

Sonny Chillingworth WAIMEA COWBOY (Lehua Records SL-CD 2003)

This album, recorded in 1964 by Sonny Chillingworth (1932-1994), has been one of the most influential Slack Key recordings in Hawaii's history. Born July 14, 1932, the eldest son of Anna K. Purdy and Edwin Bradfield Chillingworth, Slack Key guitar (*ki ho'alu*) master Edwin Bradfield "Sonny" Chillingworth, Jr. has, since 1949, proven himself to be one of the greatest and most influential Slack Key guitarists in Hawaiian music. His eclectic approach spans a wide spectrum of cultural traditions outside of Hawaiian music, incorporating elements of Portuguese fado, Puerto Rican katchi katchi, Mainland country & western and folk, Mexican, ragtime, Blues and a bit of jazz. No matter the style, Sonny keeps his playing 'onipa'a, firmly established, in his love for the people and heritage of Hawai'i. He also possesses a marvelously warm and rich voice, ideally suited for the romantic songs and *paniolo* (Hawaiian cowboy) favorites he loves to sing.

When Sonny passed away on August 24, 1994, Hawai'i newspapers carried the story on their front pages and local television aired footage on the evening news. Hawaiian music radio in the Islands and elsewhere broke into regularly scheduled programs to play Sonny's recordings and broadcast testimonials. Honolulu's mayor even opened Honolulu Hale, the city hall, for a public wake. But the flowers we receive while we're living smell the sweetest, and it's very gratifying to report that Sonny also received abundant attention and affection during his life.

From the beginning of his career, in the early 1950s, Sonny had the respect of the Slack Key community. In the 1960s, club dates and recordings brought him wider recognition, culminating in this classic first album, *WAIMEA COWBOY*, (originally for Mahalo Records). For a while, he was also a member of 'ukulele master Eddie Kamae's very influential group, the Sons of Hawai'i. In the 1970s, Sonny kept busy with his own band and as a member of the Gabby Pahinui Hawaiian Band. He also began sharing Slack Key *mana'o* (knowledge) with students, including George Kuo, Ozzie Kotani and others.

In the 1990s, Sonny received many honors. In 1991, the Second Annual Big Island Slack Key Guitar Festival was held in his honor. For the opening, Kalena Silva composed and chanted a *mele inoa* (name chant) for him. This very traditional Hawaiian tribute touched Sonny deeply. In 1992, the Bank of Hawai'i gave him their Lifetime Achievement Award for Slack Key. In 1993, the Gabby Pahinui and Atta Isaacs Slack Key Festival in Honolulu was dedicated to him. In 1994 the Hawai'i State Legislature presented him with a proclamation acknowledging his many contributions to Hawaiian music. Typically, Sonny received it all with aloha, humility, and a special sweetness that was uniquely his.

Sonny was one of the three most influential Slack Key guitarists in history, along with the late Gabby Pahinui and Leonard Kwan. His original approach to bass patterns, chord voicings, bass runs and vamps made his style easy to identify. Like his close friend and mentor, Gabby Pahinui, he both preserved and extended the tradition, learning from a multitude of sources, adding his own techniques and serving as a guide for generations to come.

Like most Slack Key masters, Sonny came from a large, musical family. "We had great parties in Hawai'i back then," he once said, "and everybody did something; played an instrument, sang or danced." Two aunts played in the old Wahine tunings. Two uncles were particularly influential. Jimmy "Kimo" Chillingworth dazzled Sonny with his flashy approach. Harry Purdy, Jr., a *paniolo* (cowboy) on the famous Parker Ranch, dazzled him in a different way, with the old *paniolo* Slack Key and songs about ranch life. Since Sonny was related to both the prominent Purdy and Linsey families, many famous *paniolo* songs were composed by or about his relatives. "Whenever we'd visit the Big Island, we stayed with both families," he said. "That way you got to hear it all."

Sonny first took up guitar at age twelve while living with his grandfather, Harry Purdy, on Moloka'i. The Moloka'i house had no electricity, but one day Sonny's father, Edwin Bradfield Chillingworth, Sr., brought him a Victrola and some records. One of them was the first ever recording (1946) with Slack Key guitar, *Hi'ilawe* by Gabby Pahinui (reissued on THE HISTORY OF SLACK KEY GUITAR – Hana Ola 24000, a collection of the earliest recorded Slack Key tracks dating from the 1940s and early 1950s). "This is the song that really turned me on to Slack Key," Sonny says.

At fifteen, Sonny visited Honolulu. His mother, Anna Purdy, took him to meet Gabby. "He was playing at a bar and I was underage," says Sonny, "so she went in and got him during a break. He listened to me play and must've liked what he heard because he went back in, got his guitar and came back out. We played all night. That was Gabby."

After high school, Sonny moved to Honolulu, joining Gabby, Andy Cummings and others at clubs, lu'aus and more all-night jam sessions. In 1954, he made his first 78 rpm record, *Make'e 'Ailana*, with the legendary Vickie Ii Rodrigues. For the next forty years he stayed at the forefront of the local music scene. Contemporaries such as singers Myra English, Leinaala Haili and Marlene Sai frequently called Sonny for gigs and recordings. Older artists enjoyed his playing because it reminded them of their roots. "The first time Aunty Alice Namakelua came to see me," Sonny recounts, "she sat right up front and stared. That put fear into me, I'll tell you, but afterward she said my playing brought back memories. And she said she liked my singing because she could hear every word clearly. That really encouraged me."

Sonny's repertoire was always diverse, encompassing Hawaiian standards, original compositions, country, Portuguese, rock oldies, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and R & B. As his many recordings suggest, he was strongly committed to Hawaiian music but enjoyed playing other styles as well.

SONG TITLES:

1. *Makee Ailana* (by James K. I'i) - Vocal
2. *Slack Key #1* (by Sonny Chillingworth) - Instrumental
3. *No Keaha* (by Mary K. Pukui & Maddy Lam) - Vocal
4. *Whee Ha!* (by Sonny Chillingworth) - Instrumental

5. *Moana Chimes* (M.K. Moke) - Vocal
6. *Waimea Cowboy* (by Bill Lincoln) - Vocal

Part 2:

7. *Malasadas* (by Sonny Chillingworth) - Instrumental
8. *Hula Blues* (by Johnny Noble) - Instrumental
9. *Kaula Ii* (traditional; also attributed to Woolsey-Sauer-Chillingworth) - Vocal
10. *Maui Chimes* (traditional) - Instrumental
11. *Hawaiian Lullabye* (by Sonny Chillingworth) - Instrumental

SONG NOTES:

1. *Makee Ailana* (by James I'i) - Vocal

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

One of Sonny's signature songs. The beautiful background vocals are by the composer James K. I'i's great granddaughters (and the great Hawaiian musician Vicki I'i Rodrigues' daughters) Nina Kealiiwahamana Rapozo, Lani Custino and Lahela Rodrigues.

Sonny also previously recorded this song around 1955 (his very first recording), with the Tropic Islanders (with Vicki I'i Rodrigues), and issued on 78-RPM (Island Recording Studio 304-A - out of print) and on the anthology album MELE-HULA (Noelani Records 102 out of print – to be reissued on THE HISTORY OF SLACK KEY 2 on Hana Ola Records). Sonny also recorded it in 1973 with Gabby Pahinui on the album RABBIT ISLAND MUSIC FESTIVAL (Panini Records 1004), with Sonny playing in the same C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D), and Gabby playing 12 string guitar in the C Mauna Loa Tuning (C-G-E-G-A-E).

Sonny also recorded it for a future recording on Dancing Cat Records.

2. *Slack Key #1* (by Sonny Chillingworth) - Instrumental

Tuning: G Major "Taro Patch" (D-G-D-G-B-D)

One of Sonny's best known originals, *Slack Key #1* focuses on three of his signature techniques: soulful slides, fiery bass runs and beautiful chimes, delicate, bell-like overtones produced by lightly touching and releasing the string at certain places on the fretboard, rather than pressing it all the way down.

Sonny also recorded it for his posthumous 1998 album ENDLESSLY (Dancing Cat Records). Slack Key guitarist George Kuo also recorded it in the same tuning on his 1980 album NAHENAHE (Hula Records).

3. **No Keaha** (by Mary K. Pukui & Maddy Lam) - Vocal

Tuning: G Major “Taro Patch” (D-G-D-G-B-D)

Sonny’s great version of the classic Mary Pukui/Maddy Lam song, with background vocals again by the Rodrigues Sisters, Nina Kealiiwahamana Rapozo, Lani Custino and Lahela Rodrigues.

4. **Whee Ha!** (by Sonny Chillingworth) - Instrumental

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

Sonny created this rollicking instrumental to test the mettle of guitarists and their strings. Sonny sometimes credited his friends Baba Lou and Harry Hema for creating parts of the song. Sonny previously recorded it around 1958 on 45-RPM under the title *Whee Ha* (Waikiki Records 45-570 – out of print), and this track was later reissued with the title *Slack Key II* (or *Slack Key*), on the anthology album with various artists HAWAII ALOHA: ECHOES OF OLD HAWAII (Waikiki Records 107 - out of print). He also recorded it as a medley with *Hula Blues* in the 1960s on the anthology album WAIKIKI SINGS (Hula Records 520 – out of print), and on his 1976 album SONNY (Poki Records 9025).

This song was also recorded in the same tuning by Slack Key guitarist Led Kaapana on his 1994 recording LED LIVE: SOLO (Dancing Cat Records), and on his 1983 album LIMA WELA! (Leahi Records; reissued on Shaka Records).

Slack Key guitarist George Kuo also recorded it in the same tuning with the band Hui Aloha on their 1999 recording HUI ALOHA (Dancing Cat Records).

Slack Key guitarist Cyril Pahinui also recorded it in the same tuning with the Peter Moon Band (as a medley with *Opihi Moemoe*, as played by Peter Moon in the G Major Tuning [-D-G-D-G-B-D]), on their 1980 album MAILE (Panini Records).

5. **Moana Chimes** (by M. K. Moke) - Instrumental

Tuning: G Major “Taro Patch” (D-G-D-G-B-D)

A steel guitar standard, *Moana Chimes* is sometimes attributed to steel guitar wizard M.K. Moke, sometimes to Johnny Noble, and sometimes to both. In any case, it makes good use of the harmonics produced by gently touching and releasing the bar at several specific intervals on a string. Slack Key guitarists also enjoy creating this ornament to add a bit of timbric contrast or to end a phrase. Sonny previously recorded it around 1958 on 45-RPM under the title *Moana Pa`ahana Chimes* (Waikiki Records 45-570 – out of print), and this track was later reissued with the title *Slack Key Medley*, on the anthology LP HAWAII ALOHA: ECHOES OF OLD HAWAII (Waikiki Records 107 – out of print). Sonny also recorded it (as a medley with *Pa`ahana*) on his recording posthumous 1998 recording ENDLESSLY (Dancing Cat Records).

Slack Key guitarist Led Kaapana also recorded it as a pure duet with acoustic steel guitarist Bob Brozman on their recording KIKA KILA MEETS KI HO`ALU (Dancing Cat Records).

Slack Key guitarist George Kuo also recorded it as a pure duet with Barney Isaacs on acoustic steel on their recording HAWAIIAN TOUCH.

6. *Waimea Cowboy* (by Bill Lincoln) - Vocal

Tuning: G Major “Taro Patch” (D-G-D-G-B-D)

Also known as *Kilakila Na Roughriders*, this classic Bill Lincoln composition became one of Sonny’s signature songs.

Part 2:

7. *Malasadas* (by Sonny Chillingworth) - Instrumental

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

Malasadas is an instrumental improvisation composed by Sonny in the early 1960s. Around the 1880s, the Portuguese brought the braguinha to Hawai'i, a small fretted lute better known by its Hawaiian name, the 'ukulele. Other Portuguese contributions to Island life include a charming folk dance called the charmarita and that deep-fried pastry favorite, the malasada.

This medley features one of Sonny's favorite Latin-tinged bass pattern rhythms, with the low note played on the first beat, the second note played between the second and third beats, and the third note played between the third and fourth beats. Sonny was the first Slack Key guitarist to record using this bass pattern, and this song was the first one he recorded using it.

Well known for his active promotion of traditional Portuguese music in

Hawai'i, Sonny, contrary to popular belief, is not actually Portuguese. "Lots of people think I am," he says, "and sometimes they're hurt when I tell them I'm not. So what I do, I just don't say anything." Sonny got interested in Portuguese music in 1965 through Walter Thoene, a poker partner of Sonny's uncle Jim. "After that I really got interested in Portuguese music. I especially like the stylings of the fado. I wish I could go to Portugal and learn more."

In addition to Portuguese, Sonny also plays Puerto Rican music, including some pretty mean bongos and congas. "The main reason I love it is for that beat," he says. "I tell you, everybody can be dead at a party and you start up that beat, everybody's jumping and dancing."

Sonny also recorded it in the same tuning as a medley with *Portuguese Folk Song* on his recording SONNY SOLO (Dancing Cat Records)

8. ***Hula Blues*** (by Johnny Noble) - Instrumental

Tuning: G Major "Taro Patch" (D-G-D-G-B-D)

This well-known melody sprung from a collaboration between composers of *hapa-haole* music Sonny Cunha and Johnny Noble, who was one of Territorial Hawaii's most prominent band leaders and publishers. *Hapa haole* refers to songs with English lyrics and Hawaiian melodies; *hapa* means half, and *haole* means foreign. Noble debuted the song in 1920 with his famous dance band at the Moana Hotel. It quickly spread around the Islands and the world, and became a steel guitar standard, and later, especially because of this version, a Slack Key Standard.

Sonny also recorded it for his album ENDLESSLY (Dancing Cat Records). He also recorded it as a medley with *Whee-Ha Swing* in the 1960s on the anthology album WAIKIKI SINGS (Hula Records 520 – out-of-print).

Slack Key guitarist Led Kaapana also recorded it in the Standing Tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E, playing in the key of G), as a pure duet with acoustic steel guitarist Bob Brozman playing in the G Major Tuning on their recording KIKA KILA MEETS KI HO'ALU (Dancing Cat Records).

Slack Key guitarist George Kuo also recorded it as a pure duet with Barney Isaacs on acoustic steel on their recording HAWAIIAN TOUCH.

Slack Key guitarist Cyril Pahinui also recorded it in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E) on his 2007 recording HE'EIA (Dancing Cat Records).

Slack Key guitarist THE OLD WAY (Tradewinds Records 1128 - reissued on CD on Hana Ola Records [HOCD 53000], with the title LEONARD KWAN – SLACK KEY MASTER – THE COMPLETE EARLY RECORDINGS)

9. ***Kaula Ili*** (Traditional; attributed to Woolsey-Sauer-Chillingworth) - Vocal
Tuning: G Major “Taro Patch” (D-G-D-G-B-D)

Also known as *Pu'u Huluhulu* and *Kanaka Leo Nui*, *Hoomau Kau Kau Ko Kaula 'ili* or *Pu'u O Hulu*, this long-time traditional *paniolo* (Hawaiian cowboy) favorite illustrates how traditional songs change as they travel from singer to singer or place to place.

Kaula 'Ili apparently began as an O'ahu *mele pana* (song of place) that speaks of the rains at Ma'ili and the soft winds of Wai'anae. Over time, references to the Parker Ranch on the Big Island filtered in, centering on a handsome *paniolo* with his trusty *kaula 'ili* (lariat), riding over two hills, *Pu'u Kanaka Leo Nui* (Loud-voiced Man Hill) and *Pu'u Huluhulu* (Shaggy Hill). As *paniolo* singer and storyteller Clyde Halema'uma'u Sproat points out, riding over the volcanic soil on the Parker Ranch can be risky; small air pockets can crack, tripping the horse and throwing the rider. Yet, "Oh, never mind, *ke hina pu* (if we fall)," the song says, "*ua hiki no.*"; It's okay. You get up and ride again. "I relate that to my life," says Sonny. "When you're down, when you're sick, you just get up, forget about it and ride again.";

Sonny learned *Kaula 'Ili* from his uncle, Harry Purdy, Jr., a longtime *paniolo* on the Parker Ranch. Like a number of other prominent *ki ho'alu* players, Sonny can trace his lineage back to several generations of Hawaiian cowboys, who were taught by Mexican *vaqueros* (cowboys) to rope and ride and play guitar in the 19th century. Ikuu Purdy, the legendary Hawaiian roughrider who won the 1908 rodeo world championship in Cheyenne, Wyoming, is his granduncle.

The beautiful background vocals are again by the Rodrigues Sisters, Nina Kealiiwahamana Rapozo, Lani Custino and Lahela Rodrigues. Sonny also recorded this song on his 1994 recording SONNY SOLO (Dancing Cat Records).

Slack Key guitarist Moses Kahumoku also recorded it on his 1995 album HO'OKUPU-THE GIFT (Dancing Cat Records)

The Kahumoku Brothers (Slack Key guitarists George & Moses) also recorded it in the same tuning on their 1988 instrumental album SWEET

AND SASSY—HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY STYLINGS, VOL. 1
(Kahumoku Farms Record Company)

Keola Beamer also recorded an instrumental version in the D Wahine Tuning (D-A-D-F#-A-C#) on his 1997 recording WHITE MOUNTAIN JOURNAL (Dancing Cat Records)

10. *Maui Chimes* (Traditional) - Instrumental

Tuning: G Major “Taro Patch” (D-G-D-G-B-D), played in the keys of G and D

A jam session favorite among both steel and Slack Key guitarists of all levels of ability, *Maui Chimes* dates from the late 19th Century, when the steel guitar was in its youth. Appropriately, the melody is derived from a popular children's song of the era, “My Boat is Sailing”. The tune is also known in Hawai'i as *Maui No Ka 'Oi*, with lyrics in praise of the Valley Isle written by Rev. Sam Kapu.

Slack Key guitarist Ray Kane also recorded it in the same tuning on his recording NANAKULI'S RAYMOND KANE (Tradewinds Records 1130 - Reissued with all of Ray's other early tracks on CD on Hana Ola Records HOCD 52000, with the title THE LEGENDARY RAY KANE—OLD STYLE SLACK KEY—THE COMPLETE EARLY RECORDINGS).

Slack Key guitarist Led Kaapana also recorded it in the same tuning as a pure duet with acoustic steel guitarist Bob Brozman on their recording KIKA KILA MEETS KI HO'ALU (Dancing Cat Records).

11. *Hawaiian Lullabye* (by Sonny Chillingworth) - Instrumental

Tuning: G Major “Taro Patch” (D-G-D-G-B-D)

Also based on a tune that Sonny learned from Sonny learned from his uncle, Harry Purdy, Jr.,