

## LINER NOTES

### Ray Kane **WA'AHILA**

Ray Kane was born October 2, 1925 in Koloa, Kaua'i. He grew up in Nanakuli on O'ahu's Wai'anae Coast, where his stepfather, William Panoke, had a boat crew. Ray's mother, Emma Cummings, came from a very musical family that included her brother, bandleader Andy Cummings, singer Genoa Keawe and many other well known Hawaiian musicians. Ray's father, Herman Kane, reportedly played excellent slack key, but left the family and broke off contact with them when Ray was very young.

In Nanakuli, Ray spent much of his childhood in the water. By the age of nine, he was an expert skin diver. Around this time he also began to awaken to the love of music suggested by his middle name, Kaleoalohapoina'oleohelemanu (the voice of love that comes and goes like a bird and will never be forgotten). "I'll never forget it," Ray says. "I woke up early one morning and heard the most beautiful guitar music coming from a tent on the beach. It sounded like three guys, but when I looked inside, it was only one, a fella from Makua Ranch, Albert Kawelo. When he saw me watching him, he put the guitar away. Back then, see, you only played slack key by yourself, with your family, or with close friends. Nobody in my house played, so I was stuck. I would've left it right there but I couldn't get that sound out of my head."

With characteristic determination, Ray asked Albert to teach him slack key. Ray says, "He told me scram. 'You're not my family. Beat it!' But I kept bugging him. I knew he was tired of eating 'opelu every day, so I asked, 'How would you like some kumu, some ulua, some aweoweo?' 'You can get those for me?' he said. 'Sure,' I told him. 'I'll go get you a whale if you want one.' And so we traded guitar lessons for fish." Ray also credits Henry Kapuana and the radio with teaching him songs in the early days. "Back then I used to take my guitar everywhere," Ray says. "My favorite spot was Zablan's beach. It was so quiet at night. There was nobody around. I'd sit and play and watch the moon shine down on the waves."

Most of Ray's style comes from this time in his life. "Albert said to never change what he did," Ray says. "I've added to it a little, I guess, but I've always tried to play the way he showed me over sixty years ago." Rooted in the older ways of playing, Ray usually uses his thumb to play bass on the first and third beats of the measure (on the fifth and/or sixth guitar strings) with strong accented notes on the second or fourth beats (on the third and/or fourth strings). This pattern is influenced by the rhythms of the ancient *ipu*, a gourd used for accompanying chant and dance.

In the 1940s, Ray joined the military and traveled to Europe and the United States mainland. "I didn't have a guitar," he says, "so I didn't play much, but I thought about it a lot and even dreamed about it." When he got back home, he heard Gabby Pahinui's first records. "They inspired me to start playing again." Ray first recorded in 1961, and did his first complete album in 1976.

Ray says he always stresses the importance of good slides and finger picking to make the music flow smoothly. He also emphasizes attitude. "Slack key is very personal," he says. "So do it your

own way, from the heart. Humble yourself. Play the best you can and share what you know. If we don't share slack key, we'll lose it. That almost happened once, so watch out. Take care of it."

In 1987, in recognition of his performing and teaching, Ray received a National Endowment for the Arts Folk Heritage Fellowship, the nation's highest honor for a traditional artist. The state government and the City & County of Honolulu also honored him. That same year, Ray appeared in Robert Mugge's HAWAIIAN RAINBOW documentary and made triumphant appearances across Hawai'i. He also returned to the recording studio for an ongoing series of solo sessions for Dancing Cat that have, to date, produced the 1994 release PUNAHELE, this release, and enough material for a third album. "It's great to play slack key solo," he says. "The feeling of the individual really comes out. I love it."

In 1989, Ray was invited to perform at the Smithsonian Institution Festival of American Folklife and in several other prestigious mainland venues. In 1990, he realized a long-held dream to play slack key at Carnegie Hall. Health problems began limiting his mobility in the early 1990s, but with his strong resilient spirit, Ray continues to teach, tour and share his music with countless friends who have become fans and fans who have become friends. He performs in Hawai'i, Japan and the mainland, appears in numerous videos and radio broadcasts, gives more interviews that he can remember, and plays host to visitors from around the globe.

"People call from all over the world," he says. "Europe, Japan, Canada, Australia, even places I've never heard of. They say, 'Is this Ray Kane the guitar player?' I say, 'Yes, it is,' and they go into shock. They get so excited they start shaking like a leaf. But seriously, they call because they love the music. And I just thank the good Lord for giving me the talent and this many years to share it."

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## ABOUT THE SONGS

### SET ONE

#### 1. *Keiki Slack Key* (instrumental)

*Keiki* is the Hawaiian word for child. Ray wrote this instrumental in the early 1960s around the time he began recording for Tradewinds. "I saw some kids running around playing at Nanakuli Beach Park and they looked so cute. I had my guitar, so I started playing in time to their running around." The sound of children playing has always been a fixture in Ray's soundscape. He grew up a gregarious and self-admitted loud child and has had seven children of his own: Dennis, Sharlene, Emma, Joanne, Michael, Moana and Faith. In addition, he and his wife, Elodia, have been foster parents for fifty more children. "We were in the program for fifteen years," Ray says. "We had a regular United Nations; kids of all races, colors and creeds. Then I got sick and we had to quit, but our house is still a meeting place for all kinds of kids. It gets loud, but it's lots of fun. We like to see people happy."

**Keiki Slack Key** is played in G Major "Taro Patch" tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D from the lowest-pitched string to the highest) slacked down to the key of F.

2. *I Ka Po Me Ke Ao* (vocal)

Composed by Lena Salis and Vicky Silva, this popular standard speaks about expressing with the eyes something that isn't verbally discussed. Again, Ray plays in G Major tuning slacked down to F. The progression introduces a hint of tension by moving from G to A and back to G, rather than to the D7 as usually played. It's as if the answer to the singer's solicitation is still uncertain. In the second and third instrumental solos, Ray creates some lovely unique chime effects. Like most slack key artists, Ray learned the song from Gabby Pahinui. "After Albert Kawelo, it's Gabby for me," Ray says. "He had the true Hawaiian style: his voice, his timing, his touch; you can really feel it in the heart. Words can never express."

Interestingly, Gabby used to tell people he learned slack key from an excellent player in Kaka'ako named Herman. He added that the man's nickname was Manu but he didn't know his last name. Since Ray's father was known to be an excellent slack key guitarist, was named Herman, also went by the name of Manu, and lived in Kaka'ako, there is the possibility that he and Gabby may have crossed paths.

3. *Hilo E* (vocal)

In G Major tuning slacked down to E, Ray's arrangement of this traditional *mele pana* (place song) for Hilo is based on a Sons of Hawai'i recording. Ray has great affection for the group, which also featured Gabby Pahinui, and lived at various times with frontman Eddie Kamae and bassist Joe Marshall. "They're great people and real musicians," Ray says. "Their jam sessions were really something. Everybody'd be there. They'd go on for days."

Elodia says she's glad they recorded **Hilo E** because her mom was born in Hilo and she and Ray lived on the Big Island in 1968. "After a year we came back to Nanakuli to help care for Raymond's aunt," Elodia says. "We've been here ever since."

4. *Na Hoa He'e Nalu* (instrumental)

The venerable Hawaiian composers Irmgard Farden Aluli and Mary Kawena Pukui created this tribute to surfers and their special bonds of affection with the sea. Ray plays this song in G Major tuning, key of G, but takes a few verses in the key of C. Since there's no C note in the bass, he nicely builds up the tension with a suspended feeling that keeps urging him to modulate back to G.

Quite a waterman himself, Ray was decorated for heroism in 1940 when at age 14 he and 17-year-old Hyel Ching swam through heavy surf to save the lives of two fliers whose plane crashed off Maile Point. "That was our favorite diving spot," Ray says. "We knew the reef, the waves and currents. We got to the plane just in time and dragged the guys in about 400 yards. No big thing, but the next day we were featured on KGMB radio and got letters from all the top brass."

The following article is an account of the rescue, and is an excerpt from the March 1940 issue of **Paradise of the Pacific** (reprinted in **Honolulu** magazine in January 1990).

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Half a century ago, this month, two Nanakuli youths became heroes when they rescued two Army aviators whose plane had crashed in the sea one afternoon in January 1940. The heroes, Hyel Ching and Raymond Kane, are now retired and continue to live in Nanakuli. Kane, a boilermaker with Local 204 for 30 years, retired in 1982; and Ching was a heavy equipment operator at Pearl Harbor and Lualualei for 35 years before retiring in 1970. And the two friends still have the medals they were awarded 50 years ago.*

HAWAIIAN HEROES OF NANAKULI --14-year-old, 94-pound Raymond Kane and 17-year-old Hyel Ching. Praised over the radio and in newspapers and magazines, these two splendid American boys - Boy Scouts - proved their mental, spiritual and physical courage at Nanakuli, O'ahu, on Jan. 29, 1940, when they saved the lives of Lt. William S. Hindson and Pvt. James P. Brennan, both of the United States Army. A warplane of the Army, crewed by the two above-named, crashed in the rough sea between Nanakuli and Maile at 1:40 p.m. The plane's motor went dead and a forced landing was made about 400 yards from the lava shore. Reaching 200 yards from the shore the strong currents pushed them back to sea. Even had they made the shore it is quite probable the two young Army aviators would have been battered to death against the rocks. The waves were breaking high and the undertow was heavy. The lads were playing volleyball at the Nanakuli School when Dan Kuakini (a city and county road foreman) notified them of the crash and loaded them, with some other boys, in his truck. "I wanted some larger boys to go after the flyers," said Kuakini, "but before I knew it they dived in the water and started after them. They are both good swimmers and soon brought the aviators ashore." Pvt. Brennan, who was very badly injured, was taken ashore first. Then the officer was steered through the heavy surf to safety. Knowledge of the tricky currents and wild surf at Nanakuli -- as well as frequent swimming in them -- was what made it possible for these two American lads of Hawai'i to save these two lives. While the crash occurred at 1:40 p.m., it was not until 2:45 p.m. that the rescues were completed. Brig. Gen. Walter H. Frank, commanding general of the Army's 18th Wing, was high in the praise of the two young heroes who will be adequately rewarded with official praise from Washington as well as with medals from several sources.

##### 5. *Hi'ilawe* (vocal)

One of the most popular and widely played slack key standards, **Hi'ilawe** is closely associated with Gabby Pahinui. It tells the story of a romance in Waipi'o Valley, using the title waterfall as a symbol of the lovers and chirping birds to represent the gossip surrounding their affair. "I never heard **Hi'ilawe** until Gabby recorded it in the 1940s," Ray says. "That record left me speechless. I learned it right away and have played it ever since." Ray plays this version in a C Wahine tuning (C-G-D-G-B-E), slacked down to the key of Bb (see song #7 below for a basic explanation of Wahine tunings). This is only one note different from the C Wahine tuning Gabby used in 1946 (C-G-E-G-B-E), but in slack key, changing even one note opens up a whole different world on the guitar.

Gabby's landmark 1946 recording of **Hi'ilawe**, his other four earliest recordings, and fifteen other early slack key tracks have been reissued on a CD produced by George Winston for Hana Ola Records entitled **VINTAGE HAWAIIAN TREASURES, VOLUME 7: THE HISTORY OF SLACK KEY GUITAR (HOCD 24000)**.

6. ***Aloha Ka Manini*** (vocal)

A lu'au favorite, this Lot Kauwe love song to fish and poi is widely performed and has been recorded by several other top traditional performers, including Gabby and his son Bla Pahinui. Ray's arrangement in G Major tuning, slacked down to the key of E, features a vocal duet with his wife Elodia. Anyone who has seen Ray in concert knows that Elodia is his secret weapon. She always brings the house down with her wonderful voice and radiant personality.

Elodia grew up in Nu'uana'u singing in St. Stephen's church choir and with her siblings at home. "My brother Bismark went to Kamehameha School," she says. "He taught my sister Juliet and me songs he knew and we'd sing together." Elodia also loved Lena Machado and Alfred Apaka. "I always sang along when they were on the radio, but I never imagined I'd wind up singing on a recording myself."

7. ***Wa'ahila*** (instrumental)

Like all Wahine tunings, G Wahine (D-G-D-F#-B-D) contains a major 7th note. The note is hammered on the first fret (here, on the third string) to produce the tonic major chord. When that same string is left unfretted, it is the third of the strong sounding dominant seventh chord, producing the characteristic sounds of Wahine tunings.

This Wahine tuning was influenced by the sounds the Hawaiians had heard from the Spanish and Mexican cowboys in the early 1800s. The D7th and the G Major chords used in this tuning contain the same intervals as the Standard tuning E7th and A Major chords common in traditional Mexican and Spanish songs.

G Wahine is best known to slack key players as Aunty Alice Namakelua's tuning. A beloved composer and musician and frequent visitor to the home of Queen Lili'uokalani, Aunty Alice played slack key in an evocative, unadorned style dating back to her childhood in the 1890s. Active into the 1970s, she served as a mentor for several generations of Hawaiian composers and musicians.

Ray says he crafted this beautiful solo in Aunty Alice's tuning as a tribute to her. Slacked down to the key of F for deeper resonance as Alice and other slack key guitarists often do, the performance here evokes the feeling, sound and tempo of an older Hawai'i. "The melody came to me a long time ago," Ray says, "while watching canoes go back and forth on the water." When Ray first recorded the song for Tradewinds, Noelani Mahoe suggested **Wa'ahila** as the title. "She used to name a lot of my songs," Ray says. "Leonard's too, I think. She's a great lady. I met her at the Reef Hotel at their big jam

sessions." **Wa'ahila** refers to the ridge between Manoa Valley and St. Louis Heights in Honolulu.

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## SET TWO

### 1. *Wai O Ke Aniani* (vocal)

Another standard Ray learned from Gabby, **Wai O Ke Aniani** was adapted from an older song describing Keaniani Ridge in Moanalua Valley on O'ahu. Since the 1970s, Ray has opened most of his concerts with it. "I play it first cause it's one of my favorites," Ray says. "It's real simple and smooth, how slack key was meant to be...smooth, easy and full of love."

Ray performs in G Major "Taro Patch" tuning slacked down to F#. "I don't tune to a standard pitch," Ray says. "I go by my voice."

### 2. *'Ulupalakua* (vocal)

In the cool Maui uplands, on the slopes of Haleakala, 'Ulupalakua Ranch is *ka home a o paniolo* (the home of the Hawaiian cowboy), as the song's refrain keeps reminding us. It is most often credited to John Piilani Watkins. Ray plays it here in G Major tuning, lowered to F#. On the VI-7 (E7th) chord, he keeps the fifth string tonic bass note (G) going and plays only a partial E7th chord using the top four pitches. This is often done in slack key when tunings don't easily lend themselves to full chords, and/or to keep the power of the tonic note in the bass constantly droning. It is also often done on the II (A) and IV (C) chords, although not in this song.

### 3. *Kilakila 'O Haleakala* (instrumental)

Often credited to Charles E. King, this tribute to the Haleakala volcanic crater on Maui is a longtime favorite of singers, hula dancers and musicians. Ray plays it in a rare A Mauna Loa tuning (E-A-E-E-F#-C#), raised to the key of *Bb*. Raising the strings is fairly unusual, but is sometimes done to suit the song or match the singing range if there is a vocal, or to create a pleasing resonance to the slack key guitarist if it is an instrumental, like this song. Like all Mauna Loa tunings, this one pitches the first and second strings (the two thinnest) an interval of a fifth apart. That allows a player to make very sweet sounding runs in sixth intervals on the first two strings rather than on the first string and thicker third string, commonly used in the G Major tuning. A unique feature of this particular Mauna Loa tuning is being able to powerfully sound the mid-range third and fourth strings in unison, as they are tuned to the same note. Ray is the only slack key artist to record in this tuning (as of 1998).

### 4. *Lei Nani* (vocal)

Charles Namahoe's long popular *mele ipoipo* (love song) describes an unexpected and

unforgettable meeting. It speaks of a beautiful lei to represent closeness. Ray performs **Lei Nani** in G Major tuning, slacked down to F. Slack key guitarist Ledward Kaapana also plays the song, but the best known renditions are by Gabby Pahinui and Hawai'i's first lady of song, Auntie Genoa Keawe. "Auntie Genoa and I are related," Ray says proudly.

5. ***Ke Kali Nei Au (The Hawaiian Wedding Song)*** (vocal)

A baritone-soprano duet, this Charles E. King classic, has been one of Hawai'i's best known melodies since the 1920s. The title is translated as "Waiting For Thee", but the song is better known in English as **The Hawaiian Wedding Song**. Often sung at weddings or anniversaries, **Ke Kali Nei Au** actually brought Ray and Elodia together. "My boyfriend took me to dinner at the Flamingo Chuckwagon one night," Elodia says, "but before we could be seated we had to wait in the lounge, where Momi Jones was playing. While we were there, Momi got a request for **The Wedding Song** and asked Raymond, whom I didn't know, to come up and sing the male part. Momi had a cold, so she asked if anybody in the audience would volunteer to sing the female part (which, incidentally, was written in 1928 by the great composer Helen Desha Beamer, great grandmother of slack key guitarist Keola Beamer). My boyfriend said, "You can sing, go up there," so I did and, well, I guess it's a pretty powerful song because Raymond took my phone number and soon after that we got married. That was 32 years ago."

Ray is playing in Standard tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E) in the key of C, slacked down a half step to sound in the key of B.

6. ***Honolulu Harbor*** (vocal)

Written by Mary Pula'a Robins, this romantic song from the 1920s describes traveling between Honolulu and *He 'Aina Nani Kaleponi* (California, referred to here as "a beautiful land") by ship, which, at that time was the height of modernity and elegance. **Honolulu Harbor** is referred to as a beacon shining out like a star.

The famous Royal Hawaiian Band used to play the song as ships arrived or departed near the Aloha Tower, which was the center for greeting arriving travelers or bidding fond farewells. Although Honolulu Harbor hasn't been recorded too often in recent years, the Makaha Sons of Ni'ihau did a quartet harmony version in the 1980s, and preceding that, it was done very nicely in the 1970s by slack key guitarist Sonny Chillingworth. Ray performs it in G Major tuning slacked down to F.

7. ***Popoki Slack Key*** (instrumental)

The album ends with a beautiful poignant instrumental, again in the A Mauna Loa tuning raised up to the key of Bb. This song (the title of which can mean "little cat") suggests the end of the day and evokes the beautiful Hawaiian sunsets.

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

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## **RAY KANE'S TUNINGS USED ON THIS ALBUM**

**G Major "Taro Patch"** (D-G-D-G-B-D from the lowest-pitched string to the highest) for Keiki Slack Key, I Ka Po Me Ke Ao, Hilo E Na Hoa He'e Nalu, Aloha Ka Manini, Wai O Ke Aniani, 'Ulupalakua, Lei Nani and Honolulu Harbor

**G Wahine** (D-G-D-F#-B-D) for Wa'ahila

**C Wahine** (C-G-D-G-B-E) for Hi'ilawe

**A Mauna Loa** (E-A-E-E-F#-C#) for Kilakila 'O Haleakala and Popoki Slack Key

**Standard tuning** (E-A-D-G-B-E) for Ke Kali Nei Au (The Hawaiian Wedding Song)

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## **Mahalo**

The good Lord for giving me the talent and this many years to share it; my wife Elodia and my children; Albert Kawelo and Henry Kapuana; The Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture & the Arts; Lynn Martin; The National Endowment for the Arts; The University of Hawai'i; Ric Trimillios; Jay W. Junker and Hella Kihm; The Smithsonian Institution; The Wai'anae Coast Culture & Arts Society; Mrs. Agnes Cope; Noelani Mahoe; Tradewinds Records; the doctors and staff of Kaiser Moanalua & Kaiser Maili; Gay Tolar; Bank of Hawai'i; Milton Lau and Ka-Hoku Productions; Keith Haugen; Alan Yoshioka at Harry's Music; all the hard working people at Dancing Cat, Windham Hill, BMG and navarre; the City & County of Honolulu; Honolulu City Council; Gabby Pahinui and all the great slack key masters of the past; all my students; all my friends, all my fans...

"You don't have enough pages to list everybody I want to thank. I love everybody and don't you forget it."

## **CREDITS**

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