

THE LEGENDARY
ATTA ISAACS
INNOVATIVE SLACK KEY MASTER

A reissue of 21 of the most beautiful recordings made by the innovative and influential Slack Key master Atta Isaacs.

Atta was best known for his recordings with the great Slack Key guitarist Gabby Pahinui, for his prolific backup work with many artists, and for his beautiful playing, often jazz influenced, in his C Major Tuning.

Two CD set includes rare photos, performer profile & Slack Key tunings.



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BIOGRAPHY

Leland Kanuumealani 'Atta' Isaacs, Sr., was born August 5, 1929 in Honolulu. Atta's father, Alvin Kaleolani Isaacs (1904-1984) was a prominent bandleader and composer of over 300 songs, including Hawaiian classics such as *Analani E*, *Nalani*, *E Mau*, *Auhea 'Oe*, *Leimomi*, *No Huhu*, and many more. He trained his three musical sons, the great Steel guitarist Barney Isaacs (1924-1996), vocalist and bassist Norman Isaacs (1925-1980), and Atta, from an early age. As Atta's daughter Ku'u Isaacs-Lilo



Atta Isaacs while playing with Lydia Wong and Wainani Kanealii at the Kahala Hilton, 1970s.

recalls, her father started 'ukulele at age four and picked up guitar around age eight. He also learned Steel guitar and bass but is best known as one of the finest Slack Key guitarists in the history of Hawai'i.

In an interview with the Honolulu Skylark on Honolulu radio station KCCN in the early 1980s, Atta said that he started playing Slack Key in what he called Mokihana Tuning, the G Major "Taro Patch" Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D - from the lowest pitched string to the highest), the most popular Slack Key tuning in Hawai'i, and the one that most people begin learning Slack Key in. Like many players at the time, he heard Slack Key mainly at private parties and at home. He added that his wife Winola's family played in the old *nahenahe* [relaxing] style, typified by the recordings of Auntie Alice Namakelua (1892-1987), who played in the oldest Slack Key style ever documented.

When Atta met the great Slack Key guitarist Gabby Pahinui (1921-1980), who had made the first ever Slack Key recordings in 1946, they were co-workers with the City and County of Honolulu Road Division "Road Gang" who happened to be talented musicians and Slack Key artists. Atta had been taking his playing in a different direction from the traditional styles, and

then learned more about Slack Key tunings from Gabby, and felt the need to create his own tuning. As fate would have it they began jamming together and the rest is history.

In the 1950s, Atta created his signature C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E). "Dad realized how inconvenient it was to always have to retune the guitar in the middle of a concert whenever a singer wanted to sing in a different key," says daughter Cheryl Isaacs-Kila. "It became his obsession to find that perfect tuning and fingering that would allow him to play any key. Pops worked on finding his tuning, every night for years. Mom told



Atta's wife, Winola Betty Lee Mokiao Isaacs, 1960s

us, 'After I had fallen asleep, Pops woke me up in the wee hours of the morning. He had been up all night working on it and was so excited. He told me, Mama, I got it-I got it, I finally found the tuning!' He then played it for her, showing her how he had finally found it."

At first Atta tried to play his new tuning at a fast tempo, because the band he played in at the Hawaiian Hut played a lot of fast songs. However, Winola told him to try playing it *nahenahe* [soft and gentle] and to test it by seeing if he could put her to sleep with it.

As Atta's nephew and Slack Key guitarist Wayne Reis says: "Atta's C Tuning opened the doors to a whole new world of Slack Key guitar playing. In most Slack Key tradition, tunings are limited to certain songs that can only be played in certain keys. There are certain ways that songs can be played, where the special sounds that are made in a section of the song can only be enjoyed in that certain tuning. Atta was able to create a tuning that would allow you to play any song in any key and in any tuning, so what he did is not only a tribute to him but also a gift to those who have learned from it."

Atta very often played in keys other than C in his C Major Tuning, especially in the keys of F, G, and D, and sometimes A, and B flat.

He often changed keys within a song, which became one of his signature techniques. Another was his tendency to play jazz chords in Slack Key that were normally played by other guitarists in the Standard Tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E). He would add these rich sounding variations to introductions and endings, which made him especially popular as an accompanist for singers and instrumental soloists. He occasionally, on recordings, also played in the G Major Tuning.

Like his brothers, Atta played the boom-ing local club scene and also stayed quite busy in the studio as a session musician and an arranger for such top artists as Linda Dela Cruz, Charles K. L. Davis, Jerry Byrd, Bill Kaiwa, Marcella Kalua, Melveen Leed, and the legendary Sons of Hawai'i (a position also held by Slack Key guitarists Gabby Pahinui, Sonny Chillingworth, Dennis Kamakahi, and George Kuo). His last recordings



The Isaacs brothers (l-r): Barney on steel guitar, Norman on bass, Atta on guitar (c. 1947).

were on the five albums recorded in the 1970s as a member of the widely popular Gabby Pahinui Hawaiian Band, even singing lead vocals on the local hit *Blue Hawaiian Moonlight*.

When playing with Gabby, Atta tended to play more in the middle range of the guitar, while Gabby often played the high part. This was especially true when Gabby was in C Mauna Loa Tuning (C-G-E-G-A-E), where many of the variations are played on the two highest pitched strings, and played up high on the guitar neck.

Much of this two CD set has tracks reissued from the two albums Atta recorded for the Tradewinds label, founded by Slack Key enthusiast Margaret Williams (1906-1993). Although he had many offers, Atta only recorded two albums of his own. "TWO SLACK KEY GUITARS was my father's first 'solo' album which Gabby lovingly wanted to accompany him on," says Cheryl. His second album, titled ATTA, is fully reissued on this CD. He was also planning a duet album with Cyril Pahinui before his untimely passing.

"My Dad was very humble," says daughter Ku'u. "He let the others take the limelight, he stood back. He was the kind of musician who loved his music and just went out and shared it. He was on so many



The Isaacs brothers and their father (l-r): Norman, Barney, Alvin, and Atta. From the cover of the album 'Alvin Kaleolani Isaacs & Sons' by Lilinoe Records.

albums, but it was like he did it to help others."

"Whenever his friends would ask him to *kokua* [help] for a baby luau or birthday, my father would willingly accept and play for free," Cheryl says. "He knew what it was like to struggle to make ends meet so he was more than willing to give his time and talents."

Atta passed away April 15th, 1983 but is still fondly remembered for his easy-going personality as well as excellent musicianship. "When Dad died, we held his funeral at

the church," says Cheryl, "and all the parking lots were full. Lines of people came through the doors nonstop. Fine woven mats were presented to our mom, entertainers lined up for a chance to perform. I would guess that hundreds if not thousands of people patiently stood in line that night and the following day to pay their respects. Everyone loved him, we didn't know how much or how many, until then."

SONG NOTES

DISC ONE

part one

From the album **ATTA** (originally issued on Tradewinds Records 1126 in 1971).

The musicians on this all-instrumental album are Leland “Atta” Isaacs, Sr. on 12 string Slack Key guitar, Al Ka’ailau on rhythm and lead guitar, Harold Haku’ole on rhythm guitar and arrangements, and Atta’s brother Norman Isaacs on bass. Engineered by Bob Lang at Sounds of Hawaii Studios.

1. Lei Ohaoha

Atta is in the G Major “Taro Patch” Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D, from the lowest pitched string to the highest).

Lei Ohaoha (Perfect Lei) was composed by Princess Likelike (1851-1887), circa the 1880s. Likelike was one of the four composers known as *Na Lani ‘Eha* (The Heavenly Four), along with her sister Queen Lili‘uokalani and her two brothers, King Kalakaua and Prince Leleiohoku. This royal family dominated the local music scene in the late 19th Century with their wonderful compositions. Their songs continue to be popular and deeply treasured, to this day.

This CD has five songs played by Atta in the G Major “Taro Patch” Tuning, one that he did not often record in,

as he usually favored playing in the key of G in the C Major Tuning.

2. Kohala March

Atta is in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), playing in the keys of C and F.

A wonderful arrangement of this classic Hawaiian march. Note the beautiful intro line played in harmony by Atta and Al Ka’ailau in the intro of the song and before the first verse in the key of C.

Marches have been part of Hawaiian music since Prussian musician and bandmaster Heinrich (Henry) Berger (1844-1929) brought them to Hawai‘i when he was hired by King Kamehameha V to start the Royal Hawaiian Band in 1872. While most sources attribute *Kohala March* to Berger, it is uncertain whether he composed the melody or if it is based on two or more traditional melodies that he then arranged together to create this march. As he himself wrote in a journal entry circa 1922: “Composed very little of Hawaiian melodies, arranged all.” Either way, Berger helped preserve hundreds of traditional Hawaiian melodies that might otherwise be lost, by transcribing them into written music and/or including them in arrangements for the Royal Hawaiian Band to perform. He is very much responsible for starting the wonderful tradition of Hawaiian

marches, and they became part of the Slack Key tradition when Gabby Pahinui started recording some of them in 1946.

3. Kokohi-Moani Ke ‘Ala

Atta is in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), playing in the keys of F and C.

Kokohi is an alternate version of Hawai‘i’s most beloved composer Queen Lili‘uokalani’s song *Ka Wai Mapuna* (translated as ‘Bubbling Spring Water’, and also sometimes titled *Lia I Ka Wai Mapuna*). The Queen composed *Ka Wai Mapuna* in Lahaina, Maui in 1876, and it originally had two verses and a chorus. A third verse was later added, and the melody and rhythm slightly changed; that alternate version of the song became known as *Kokohi* (titled for the first word of the chorus, which translates as ‘Restrain’). *Moani Ke ‘Ala* (translated as ‘Wafted Fragrance’ or ‘Wind-borne Fragrance’, and sometimes also known as *Kuhi Au* or *Kui Au*) is a popular love song written in the 1870s by Prince Leleiohoku (1854-1877), which speaks of the cold *Pu‘ulena* wind that blows near Kilauea Crater on the Big Island of Hawai‘i and also of the misty *Tuahine* rain that falls in the Manoa District on the Island of O‘ahu [also see song #15].

Kokohi is played here in the key of F, and in the second verse guitarist

Al Ka’ailau also solos in the key of F in the Standard Tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E) with Atta playing answering phrases, before Atta solos for the whole version of *Moani Ke ‘Ala* in the key of C.

4. Kolopa

Atta is in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), playing in the keys of C and G.

A delightfully *kolohe* (mischievous) song filled with *kaona* (hidden meaning), the title literally translates as ‘Crowbar’ (alluding to the jerking motion a crowbar makes when in use) and the lyrics speak of swaying hips, squeaking sounds, a wrinkled shirt... and much more. Composed by Emma Bush (1892-1944) in the 1920’s, *Kolopa* was first recorded in 1928 by Johnny Noble’s Orchestra with Emma singing the vocal solo (Brunswick Records).

This song starts out in the key of C for the first two verses. Guitarist Al Ka’ailau solos for a verse in the key of G in the Standard Tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E) with Atta playing a subtle second part, and Atta then takes a solo in the key of G featuring harmonics, before modulating back to the key of C.

Note the beautiful melodic jazz type progression at the end. This was one of Atta’s greatest trademarks: the way he used jazz chords and chord

progressions of the type that were normally played by guitarists in the Standard Tuning for his introductions and endings, especially when he accompanied singers.

5. *Na Molokama*

Atta is in the G Major “Taro Patch” Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D).

This song (also sometimes titled *Namolokama* or *Ka Wai A'o Molokama*) was composed by Alfred Alohikea (1884-1936). He was born in Waipi'o Valley on the Big Island of Hawai'i and lived most of his life on Kaua'i. He is a composer of the highest regard, having written a lot of the well-known songs inspired by Kaua'i, such as *Hanohano Hanalei*, *Hanalei Bay*, *Kai Hawanawana*, and *Pua Lilia*. He was also a superb performer and vocalist known for his rich baritone voice, and he was often asked to sing with the Royal Hawaiian Band. He probably composed *Na Molokama* around the early 1900s, and it celebrates the beautiful waterfalls that create part of the stunning backdrop to Hanalei Bay on Kaua'i's North Shore. This song is also sometimes attributed to David Nape (1870-1913).

This is another song played by Atta in the G Major Tuning, featuring a beautiful use of A7th to D7th chords at the end of the verses.

6. *Wiliwili Wai*

Atta is in the G Major “Taro Patch” Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D), playing in the keys of G and C.

Queen Lili'uokalani (1838-1917) wrote this lighthearted song (also known as *Ka Wiliwiliwai* and *Wiliwiliwai*) circa 1890. The title translates as ‘Twisting Water’ and the lyrics describe her bemusement in watching a lawn sprinkler (the first one she had ever seen) twirl around a neighbor's yard.

Here Atta solos in the key of G for the first two verses, and on the third verse guitarist Al Ka'ailau solos in the key of C in the Standard Tuning, playing the low notes on the guitar along with Atta's brother, bassist Norman Isaacs, while Atta provides rhythm guitar, before modulating back to the key of G for Atta's solo.

part two

From the album **ATTA** (originally issued on Tradewinds Records 1126 in 1971).

7. *Nu'a O Ka Palai*

Atta is in the G Major “Taro Patch” Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D), playing in the keys of G and C.

Nu'a O Ka Palai (also known as *Aia I Ka Nu'a Ka Palai*) is another composition by Prince Leleiohoku

(1854-1877). Written circa 1870, it describes how the *palai* (fern) that thickly blankets the ground near Hanalei on the Island of Kaua'i, recalls the warm embrace of a love held dear to one's heart.

Again, here Atta solos in the key of G and guitarist Al Ka'ailau again solos in the key of C in the Standard Tuning in the third verse with Atta providing a subtle second part, before modulating back to the key of C for Atta's solo. Near the end, note the beautiful F chord over a G bass.

8. *Hualalai*

Atta is in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), playing in the keys of C and F.

This song, written by Matilda Kauwe in 1929, pays tribute to the inter-island steam ship Hualalai that was named for the majestic volcano that towers above the Kona coast on the Big Island of Hawai'i. *Hualalai* was first recorded by Johnny Noble (1892-1944), in 1929, with Matilda singing lead vocal (Brunswick Records).

Atta solos for the first two verses in the key of C, and again guitarist Al Ka'ailau solos in the key of C in the Standard Tuning in the third verse, before modulating back to the key of C for Atta's solo.

9. *How'd You Do?*

Atta is in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), playing in the key of F.

This was Atta's best known signature piece, which especially shows his jazz influence, and his love of playing in the key of F in the C Major Tuning. He also recorded it with Gabby Pahinui playing steel guitar in 1975, on the album **THE GABBY PAHINUI HAWAIIAN BAND, VOLUME 2**. Again note the beautiful jazz chords in the introduction and the ending, and throughout this song. This song was composed around 1940 by the great steel guitarist and composer Andy Iona (1902-1966). Andy also composed the steel guitar standard *Sand* in the 1930s, and was a contemporary of Atta's father bandleader Alvin Isaacs. Like Alvin Isaacs, Andy Iona was a multi-talented steel player, bandleader, and composer.

10. *Mele Li'i*

Atta is in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), playing in the key of F.

Another of Atta's jazz influenced interpretations, with his beautiful use of 3/4 time in the first two verses, before going into 4/4 time. Note the distinctive and beautiful jazz chords in the introduction and ending, coinciding with his version of *How'd You Do?*.

Atta again uses beautiful jazz chords in the introduction and towards the end.

11. Ke Anuenue

Atta is in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E).

Atta created this powerful arrangement of the Mary Kawena Pukui (1895-1986) and Maddy K. Lam (1910-1985) beloved composition from the 1950s about rainbows. This classic song is commonly taught to *keiki* (children) in Hawai'i's elementary schools.

It features tenth intervals played on the lowest pitched sixth and fourth strings in the introduction and the ending. He moves the melody up an octave for the fourth, fifth, and sixth verses, and note the beautiful and dissonant gradually descending intervals in the high range on the fifth verse.

12. Sweet Lei Lehua

Atta is in the G Major "Taro Patch" Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D), playing in the keys of G and B flat.

Composed circa 1884 by King David Kalakaua (1836-1891), *Sweet Lei Lehua* is another late 19th Century composition with the lilting quality of the Monarchy Era. Atta plays a beautiful *rubato* introduction, the kind that also influenced Cyril Pahinui's playing. Atta solos in the key of G for two verses, and guitarist Al Ka'ailau solos in the key of B flat

in the Standard Tuning for the third verse with a very subtle second part added by Atta, before returning to the key of G for Atta's solo. Notice the beautiful addition of an A7th chord just before the D7th chords, just before the ending, and notice the beautiful chords when the song modulates from the key of B flat back down to the key of G.

DISC TWO

part three

From the album **HAUOLI** (Sounds of Hawaii 5026).

Group personnel: Atta Isaacs on 6 string Slack Key guitar, Barney Isaacs on steel guitar, unknown vibraphonist (probably Benny Saks), unknown string bassist (probably Norman Isaacs), arrangements credited to Paul Mark. Engineered by Herb Ono at Sounds of Hawaii Studios.

13. Lahainaluna

Atta is in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E).

By the great and influential singer, inter-preter, guitarist, and composer Kuiokalani Lee (1932-1966), who composed many classic songs, including this song, as well as *I'll Remember You*, *Days of My Youth*,

One Paddle Two Paddle, *Ain't No Big Thing*, and *Get On Home*. He recorded one classic album **THE EXTRAORDINARY KUI LEE** (originally on Columbia Records, and reissued on Hana Ola Records), which was released in 1966 just three weeks after he passed on. His compositions (approximately 40 of them, most of which were composed between 1956-1961) and his interpretations of Hawaiian classics were both traditional and contemporary based, and he very much helped pave the way for the Hawaiian Renaissance in the late 1960s and the early 1970s.

Atta plays two beautiful verses, especially accenting his signature index finger strums from the highest pitched first string to the second and third strings, as well as his distinctive sixth intervals. Barney Isaacs then plays a beautiful verse on steel guitar, featuring his signature pull offs, with Atta providing melodic rhythmic backup. Also note Atta's ending riffs.

14. 'Akaka Falls

Atta is in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), playing in the keys of A, D, and C.

Helen Lindsey Parker (1886-1954) composed the lovely *'Akaka Falls* (*Wailele O 'Akaka*) in the early 1900s,

and it has become one of the most famous melodies in Hawaiian music. It honors the beauty of the towering yet gently flowing Big Island *wailele* (waterfall) named in the title, and its misty rain, permeated with the sweet scent of wild ginger blossoms that grow nearby.

Barney Isaacs solos for the first verse on steel guitar in the key of A. Atta then solos for the second verse in the key of D, and notice, when he plays the A7th chord, his use of the open (unfretted) notes on the highest pitched first string (the E note, the 5th) and the third string (the G note, the 7th). Barney solos on the third verse in the key of C with Atta providing melodic riffs in the background. Notice the beautiful chord progressions they use for this version.

Next are three songs featuring Atta Isaacs on 6 string Slack Key guitar with the New Hawaiian Band from their album **THE NEW HAWAIIAN BAND**. The other musicians are Atta's brother Barney Isaacs on steel guitar, Ohta-San on 'ukulele, Jimmy Kaopuiki on bass, and Benny Saks on vibraphone. Produced by Bud Dant. Engineered by Herb Ono at Sounds of Hawaii Studios in 1971 and originally issued in 1975.

15. Maika'i Ka Makani 'O Kohala/ Moani Ke 'Ala (aka Maikai Makani/ Kui Au)

Atta is in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), playing in the keys of C and F.

Maika'i Ka Makani 'O Kohala (which translates as 'Good is the Wind of Kohala' or 'Thirsty Breezes of Kohala', and is also sometimes titled *Maikai Makani* or *Maika'i Makani* or *Ka Inuwai* or *Ka Inu Wai*) was composed in the late 1800s and is attributed to David Nape (1870-1913) and William Sheldon (1858-1912). It honors the remote Kohala district on the Big Island of Hawai'i, known for its parching *Inuwai* winds that blow there steadfastly. In this song, those winds are also a metaphor for endless love. Nape and Sheldon were both members of the Royal Hawaiian Band.

Here, Atta plays a driving arrangement of it in a march tempo for two verses in the keys of C and F, then goes to a verse in the key of C of another arrangement of *Moani Ke 'Ala* (also known as *Kuhi Au* or *Kui Au*), by Prince Leleiohoku (1854-1877) [also see song #3]. Barney Isaacs provides great rhythmic backup on steel guitar on this track.

16. Green Rose Hula

Atta is in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), playing in the keys of C and F.

Made famous by the late great Johnny Kameaaloha Almeida (1897-1985) and composed by Laida Paia (Mrs. James Keoni Willis) who was a member of Almeida's trio, this lilting hula compares the rare beauty of a lover to that of the cherished green rose (which stays in bloom for a very long time). Atta plays two verses in the key of C, and then Barney Isaacs plays two verses in the key of F, before modulating back to the key of C for Atta's soloing.

17. Ke Ka'upu

Atta is in the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E).

Ke Ka'upu (or, 'The Albatross', and sometimes also titled *Keka'upu* and *Kekaupu*), is another wonderful love song penned by Prince Leleiohoku (1854-1877) circa 1897. In it, he compares the peace found in a great love affair with the peaceful soaring of the albatross. Albatross are known for their expert flying abilities, capable of flying long distances. They also mate for life, and are known for their ritualistic courtship dances. There is much *kaona* (hidden meaning) to be found in this joyful song. There are two tunes to this song, the newer one is from the late 1930's.

Barney Isaacs plays an intro *rubato*

verse, before Atta comes in with a rhythmic solo for two verses, with Barney taking the next two verses, and Atta soloing for the next verse, and Barney again for the final verse.

part four

Four songs from the album **TWO SLACK KEY GUITARS** featuring Atta Isaacs and Gabby Pahinui on 6 string Slack Key guitars (originally issued on Tradewinds 1124 in 1969).

The sidemen are Harold Haku'ole and Al Ka'ailau on rhythm guitars, Atta's brother Norman Isaacs on bass, and Atta's father Alvin Kaleolani Isaacs on 'ukulele. Engineered by Bob Lang at Sounds of Hawaii Studios.

18. Waltz Medley: Uluhua Wale Au / Pulupe / Sweet Lei Mamo

Atta Isaacs: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), playing in the keys of G, F, and C. Gabby Pahinui: C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E), playing in the keys of G, F, and C.

A beautiful medley arranged by Atta. Waltzes came into Hawaiian music during the Monarchy era of the late 1800s and continue to revive the elegant qualities of life in the royal court of that era. *Uluhua*

Wale Au (which translates as 'Vexed Am I') was composed circa the late 1890s by Princess Theresa Owana Ka'ohelani La'anui (1860-1944), who was also known as Theresa Cartwright and Theresa Wilcox. The lyrics describe the splendor of the Wai'anae area on the Island of O'ahu. *Pulupe* (whose full title, *Pulupe Nei 'Ili Ke Anu*, translates as 'Drenched Is My Skin'), was written circa the early 1900s (authorship of the song is not known at this time). It is more commonly known as *Beautiful Lanihuli*, named for the highest peak on Oahu's Nu'uuanu *pali* (which translates as 'cliff', and is often used in Hawaiian songs to represent the highest point of a love affair). *Sweet Lei Mamo* honors the exquisite beauty of the safflower, which was given the Hawaiian name *mamo* because its feather-like yellow flowers resemble the feathers of the treasured *mamo bird* (the black Hawaiian honey creeper species, extinct in Hawai'i since the 1880s). Composed circa 1897, this song has most often been attributed to L. Huelani (and some sources also attribute it to Charles Hopkins and William J. Coelho).

Again, notice Atta's beautiful melodic jazz chords at the intro and the more dissonant ones at the end.

19. Noho Au A Kupa

Atta Isaacs: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), playing in the keys of D and C. Gabby Pahinui: C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E), playing in the keys of D and C.

This beautiful ballad (also titled *Ua Noho Au A Kupa*, which translates as “I’ve become accustomed to your face”) was composed in the late 1890s by Edward Nainoa. It has also sometimes been attributed to Emma Bush (1892-1944).

Atta arranged this beautiful sentimental Hawaiian standard, and here

he plays the first two verses in the key of D, soloing on the lower pitched strings for the second verse, before modulating to the more natural key of C for the third and fourth verses. Gabby plays some beautiful harmony notes in the fourth verse. Atta then modulates back to the key of D for the fifth and sixth verses, playing the first half of the verse again on the lower strings, and Gabby again does a beautiful second part in the sixth verse. Atta also sometimes uses distinctive octaves, using the fourth and first strings.

20. Keali’i’s Mele

Atta Isaacs: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E). Gabby Pahinui: C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E).

An original waltz by Atta composed in the 1960s for his youngest son Norman (whose Hawaiian name is *Keali’i*), describing musically the antics of a youngster. Note how the song starts in 4/4 time with a rare example of great driving double-thumbing by Atta before going into 3/4 time, with the thumb playing bass notes on the lower pitched strings on beat one and beat three, and a higher pitched alternating bass note string on beat two and beat four. Notice the beautiful use of the jazz-inspired chord progressions. The song twice briefly modulates to the keys of G and F. Note also the distinctive hammered-on end run, on the notes of the first fret. Cyril Pahinui learned this run from Atta and also sometimes ends songs with it, and Cyril has lovingly perpetuated the jazz influence he got from Atta. Also note the great rapid three-finger rolls at the end with three note jazz type partial chords using voice leading (the gradual changing of chords by changing one note at a time).

21. Ka Ua Noe (The Misty Rain)

Atta Isaacs: G Major “Taro Patch” Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D). Gabby Pahinui: G Wahine Tuning (D-G-D-F#-B-D).

The classic and evocative original duet from the 1960s of six beautiful verses with just the two Slack Key guitars of Atta and Gabby, accompanied by Norman Isaacs on bass. Gabby plays the great riff at the end of the verses, hammering-on from the open F# note on the third string up to the G note, and then playing the open (unfretted) D note on the fourth string, the G note on the third string, the open D note again on the fourth string, and then the E note on the fourth string, giving the feeling of a G6th chord. This is the only time Gabby ever recorded in the G Wahine Tuning.

Gabby takes the lead on the short intro first verse and the second verse, and Atta basically takes the lead on the third verse. Gabby then takes the lead on the fourth verse with a beautiful high sixth interval of F# and high D with vibrato. Atta takes the lead on the fifth verse, and they play the sixth and last verse together. Their beautiful parts and two different tunings interweave throughout the song.



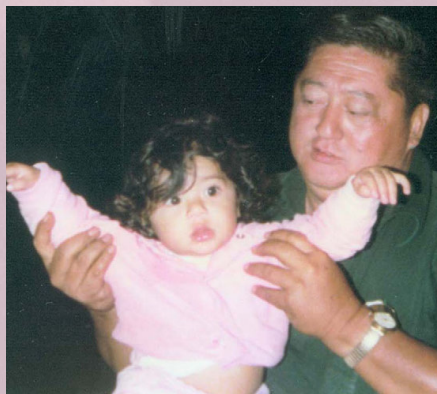
Photograph by Susan Titelman

"Dad always told us that we gotta learn the old style music. All the beautiful songs that were before, that have so much meaning and *kaona* [hidden meanings] in the songs are going to be lost, so go try to perpetuate that. I mean you can play the contemporary side, but you have to bring back the other, otherwise you lose the Hawaiian-ness of the music."

-Barney Kaponi Isaacs
(Atta's son)

"He was one of the best, one of the greatest. He has done so much for Hawai'i. He was one of the best Slack Key guitar players I ever came across in my time. I was so honored to have him play on my album. And I really don't want to say that he is a backup person on my album, he was very much an artist in his own right. He was just phenomenal."

-Bill Kaiwa (vocalist)



Atta and his granddaughter Cheryl Betty Lee Kauioakalani Isaacs on her first birthday in 1978. Cheryl, who had a beautiful loving spirit much like Atta's, passed away in 2005.

"I never heard anyone on the planet play Slack Key the way Atta did, his style was so unique, and it fit perfectly with my dad Gabby's music. When the two of them hooked up with their guitars they didn't speak in words, they just talked with their music - back and forth. And every time when it was Atta's turn to take a solo, the sound just exploded, and my dad absolutely loved it. Atta was a part of what made my life wonderful and he's part of what I'm trying to say through my music, because he was my dad's right hand man, and Sonny Chillingworth was, too."

-Bla Pahinui
(Slack Key guitarist, son of Gabby Pahinui)

"One of the first things everyone noticed about my father was that he would address you as 'Chief', and he would always invite you to come inside and have something to eat. His concern for the well-being and comfort of others was evident wherever he went. He appreciated every person that was under his leadership, his co-workers, his bosses, people that enjoyed his music, and every member of his family. My father's concern for you was genuine, not just for show. He had a good heart and this was the example that I wanted to follow."

-Cheryl Isaacs-Kila (Atta's daughter)

"Those three guys [Gabby Pahinui, Sonny Chillingworth, and Atta] all respected each other but they all had their own style. There was no competition among them. They were always jamming at Gabby's house, and would practice after work and during their breaks, in the tool shed. And other folks, like Joe Gang, or whoever else was rehearsing for their next album, would stop by to practice with them, too."

-Kiki Chillingworth Caminos
(former wife of the late Slack Key guitarist Sonny Chillingworth)

"Atta was a great guitarist. Together with Pops [Gabby] and Sonny [Chillingworth], the best of the best! I learned from just watching them with eyes and ears, no charge. When I play music I always think of my Dad and Atta and Sonny. Whenever I play I'm so thankful for what I learned from them in my younger days and I am just sharing what I learned from them."

-Cyril Pahinui
(Slack Key guitarist, son of Gabby Pahinui)



Atta Isaacs entertains friends and family at his grandson Kealii's first birthday luau in 1978, one of his last family luaus.

"It was a great blessing to watch Uncle Atta play Slack Key. It was so enjoyable, beautiful, uplifting, and special. For those who might not have had an interest in Slack Key before, it made them reconsider, and entertain the idea of how beautiful an instrument the guitar is and how beautiful Slack Key is when presented with a new twist. It made a good song even better just by playing the chords in his tuning, it just gave a whole new feeling to the song - and it was contagious, at least for me it was. I loved it to the point where I became obsessed to learn it on my own and I did."

-Wayne Reis
(Slack Key guitarist, Atta's nephew)



Leland K. 'Atta' Isaacs, Sr. and Winola Betty Lee Mokiao on their wedding day, January 13, 1948.



Atta and Winola Isaacs at the luau that Atta held for Winola's 50th birthday in 1982 (one of his many wonderful family luaus).



The Isaacs family, Christmas 1982.

"Words cannot express how grateful we are that you have taken this time to give merit to and recognize our father, Leland Kanuumealani 'Atta' Isaacs, Sr. Much love and aloha from the children of Atta Isaacs, Sr."

Cheryldeen Isaacs-Kila

credits

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Original sessions of tracks 13 and 14 produced by Sounds of Hawaii, Inc.

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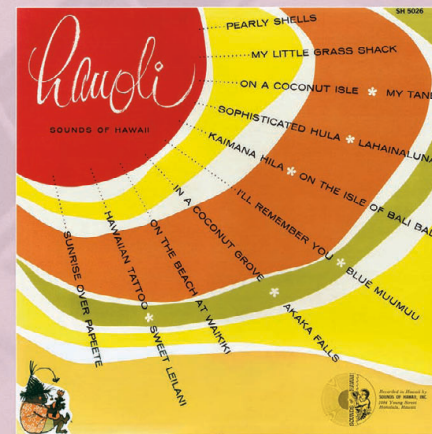
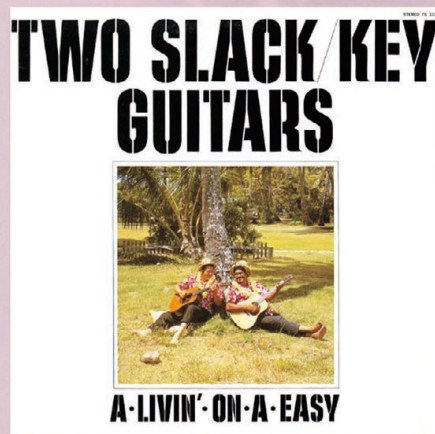
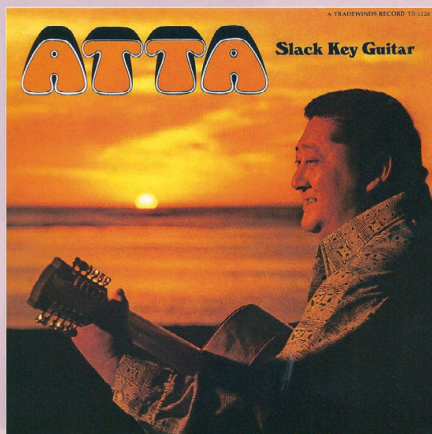
Michael Cord and Noelani Mahoe for making this reissue possible, Atta's wife, the late Winola Betty Lee Mokiao Isaacs, Atta's father, the late Alvin Kaleolani Isaacs, Atta's mother, the late Julita Ah Lan Chung, the late Barney Isaacs, Cookie Isaacs, the late Norman Isaacs, the late Margaret Williams, the late Leland Kalani "Atta Boy" Isaacs, Jr., Illinois Isaacs, Cheryldeen Kauio Kalani Isaacs-Kila & Randy Kila, Barney Kaponi Isaacs, Sr. & Haunani Isaacs, Winola Kuulani Isaacs-Lilo, Harry Keonaona Isaacs, Jamie Kalanikau Isaacs, Maydeen Iwalani Isaacs- Gabriel, Norman Kealii Isaacs, Sr., Lelynn Kukana Isaacs-Iniguez, Wayne Reis, the late Gabby Pahinui, the late Emma Pahinui, Bla & Kathleen Pahinui, Cyril & Chelle Pahinui, Martin & Ruth Pahinui, the late Sonny Chillingworth, Kiki Chillingworth Caminos, Mahina Chillingworth, Dennis & Robin Kamakahi, the late Ray Kane, Elodia Kane, Led & Sharon Kaapana, George Kuo, Ozzie Kotani, Bill Kaiwa, Milton Lau, Jacqueline "Honolulu Skylark" Rosetti, the late Linda Dela Cruz, Harry B. Soria, Jr., Robert Uban Banks, Rusty Week, Randy Lorenzo, Ry Cooder & Susan Titelman, Maryann M. Cord, the late Mayor Frank Fasi, the late Lawrence Brown, the late Witt Shingle, Dorothy Ono, and the late Herb Ono.

Extended and updated liner notes and complete discography available in the "Recordings" section at www.dancingcat.com and at www.cordinternational.com



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