

LINER NOTES

Various Artists

KI HO'ALU CHRISTMAS

Christmas is celebrated in Hawai'i with great enthusiasm and elaborate preparations. While some of the activity and music is closely linked to life in late twentieth-century America, much is also quite unique to the Islands, reflecting our multi-cultural society and long Polynesian heritage. No one knows for sure what year Christmas was first celebrated in Hawai'i, but the first celebrants were most likely European sailors who began stopping here on a fairly regular basis soon after Cook's initial visit in 1778.

At Christmas, called *Kalikimaka* in Hawaiian, local composers translated European and American carols and hymns or crafted new songs reflecting the Hawaiian experience. Hawaiian hymnals, such as NA HIMENI HAIPULE HAWAII, also include Christmas songs, many dating back to the nineteenth century. With the advent of commercial music in Hawai'i around the turn of the century, composers began writing Christmas-oriented songs in both Hawaiian and English. This trend reached its peak in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when Hawaiian classics such as **Mele Kalikimaka** traveled far and wide.

Hawaiian musicians continue to embrace traditional, imported, and local songs for the holiday season. No matter where the music comes from, it invariably takes on a uniquely Hawaiian flavor in the hands of Hawaiian musicians, as this album illustrates.

Ki ho'alu (Slack key) is a mainstay of entertainment and relaxation in many *'ohana* (families) assuring it a role in Hawaiian Christmas celebrations. *Ki ho'alu* has also figured prominently in Hawaiian caroling and serenading, especially in rural areas where visits to the homes of neighbors and relatives are still often accompanied by some impromptu music-making. Caroling is now mostly done in the cities, but Hawai'i's ranching areas abound with colorful stories of *paniolo* (cowboys) riding up to a house, performing from the saddle, then riding off to their next destination.

Professional musicians have also been known to go caroling with *ki ho'alu*. Old-timers fondly recall a dream trio of "Pops" Gabby Pahinui, Sonny Chillingworth and Andy Cummings strolling through Kahala and other exclusive neighborhoods at Christmastime, playing for tips and refreshments.

Christmas recordings have a long history in Hawai'i. New holiday releases come out every year to join the local favorites returning to the stores and airwaves. Many prominent artists, from traditional figures like Aunty Genoa Keawe, Nina Keali'iwahamana, and The Sons of Hawaii, to more contemporary groups such as The Brothers Cazimero, have released songs for the Christmas season. The Waimanalo Keikis, a children's group, has even recorded some Yuletide classics using *ka'eke'eke*, the traditional Hawaiian bamboo stamping tubes.

KI HO'ALU CHRISTMAS brings together the artistry of twelve of today's most celebrated slack key guitar masters. While chestnuts seldom roast on an open fire in Hawai'i and our Christmases are only white high atop Mauna Kea, we do have the colors of the rainbow, along with feelings

of aloha and the sounds of this beautiful, unique music to wish everyone around the world "*Mele Kalikimaka e Hau'oli Makahiki Hou*" (Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year).

ABOUT THE SONGS:

SET ONE

1. **Keola Beamer: *Do You Hear What I Hear?*** (instrumental)

Composed by Noel Regney and Gloria Shayne in 1962. Keola arranged this instrumental version for multiple guitars. The electric guitars are played in a C-F-C-F-C-F tuning, from the lowest pitched string to the highest. The acoustic steel and nylon 6-string guitars are played in a C Wahine tuning (C-G-D-G-B-E), often referred to as "Keola's C," because he is most associated with it. Wahine means a tuning which contains a Major 7th note, here the "B" note on the second string.

2. **Ledward Kaaapana: *C-H-R-I-ST-M-A-S (The Meaning of Christmas)*** (instrumental)

Composed by country artist Eddy Arnold and Jenny Lou Carson. Ledward plays this as a solo instrumental in a C Wahine tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D), often known as "Leonard's C" because it is favored by the great slack key guitarist Leonard Kwan. This song displays Ledward's trademark soulful technique of playing the introductions rubato. Ledward was the first of the Dancing Cat artists to record Christmas pieces, which eventually led to this album.

3. **Moses Kahumoku: *Christmas Carol Waltz*** (instrumental)

Moses plays this solo instrumental original, which features his powerful "hammer-on" and "pull-off" techniques in the G Major "Taro Patch" tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D). A "hammer-on" is an ornament produced by plucking a note and immediately fretting above that note to produce a second tone. "Pull-off" refers to plucking a string and immediately pulling the finger off that note, producing a second note that is either open or fretted by another finger.

4. **Cyril Pahinui: *Mele Kalikimaka*** (vocal)

R. Alex Anderson composed this *hapa haole* classic in 1949 as Hawai'i's answer to **White Christmas**. With its jazzy swing and breezy lyrics that mix praise and promotion, it nicely expresses the optimistic spirit of both the holiday season and of Hawaiian music in the postwar era. Recordings by local stars such as Genoa Keawe helped give the song a wide circulation. Cyril sings this perennial favorite accompanying himself on the 12-string guitar in C Major tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E). The five instrumental choruses demonstrate his great improvisational prowess.

5. **James "Bla" Pahinui: *Away in a Manger***(instrumental)

The origin of this classic Christmas hymn is uncertain, though it is often credited to the German religious reformer Martin Luther. Bla plays it as an instrumental solo in his "Dropped D" tuning (D-A-D-G-B-E).

6. **Barney Isaacs & George Kuo: *Winter Wonderland*** (instrumental acoustic steel and slack key guitar duet)

Composed in 1934 by Felix Bernard and Dick Smith. Recorded in 1995, this instrumental duet features the late Barney Isaacs on acoustic steel with George Kuo on slack key. This piece is played in the key of C, with Barney in an A minor 7th tuning (C-E-G-A-C-E) and George in "Leonard's C" Wahine tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D).

7. **Rev. Dennis Kamakahi: *Christmas Memories*** (vocal)

Here, Dennis performs a solo vocal version of a song he wrote in 1978 and first recorded on the album CHRISTMAS TIME WITH EDDIE KAMAE AND THE SONS OF HAWAII (Hawaii Sons HS 4004). "Herb Kane did a painting for the cover of that album," Dennis recalls. "The house, the porch, people playing music; it all reminded me of what Christmas used to be like in Hawai'i. That inspired me to write this song. It expresses the thoughts of an older man thinking back to Christases past." Dennis plays this instrumental in C Mauna Loa tuning (C-G-E-G-A-E) on the 12-string guitar. Mauna Loa tunings are based on a major chord with the top two thinnest strings tuned a 5th interval apart, producing a distinctively sweet sound.

SET TWO

8. **Ozzie Kotani: *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*** (instrumental)

First published in 1849 as a poem by Edmund Hamilton Sears, **It Came Upon a Midnight Clear** was adapted by Richard Storrs Willis as a musical composition in 1850. Ozzie plays this solo instrumental arrangement in the G Major tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D).

9. **George Kahumoku: *Little Drummer Boy*** (instrumental)

Composed in 1958 by Katherine Davis, Henry Onorati and Harry Simeone. George plays this as a solo instrumental in the G Major tuning on a 12-string guitar.

10. **George Kuo: *Fireside Ki Ho'alu*** (instrumental)

George created this evocative solo instrumental in G Major tuning while visiting San Francisco at Christmastime in 1990. "The weather was very wintry," he says, "but there was a fireplace where I was staying. I saw all the colors in the flames dancing around and felt the warmth. That inspired the rhythms and the melody."

11. **Cindy Combs: *Medley: Kanaka Waiwai & Iesu No Ke Kahuhipa*** (instrumental)

Iesu me ke Kanaka Waiwai (Jesus and the Rich Man) is one of modern Hawai'i's most popular *himeni* (hymns). Bandleader and songwriter John Kameaaloha Almeida claimed he composed it in 1915. **Iesu No Ke Kahuhipa** is the Hawaiian version of **Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us**, which was translated by Rev. Lorenzo Lyons (composer of the well-known song **Hawai'i Aloha**). Cindy plays this solo instrumental medley in "Keola's C" Wahine tuning (C-G-D-G-B-E), a favorite of hers because Keola Beamer was her first slack key teacher.

12. **Joanie Komatsu: *Po La'i E (Silent Night)*** (vocal)

Composed in 1818 with words by Joseph Mohr and music by Franz Gruber. The English lyrics were adapted from the original German of Joseph Mohr, and translated into Hawaiian by Stephen and Mary Desha. Joanie plays in the G Major tuning and sings both in Hawaiian and English. Her sister Ruth Komatsu accompanies on the alto recorder, which has a beautiful tone that often sounds like a human voice.

13. **Ledward kaapana: *Silent Night*** (instrumental autoharp)

Ledward plays this Christmas classic on the autoharp in the key of G in his unique solo style.

Liner notes written by Jay W. Junker and George Winston

Produced by George Winston.

All recordings engineered and mixed by Howard Johnston.

Additional engineering by Milan Bertosa, Mark Slagle, and Porter Miller.

Mastered by Bernie Grundman at Bernie Grundman Mastering in Los Angeles, CA.

Album cover design, Hawaiian Christmas wreath, photography art direction by Nelson Makua Design.

Photography by Norman Makio of Modern Camea Center.

The curly coa conert acoustic guitar on the cover was made by Bob Gleason of Pegasus Guitars.

The wreath contains hawaiian red ginger, anthuriums, protea, dendrobium orchids, palm seeds and buds, laua'e ferns, and palapalai ferns.