 1 through 12. This is the first Hawaiian song he learned from his first grade teacher, Mrs. Mahela Rosehill, where it was sung as a prayer for lunch. George did not understand the full meaning of this song until he contributed to the soundtrack for a documentary on Queen Lili'uokalani called

'ONIPA'A (meaning "steadfast").

At a young age, George mastered one string on the 'ukulele by playing the bass run he heard on the radio in the song **Pipeline**, a great surfing instrumental hit from 1963 by the Chantays. Here, in the introduction and end, that technique is deeply transformed into the feeling of the oud, a middle Eastern string instrument (a precursor to the guitar) which has double nylon or gut strings that are often strummed rapidly. The introduction, played on the low strings, is especially haunting, and is evocative of sunrise at the ocean, an impending hot day ahead. Interestingly, George plays another instrument with double strings: the 12 string steel string guitar. George also recorded this song as a vocal with slack key guitarist Daniel Ho on their duet CD *HYMNS OF HAWAII* (Aire Music 88922).

2. ***E Ho'i I Ka Pili*** (vocal)

George: 12 string guitar in G Major Tuning

This love song, the title of which means "come back to be close" or "let's try again," was written by vocalist Keali'i Reichel in the mid-1990s. It is reminiscent of a lovers' quarrel, inviting the "good fun" part: kissing and making up. In comparison, Grandpa Kapono Beamer's song **Ku'u Hoa** (or **My Sweetheart**) was the original make-up song, written for Grandma Louise Dambi Walker Beamer. Though the rhythms in both songs are different, the intent (to convince your lover to return to you after a lovers' quarrel) is the same. Both songs are written to charm and win the lover back. Note George's soulful deep rendition and his beautiful falsetto variation in the 3rd verse.

3. ***Moku Hulu*** (vocal)

George: 12 string guitar in C Wahine ("Leonard's C") Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D), capoed to the 2nd fret to sound in the key of D. The 2nd guitar is also 12 string in G Major Tuning, capoed to the 7th fret to sound in the key of D

This is a song from the Big Island of Hawai'i written by Uncle Robert Keli'iho'omalua about the town of Kalapana (where the great musical family the Kaapanas, including the great slack key guitarist Led Kaapana, are from). Though the black sand beaches of Kalapana and Queen's Bath have been destroyed by the hot lava of Tutu Pele, the memory and Aloha of these places still live on through this song.

This song is dedicated to the Keli'iho'omalua family and in memory of the late, great vocalist from the family, Philmen Kawehilani "G Girl" Keli'iho'omalua. Mahalo to Philmen and Sam for sharing their Aloha through this song, which translates as "an esteemed district (of Kalapana)."

The C Wahine Tuning (a tuning with a major 7th note in it, here the second string B note) in which this song is played is also called "Leonard's C" because it was recorded prominently by the late, great slack key guitarist Leonard Kwan (1930-2000). Leonard is one of the three most influential slack key guitarists of all time (along with the late Philip "Gabby" Pahinui, 1921-1980, and the late Sonny Chillingworth, 1932-1994). This piece is similar in feeling and sound to two other great songs recorded as slack key pieces:

Kawaihae, which has a similar vocal melody and was recorded by the great slack key guitarist Cyril Pahinui on [NIGHT MOON \(PO MAHINA\)](#) (Dancing Cat 38030), and **Slack Key Music Box**, which has a similar beautiful chiming high second guitar part and was recorded by the great slack key guitarist Keola Beamer on [MOE'UHANE KIKA – "TALES FROM THE DREAM GUITAR"](#) (Dancing Cat 38006).

4. **Keiki Mahine** (vocal)

George: 12 string guitar in G Major Tuning, tuned down to F

Diana Aki: 'ukulele in Standard Tuning (G–C–E–A), playing in the key of F, and vocals

Mahalo to Auntie Diana Aki and Auntie Kapeka for allowing us to bring this deeply Hawaiian love song into the world. This is a family song, translated as "the young (or child) woman," from Miloli'i in South Kona on the Big Island of Hawai'i, originally recorded by Auntie Diana Aki and the Sons of Hawai'i. It speaks of a love tragedy between two lovers from different social classes, one an *Ali'i* (young chieftess) from *mauka kuahiwi* (above in the wilds) and the other a common fisherman from the *kai* (ocean). Their love does not have a happy ending and is the ODE TO BILLIE JOE or ROMEO AND JULIET theme of Hawaiian music. Because both lovers are forbidden to marry, they seal their love forever by jumping into the deep blue ocean.

5. **Moloka'i Slide** (vocal)

George: 12 string guitar in G Major Tuning, tuned down to F

Bob Brozman: National steel guitar in G Major Tuning, tuned to the key of G and playing in the key of F

This song is written by Tad Suckling from Vancouver, Washington, about his love for a wagon ride lu'au held at Mapulehu, Moloka'i, and the hospitality shown to him by Larry Helm and his family. **Moloka'i Slide** was perpetuated by Natalie Helm, a member of the Moloka'i High School volleyball team who shared the song with other volleyball players throughout the state of Hawai'i. It became somewhat of a cheer (the chorus starts with the words "Take me back") and was eventually heard and recorded by the group Ehukai from Hilo. A great tragedy to the entire community of Moloka'i and a loss to the people of Hawai'i occurred when, after winning the MIL (Maui Inter-Scholastic League) volleyball championships, the plane carrying Natalie Helm and her other teammates crashed.

The Helm family is no stranger to tragedy. Natalie's uncle, the late, great singer George Helm, disappeared at sea in March 1977 while paddling to the island of Kaho'olawe to protest the use of that island as a bombing range. George Helm was a good friend of George Kahumoku through Helm's mentor, Auntie Edith Kanaka'ole. George Kahumoku was the Director of the Alu Like Native Hawaiian Inc. (a private, non-profit service organization that assists Native Hawaiians in their efforts to achieve social and economic self-sufficiency) for the entire Big Island at the time, with an office space complete with a phone and desk for the Kaho'olawe *'ohana* (family). When George Helm died, George Kahumoku played at the funeral services at Helm's mother's house.

Moloka'i Slide speaks of love of music, food, the songs of the gecko in the night and the general warmth of Hawai'i, its climate and its people. Though the original intent of this

song is a happy one, it now carries a deep poignancy. Bob Brozman makes his steel guitar weep as a lament for those who lost their family members in the plane crash. Note George's great simultaneous bass and rhythm (and occasionally lead) parts. This song is dedicated to the Moloka'i families who continued to *ho'omau* (keep going) even with the loss of their loved ones. George and Bob both play in the G Major Tuning here, but play it in different ways—George tunes his G Tuning down to F, while Bob's guitar is tuned to G while he *plays* in the key of F. In the slack key tradition, when playing duets, the two players often try to play in two different tunings, or use the approach here, to get beautiful contrasting and complimentary sounds.

6. ***Nu 'Oli*** (instrumental)

George: Taylor 12 string guitar in G Major Tuning, tuned down to F

In 1989, George's *tutu* (grandmother), Emily Lihue Ho'opale Dulay, requested that he make an album of the old Hawaiian hymns that his grandmother used to sing in church. Since then, George collected hymns as a favor for his grandmother. In May of 2000, his *HYMNS OF HAWAII* CD (Aire Music 88922), in collaboration with Daniel Ho, was awarded a Na Hoku Hanohano Award for Best Religious Album of the Year.

Danny Palakiko, Sr. reintroduced George to this waltz, the title of which means "glad tidings," in 1996. Beverly Spencer from Lahaina Community Baptist Church assisted with piano arrangements which George transposed into slack key. There is an 1800s feeling that emanates from this hymn, which is dedicated with Aloha to George's grandmother and his mom, Aileen Perez.

PROGRAM 2

7. ***Hawaiian War Chant*** (*Taua I Ta Huahua'i*) (vocal)

George: Taylor 12 string guitar in G Major Tuning, tuned down to F

Originally a love song but popularized in the early 20th century as the war chant, this popular song is really a mating dance used to entice one's lover into lovemaking. George says that "the good thing about going to war with your lover is that you can make up afterwards, making the lovemaking and feelings more intense!" George transforms this song in his trademark swing/bluesy style, which was also a specialty of the Kahumoku Brothers (George and his brother, the great slack key guitarist Moses Kahumoku—see his recording [HO'OKUPU "THE GIFT,"](#) Dancing Cat 38023), especially in their live performances. Note his great one-man-band-style playing here, with the bass and rhythm parts played simultaneously and, during the powerful instrumental break, both the bass and lead guitar parts.

8. ***E Malii Mai*** (vocal)

George: 12 string guitar in C Wahine ("Leonard's C") Tuning, tuned down to A

This love song by the great prolific songwriter and vocalist Auntie Irmgard Farden Aluli

(1911–) is really a directive on relationships that the young people of today need to learn. Auntie Irmgard basically says "give me attention" or "*e maliu mai*." In this world of fast pace, cyberspace and the mighty chase, one tends to forget to devote some time to the things that are really important, such as paying attention to the concerns and needs of those that are close to you and your heart—family, spouse and friends.

Auntie Irmie, this song is dedicated to you and all the great music you've created in the past 75 years. It is also dedicated to the group Puamana, named after her most famous song, who has kept her music alive. Irmgard's family has been one of the greatest Hawaiian musical families in the 20th century.

Here George plays the instrumental breaks with key of G fingerings, and modulates to the key of C fingerings to accompany the vocal verses, which sound in the keys of E and A with the guitar tuned down 3 half steps.

9. ***Lei Pikake*** (vocal)

George: Taylor 12 string guitar in G Major Tuning, tuned down to F

Norton Buffalo: Hohner Super Chromonica harmonica intoned in the key of Bb, and playing in the key of F

Hawaiians write songs about their love for nature, the ocean, favorite foods, places or flowers. In many instances, the *kaona* (underlying or hidden meaning) speaks about a secret love or intimate lovemaking. This love song, composed by guitarist Barry Flanagan with Hawaiian and English lyrics by Kiope Raymond and originally sung by the group Hapa on their first album from 1993, HAPA (Coconut Grove 8191), speaks of the love of the *pikake* (jasmine) lei. Norton Buffalo brings out the soul in this song with his haunting and evocative harmonica accompaniment.

10. ***Ke Welina A Kealoha*** (vocal)

George: Taylor 12 string guitar in G Major Tuning, tuned down to E

George wrote this hauntingly beautiful song over 20 years ago for his niece as a *mele inoa* (name song). At birth, George was going to adopt his niece; however, her birth mother Leona changed her mind and let George name her instead. He wanted to name her Aloha after his wife Penny, but there were too many things and places named Aloha—like Aloha Rent–A–Car, Aloha Dog Grooming, Aloha Car Wash, Aloha Plate Lunch, etc. He went to Auntie Edith Kanaka'ole to ask for a name for this baby with more than just plain Aloha. She said there was an old Hawaiian saying that went, "ke welina a kealoha," which means "the essence or the soul of love." And so a name for Ke Welina was found. He composed this song while rocking Kewe when she was two weeks old and collaborated with Kalani Meinecke, a Hawaiian linguistic expert, on the Hawaiian translations. George originally recorded the song on the Kahumoku Brothers' first album, KAI MALINO "THE PEACEFUL SEA" (Hula 577), with his brother Moses. Today, Kewelina has a son of her own and George has several nieces and cousins named Ke Welina A Kealoha after the song he wrote.

11. *Nakalele* (instrumental)

George: Taylor 12 string guitar in G Major Tuning, tuned down to F

Nakalele is a sacred spot located on the northernmost tip of Maui. It is said that one enters into the spirit world off the cliffs of Nakalele. Because it is a *kalae* (point), there is an aura or vortex of great tension, or what some people call a power source. A *heiau* (sacred place) is located nearby. When one walks to this sacred spot, there is a calmness and a peacefulness, sort of like zen meditation. Ironically, once one reaches the *haku* (head) or *piko* (center) of this sacred spot, one is almost blown into the ocean. There is much wind, *mana* (spiritual energy) and action. In one of Auntie Edith Kanaka'ole's prayers and chants she asks for divine wisdom: from the North, where the cold winds come from, and from the East, home of the rising sun, she asks us to open up our *wehe mana'o* (minds) for *kahonu no'eau* (deep knowledge) to guide us in the present; from the South, where the Aloha and the winds that warm us comes from, she asks for knowledge from the past; and from the West, where the sun sets, we send our prayers for the present challenges we need to let go of and change for a better future. This song was written by George to simulate the tension created by the vortex at Nakalele, and to share and celebrate Auntie Edith Kanaka'ole's prayer.

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In memory of: My *tutu* (grandmother), Emily Lihue Ho'opale Dulay, who raised me, and my grandpa, Bonifacio Dulay; Leonard Kwan; Philmen Kawehilani "G Girl" Keli'iho'omalu; Willy Aki; and my best friend in sixth grade, Herman "Bob" Meyer.

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