

# The Legendary Leonard Kwan

## The Complete Early Recordings

Original sessions produced by Margaret Williams

Reissue produced by George Winston

Reissue assembly, No Noise engineering, and mastering by Howard Johnston and Justin Lieberman

Disk transfer by Joe Bozzi, at Bernie Grundman Mastering, Hollywood, CA

Disk restoration on Hawaiian Chimes by Robert Parker, Vintage Productions, Sydney, Australia

Photograph of Leonard Kwan for the cover of THE OLD WAY album by Boone Morrison

Sheet music transcription of 'Opihī Moemoe by Leonard Kwan

Liner notes by J.W. Junker, with assistance from Noelani Mahoe and Chris Orrall,

with technical guitar notes added by George Winston

Art Director/Project Manager: Maryann Cord

Design: Parker Graphic Design

Photographs of Leonard Kwan by Eldon Akamine. All other photos courtesy of Leonard's sons Leonard, Jr., Kenneth, and Kevin-Lee Kwan, and family.

The Kwan Family would like to say mahalo nui (special thanks) to:

Ke Akua (God), Leonard's ohana (family), the late Margaret Williams, and Noelani Mahoe of Tradewind Records,


George "Keoki" Winston, Ben Churchill, Howard Johnston, and Dancing Cat Productions, Michael Cord,

and Cord International, Keoki Kuo, and Dennis Ladd.

Also thanks to: Leonard Kwan Jr., Kevin Lee Kwan, Kenneth Kwan, Noelani Mahoe, Harold Haku'ole, Linda Dela Cruz, Chris Orrall, Lydia Ludin, Lea Uehara, Winnie Kurokawa, Dirk Vogel, T. Malcolm Rockwell, Dennis Kamakahi, DeSoto Brown, the late George S. Kanahale, Howard Johnston, Bob Brozman, Michael Cord, George Kuo, Dennis Ladd, Keith Haugen, Mika'e Mike McLellan, Ray & Elodia Kane, Ozzie Kotani, Hawai'i State Library, Bishop Museum Archives, Corrina Burnley, Jennifer Ramsey, Gail Korich, Justin Lieberman, Ron Rigler, Robert Parker, Porter Miller, Milan Bertosa, Harry Soria, Jr., Tony & Robyn Hugar, J.W. Junker, and Eldon Akamine.

For more information, please visit: [www.dancingcat.com](http://www.dancingcat.com)

© We'd like to hear from you!

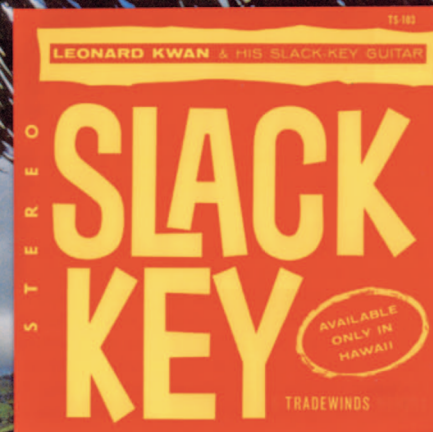
 Cord International

P.O. Box 152, Ventura, CA 93002



Visit our website: [cordinternational.com](http://cordinternational.com)

# The Legendary Leonard Kwan



## The Complete Early Recordings



# The Legendary Leonard Kwan

## The Complete Early Recordings

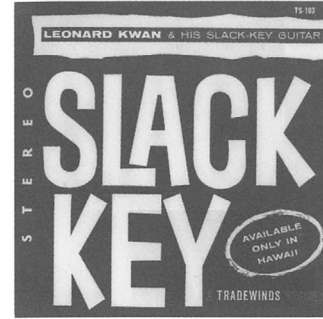
This first CD reissue of the late Leonard Kwan's historic Tradewinds recordings marks an important event for all fans of slack key. Leonard's unique and beautiful style is lovingly represented on these legendary tracks recorded from 1957-1974. This CD includes all of the masterful Tradewinds tracks with Leonard as a leader, plus two songs featuring him as a sideman. His classic 1960 album **SLACK KEY** (the "Red Album"), part of this reissue, was the first ever all-instrumental album of slack key guitar. It influenced and inspired everyone who plays slack key and continues to be the most influential slack key guitar album in history.

"Producing Leonard was the most enjoyable thing I have ever done - both for the music and for who he was personally. He was full of endless delightful surprises. He and his music were one - every note, chord, and musical phrase reflects who he was."  
George Winston

With his recording debut in 1957 on an Island Recording Studio 45 rpm, and especially with these landmark Tradewinds label releases from the 1960s and early 1970s, Leonard Ke'ala Kwan (1931-2000) established himself as one of slack key's most distinctive and influential talents.



According to producer George Winston, Leonard is one of the three most influential slack key players in history, along with Philip "Gabby" Pahinui (1921-1980), and Edwin "Sonny" Chillingworth (1930-1994). All three of these legendary figures were influential for three main reasons. First, each had a very individualistic style and played with great soul and beauty, often in his own set of preferred tunings. Second, their recordings were not only of very high artistic quality but were also among the earliest and most widely distributed slack key albums. Third, while Gabby and Sonny were high profile live performers and Leonard better known as a recording artist, all three were prominently recorded as featured soloists in group settings. This helped establish slack key as an integral part of the typical Hawaiian band. Previously, slack key guitar had been commonly heard at family gatherings, at private parties, and in homes, but was seldom brought into the commercial music world. Now, thanks largely to Gabby, Sonny, and Leonard, it has become a mainstream sound in local Hawaiian music.



### Instruction Book:

#### SLACK KEY INSTRUCTION BOOK

- A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO GUITAR PLAYING THE HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY WAY — By Leonard Kwan and Dennis Ladd  
(Tradewinds Publications)

Available from Elderly Instruments

P.O. Box 14210, Lansing, Michigan, 48901

phone: 517-372-7890; fax: 517-372-5155

email: [webb@elderly.com](mailto:webb@elderly.com) (refer to catalog #92B-2).

Also available from Harry's Music Store  
3457 Wai'ala'e Ave., Honolulu, Hawai'i, 96816  
phone: 808-735-2866; fax: 808-734-2951.



For the full extended version of these notes, go to [www.dancingcat.com](http://www.dancingcat.com), then to the recordings page, then under Leonard Kwan; or to the special Hana Ola Records section

## Selected Leonard Kwan Discography

As A Leader:

### 45-RPM - Hawaiian Chimes

(Island Recording Studio 314 — out-of-print) —

This was Leonard's first recording in approximately 1957

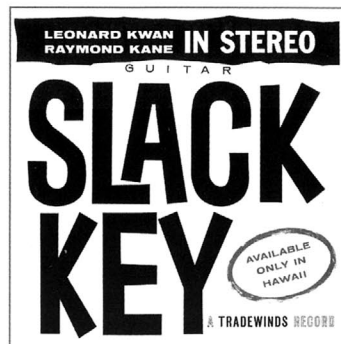
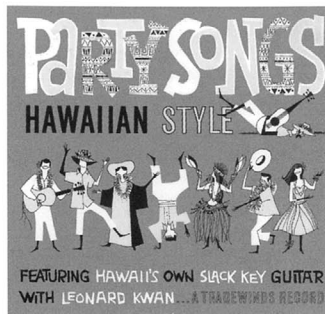
### SLACK KEY (the "Red Album")

(Tradewinds Records 103 — out-of-print) — 1960

### SLACK KEY (the "Black & White Album")

(Tradewinds Records 106 — out-of-print)

Has seven tracks by Leonard Kwan and six tracks  
by slack key guitarist Ray Kane — early 1960s



### THE OLD WAY

(Tradewinds Records 1128 — out-of-print) — 1975

### KE`ALA'S MELE

(Dancing Cat Records 38004) — 1995

### HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY CHRISTMAS

(Dancing Cat Records 38044) — Anthology album with Leonard  
playing a family song, *We Wish You Merry Christmas* - 2000

-Also another Leonard Kwan solo guitar album is planned by  
Dancing Cat Productions.

Leonard also served as a de facto house session slack key guitarist for Tradewinds. In an interview in 1994, Leonard told J.W. Junker that Tradewinds owner Margaret Williams had originally asked his uncle, "Pete" Hau'oli, to record in the late 1950s. When Pete recommended Leonard instead, and loaned him his Gibson F-hole electric guitar (which Leonard made all of his recordings on from the 1950s through the 1970s), a test recording was made which yielded an innovative, very catchy instrumental, without a name. Don McDiarmid, Sr., the great swing era composer and bandleader, named it 'Opihi Moemoe. When released as a 45 rpm single in the late 1950s, it became an instant classic among slack key guitarists. Don also named some of the other original instrumentals that didn't have titles, including 'Opihi Bounce, 'Opihi Momona Nui, and Nahenahe. Margaret Williams then possibly named the remaining two compositions by Leonard, *Pau Pilikia* and *Manini*.



Hawaiian Chimes 45 rpm, 1957

A full album of instrumental tracks, titled SLACK KEY, soon followed in 1960. Known affectionately as the "Red Album", this was the first album in Hawaiian recording history devoted exclusively to slack key instrumentals, and it has influenced and inspired virtually all slack key players since, as much or more than any other slack key album. It established repertoire, techniques, and tunings (five out of the eleven slack key tunings that Leonard used were on that album) that have become standard features in the tradition. It also featured six originals by Leonard, out of the ten songs on the album (there were twelve tracks, but two were repeated), a feat unheard of before or since on an instrumental slack key recording, until Keola Beamer's eight originals on his 2002 album SOLILOQUY (Dancing Cat Records). Gabby Pahinui was the most influential slack key guitarist in history, but Leonard's "Red Album" was the most influential slack key album ever.



NOTE: Hawaiian words include the 'okina (glottal stop) but may not include the kahako (macron).

(For the extended version of these notes, go to [www.dancingcat.com](http://www.dancingcat.com), click on the Recordings page, at the bottom of the page you'll see "Extended Notes for Slack Key Albums on Hana Ola Records & Other Albums", click on Leonard Kwan).

For the full extended version of these notes, go to [www.dancingcat.com](http://www.dancingcat.com), then to the recordings page, then under Leonard Kwan; or to the special Hana Ola Records section

Also according to George Winston, Leonard is honored in slack key circles with two tunings named for him, since he was the one who most prominently recorded in them: the C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D), which is often referred to as “Leonard’s C” or “Leonard’s C Wahine Tuning”; and the F Wahine Tuning (C-F-C-G-C-E), sometimes known as “Leonard’s F” or “Leonard’s F Wahine Tuning” (and he was the first one to ever record in this F Wahine Tuning).



Leonard & Elizabeth, 1953

Leonard’s recordings also impressed guitarists outside of Hawai‘i, including folk musician Pete Seeger, and guitarist Chet Atkins, who heard his golf caddy play Leonard’s *Opihi Moemoe* while in the Islands, and on his return to Nashville recorded his own great take on the song (under the title *Hawaiian Slack Key*), on his 1974 solo guitar album *ALONE* (RCA Records).

Like most slack key masters, Leonard grew up in a musical family. His mother, Rose Hau’oli, sang traditional Hawaiian music. His grandfather, Reverend Ambrose Hau’oli Kaua, directed the choir at the family’s church. Reverend Kaua also played a little slack key, but Leonard’s main teacher was his uncle, Joseph “Pete” Hau’oli. “I started when I was about ten,” he said. By all accounts, Leonard progressed rapidly and soon was playing with his uncle in downtown Honolulu during the boom days of World War II. “I got the chance to play with Genoa Keawe, Andy Cummings, Benny Rogers, all the union guys,” he said. He also studied band at school, picking up alto sax, music theory, and what would be his main instrument for many years, the string bass.

“When I was about sixteen I joined Charlie Kaniyama’s fifteen piece band,” Leonard said. “We played dance music, the popular hits of the day, Hawaiian and pop.” Big band music became one of the influences on his slack key playing: for some of the chord structures (especially the Seventh and Ninth chords), and for the use of push beats (playing just before a downbeat). He was also influenced by the Latin music of the day, most specifically the rhythm of the maracas. He also played with smaller groups, often on string bass, electric bass, rhythm guitar, and slack key guitar. He especially enjoyed playing with slack key great Sonny Chillingworth’s band. “Sonny always encouraged me to play slack key. Compliments from such a great player like that really meant a lot,” Leonard said. As with most slack key guitarists, Leonard also cites Pops Gabby Pahinui as a major influence. “I never did play with Gabby,” Leonard said. “But I like the way he played.”

At the height of the big slack key revival of the 1970s, Tradewinds released a second full album of Leonard’s work in 1975, appropriately titled *THE OLD WAY*. Still using his uncle’s famous Gibson electric, he performed twelve more classics in his inimitable style and created one of slack key’s first instruction manuals, *SLACK KEY INSTRUCTION BOOK*, on Tradewinds Publications (see the discography).

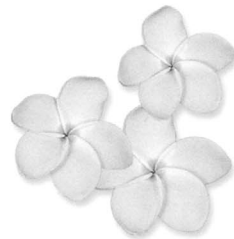
## 28. Noho Paipai (Rocking Chair Hula) (2:25)

Sung by the Kamaha’os Trio (singers Kalona Manning, Kaua Ioane, and Kape Kauhane), and accompanied by Leonard Kwan on slack key guitar, Thomas Kaheiki on bass, and William Kaawa on rhythm guitar. Recorded at SOS Studio by Ted Takase. Leonard is playing in the G Old Mauna Loa Tuning (D-G-D-E-A-D).

One of the best known songs attributed to the Dean of Hawaiian Music, John Kameaaloha Almeida (1897-1985). This classic swing tune from around 1945, also called *Rocking Chair Hula*, is based on a traditional song and celebrates the joys to be had sharing a rocking chair with the one you love.

This song features Leonard’s slack key accompaniment in the old-style Old Mauna Loa Tuning. This tuning features hammered-on notes on *both* the second and third strings, which are both tuned down from the popular G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D, to D-G-D-E-A-D), to achieve this unique sound. Leonard also recorded the song *Old Mauna Loa* in this tuning on his recording *KE’ALA’S MELE* (Dancing Cat Records).

This track was first issued on the late 1950s or early 1960s anthology album *PARTY SONGS HAWAIIAN STYLE, VOLUME 1* (Tradewinds Records 102).



For the full extended version of these notes, go to [www.dancingcat.com](http://www.dancingcat.com), then to the recordings page, then under Leonard Kwan; or to the special Hana Ola Records section



## BONUS TRACKS:

### 26. Po Mahina (3:09)

Sung by the Kamaha'os Trio (singers Kalona Manning, Kaua Ioane, and Kape Kauhane), and accompanied by Leonard Kwan on slack key guitar, Thomas Kaheiki on bass, and William Kaawa on rhythm guitar. Recorded at SOS Studio by Ted Takase. Leonard is in the C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D), played in the keys of G and C.

This Charles E. King classic, composed in 1917, is set under the dazzlingly bright Hawaiian night moon (*Po Mahina*). Leonard plays two introductory verses in the key of C, before the song modulates to the key of G (the opposite of what Leonard does in *Opihi Moemoe* — songs # 2 and # 12). Note the great turnaround phrase that Leonard uses (the same one that he also used in *Nahenahe*, song # 6), at the end of the fourth and tenth verses, as the song modulates from G to C; he also plays it at the end of his featured instrumental break for verse six; and he uses it again at the end of the song. This track was first issued on the late 1950s or early 1960s anthology album *PARTY SONGS HAWAIIAN STYLE, VOLUME 1* (Tradewinds Records 102).



Playing bass with senior citizen's group, 1995

Leonard's unique take on this Hawaiian standard, with music composed by Joseph Lopes and lyrics by Jack Hetzel in 1924, is the only time he recorded in Gabby's F Wahine Tuning (F-C-E-G-C-E), rather than the F Wahine Tuning he normally used (C-F-C-G-C-E - with the sixth, fifth, and fourth strings tuned *lower* than in Gabby's Wahine Tuning). Leonard was only the second guitarist to ever record in Gabby's F Wahine Tuning. For songs played in Leonard's normally used F Wahine Tuning, see *Mi Nei*, song # 15; and *'Akaka Falls/Imi Au la 'Oe*, song # 19.

This song originally appeared on the early 1960s album *SLACK KEY* [the "Black & White Album"] (Tradewinds Records 106), which also featured tracks by slack key guitarist Ray Kane; and this same track also appeared on the album *PARTY SONGS HAWAIIAN STYLE, VOLUME 2* (Tradewinds Records 104). The song also features rhythm guitar by an unknown accompanist, playing in the key of E Flat, in the Standard Tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E).

Health problems and growing family commitments took Leonard out of the limelight in the late 1970s and the 1980s, though his influence continued to grow. In the late 1980s, he began recording his extensive repertoire in the solo format for Dancing Cat Records, the label specializing in slack key recordings which is owned by pianist/guitarist and slack key enthusiast George Winston. "Recording Leonard was the most enjoyable thing I have ever done," says Winston. "Both for the music and for who he was personally. He was full of endless delightful surprises. He and his music were one - every note, chord, and musical phrase reflects who he was." Winston has also produced the reissue of these classic Tradewinds recordings, a long time dream of his.

Tradewinds was an interesting label, founded by Margaret Williams (1906-1993), a Florida native who settled in the Islands with her first husband Cy Williams. Margaret was greatly attracted to the local music scene, especially the musicians who performed in older, traditional styles.



Leonard 1969

In 1958, she decided to begin a record label. While it relied, like the other labels of the time, on musicians playing in Waikiki for its talent pool, Tradewinds crafted a unique sound by recording the music you would hear after hours in the clubs or at private parties. This included the traditional singing of Noelani Mahoe, the rural-inflected vocals of Linda Dela Cruz, the Halekulani Girls (a trio with singers Alice Fredlund, Linda Dela Cruz, and Sybil Andrews), the spectacular *leo ki'eki'e* (falsetto) of Uncle Bill Ali'iloa Lincoln, and others, and it became the main label for *ki ho'alu* (slack key guitar). According to Margaret's second husband, Dr. Robert Tufft, slack key was her chief musical interest. Slack key giants Gabby Pahinui (1921-1980), Atta Isaacs (1929-1983), and Ray Kane (1925- ) all recorded for Tradewinds, but the mainstay was Leonard Kwan.

This album collects, for the first time, all of Leonard Kwan's masterful tracks under his own name for the Tradewinds label and the Island Recording label. They were recorded from 1957-1974, and each track has a timeless quality. Leonard's talent, creativity, humility, delightful smile, sly sense of humor, and aloha shine through as clearly now as then. Though he passed away in 2000, his music continues to delight, expressing an individual style firmly rooted in a deep tradition.

For the full extended version of these notes, go to [www.dancingcat.com](http://www.dancingcat.com), then to the recordings page, then under Leonard Kwan; or to the special Hana Ola Records section

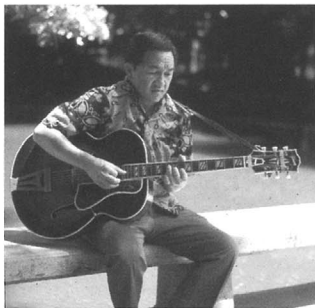
## The songs:

### 1. Hawaiian Chimes (2:51)

B Flat Wahine Tuning (F-Bb-D-F-A-D), from the lowest pitched string to the highest. Originally issued on 45 rpm (Island Recording Studio 45-314-A). Sidemen unknown.

This was Leonard's very rare debut recording, released around 1957, near the end of Hawai'i's days as a Territory. He plays this original composition from the 1950s, in the older and rarely recorded (but not obsolete) B Flat Wahine Tuning.

Its chief characteristic is Leonard's unique way of playing harmonics, which gives the recording its title. For this technique, he touches the strings lightly with his right hand index finger at the natural harmonics found at the fifth, seventh, and twelfth frets (the frets they sound out the loudest and clearest on), while *simultaneously* plucking them with his right hand thumb, a move usually done with two hands. On certain notes, he also hammers on the first fret of the second and fourth strings, after plucking the open (unfretted) harmonic note (a hammer-on means to rapidly fret a note somewhere above the first note played on the string just after it is plucked). This is the first time this unusual and exotic technique was ever recorded in the slack key tradition. He also used it on his 1975 recording *New 'Opihi Moemoe* (song # 14), which is in the same B Flat Wahine Tuning.



Leonard plays great variations for ten verses, telling a story with his musical phrases, as he did so well, before playing the harmonic chimes for the last four verses.

Leonard redid this tune with the title *Ki Ho'alu Chimes* on his 1995 recording *KE'ALA'S MELE* (Dancing Cat Records). There he played it in the related D Wahine Tuning (D-A-D-F# -A-C#- from the lowest pitched string to the highest), which basically uses the same finger positions, except one string up in pitch.

Tracks 2- 11 were originally issued in 1960 on the album *SLACK KEY* [the "Red Album"] (Tradewinds 103). They were produced by Margaret Williams and feature Leonard Kwan on slack key guitar with Noelani Mahoe on 'ukulele, and probably the following sideman:

Napua (Matthew Wright), upright bass; Aina (Mungo Harry Kalahiki,

who recorded the first album that Tradewinds ever issued in the late 1950's, *MUNGO PLAYS UKULELE*), on 'ukulele, and rhythm guitar; Alike (Alex Cash), rhythm guitar; Kaia (Harold Haku'ole), 'ukulele, and rhythm guitar; and Charlie Makua'ole Parker, rhythm guitar.

Tracks 2-13 and 26-28 were recorded in Margaret Williams' living room; or at SOS Studio, recorded by Ted Takase.

Notice Leonard's great runs for the C Sixth and G Ninth chords in the first part of the melody. Both the C Major and the G Seventh chords use the A note to color them, creating C Sixth and G Seventh/ Ninth chords, respectively.

He again ends with his signature turnaround, with the chords of C Major, to F Major, to F minor, and to C Major again.

### 24. Hula Blues (2:48)

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

One of the most popular Hawaiian tunes of the 1920s, Johnny Noble's jazz and ragtime influenced melody, composed in 1920, with English lyrics by Sonny Cunha, spread far and wide, establishing itself as a bandstand and recording studio standard to this day. It has been played more often as an instrumental than as a vocal since the last half of the 20th Century, becoming a favorite with steel guitarists, and later with slack key guitarists.

Leonard here starts the song with a distinctive slide up to the first melody note. He also plays his signature roll on the second measure of the C chords.

Notice that after he plays the F Sixth chord, he goes up to an F# Sixth chord when the melody of the song goes to the E Flat note (rather than playing the E Flat melody note with an F Seventh chord, as is normally done). And again notice his great signature turnaround at the end of the verses. In the choruses, on the G Seventh chord, he plays soulful rolls with powerful octaves, and with the D Seventh chord he plays an octave roll with the open D notes on the first and fourth strings. In the verses after the second chorus, he interestingly doubles the length of each verse; and he ends the song with his signature C Sixth chord.

### 25. Old Mauna Loa (2:34)

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

A traditional type instrumental by Leonard from the 1950s. In the first and fifth verses, for the second chord in the third measure, he substitutes a C chord with a G bass; in all the other verses he uses the normally played D Seventh chord there. Another beautiful story is told here, with the value Leonard gives to each note and phrase, as if each one is sung as words.

The original album liner notes erroneously stated that this song was played in the G Old Mauna Loa Tuning (D-G-D-E-A-D), but it is actually played in the G Wahine Tuning (D-G-D-F# -B-D). Leonard *did* record this song in the G Old Mauna Loa Tuning as a solo guitar piece on his 1995 album *KE'ALA'S MELE* (Dancing Cat Records).



Front L-R: Ke'ala and Pua Kwan  
Middle L-R: Elizabeth Kwan and Beryl Kwan,  
Leonard Jr. and Leonard Sr.  
Back L-R, Sons: Kevin-Lee and Kenneth

For the full extended version of these notes, go to [www.dancingcat.com](http://www.dancingcat.com), then to the recordings page, then under Leonard Kwan; or to the special Hana Ola Records section

It is the genius of the slack key guitarists that they find a way around this type of limitation in the slack key tunings (all tunings, including Standard Tuning, have limitations), and make it sound *right* and *better* to often not be playing the root note of the chords that don't have open bass strings. Slack key guitarists do all this by going with what sounds good, as well as what is possible technically, and by what story they want to tell with the music.

The technique of not using a root note in the bass of the chord (or as in this song, using the bass of the tonic [the key the song is in] for other chords) creates a unique tension, making the chord want to move on to one *with* a root in the bass - which it does here when it goes from the A Seventh chord to the D Seventh chord.

Also note when Leonard starts the song solo for the first verse, his distinct use of the bass notes just at the beginning of each measure, and his distinct phrasings, always telling a story with his music.

## 22. Ke Aloha (2:20)

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

By the revered Hawaiian composers and scholars Lei Collins (1913-1999) and Maddy Lam (1910-1985), composed in the 1950s or earlier, this gentle *mele ho'oiipoipo* (love song) speaks of an alluring flower scent in the evening.

Leonard plays his signature roll for the C Sixth chords on the fourth measure of each verse of the melody, just after the G Seventh chords.

## 23. 'Uhe'uhe (2:39)

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

Also known as "the shouting song", this Charles E. King jazzy party song from 1930 describes a *paniolo* (Hawaiian cowboy) calling "whee ha!" as he lands a prize catch with his fishing pole. This song again shows Leonard's preference of playing partial chords for the ones that don't have open bass notes for the roots.

In the second verse, he plays the melody up an octave higher, showing his penchant for creating variety and variations in an instrumental rendition of a song, similar to the way the words tell the story in a vocal rendition. Also in the second verse, notice Leonard's use of soulful jazzy fifth intervals, another one of the most distinctive sounds on this recording.



With his three sons, L-R: Leonard, Jr., Kenneth and Kevin-Lee

## 2. 'Opihi Moemoe (2:57)

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

Leonard's best known and most recorded composition, which he put together in the 1950s, features a modulation (going between the keys of G and C), and it was the first recorded slack key composition to do so.

It also has three distinct melody sections, and it features a distinctive way of playing the opening melody on the G Major chord in Leonard's two-finger picking style, using his thumb and index finger. He starts it by playing the open (unfretted) G bass note on the fifth string with his thumb, followed by a signature triplet phrase: beginning on the third string open G note played with his index finger, then playing the same G note on the fifth fret of the fourth string with his thumb, and back again to the open G note played on the third string with his index finger. On the answering phrase he plays it in a similar way, with the addition of a fourth G note, played on the fifth fret of the fourth string with his thumb. This playing of the same note on two successive strings gives the first melody a strong drone quality.

On the next chord, the D Seventh, he plays triplets and uses his trademark slide technique, giving the song a marvelous flowing quality. He also plays other beautiful phrases in triplets throughout the song.

The modulation to the key of C is played with an E note bass, on the fourth string, second fret, creating an unresolved tension, which resolves when the song modulates back to the key of G (also see *Sase*, song # 21, for more on this principle).

'Opihi Moemoe became an instant classic when it first appeared on 45 rpm around 1958, and it wound up on jukeboxes throughout Hawai'i, and got radio play as well, expanding its influence. The 45 disc credits the following sidemen: Napua (Matthew Wright), upright bass; Aina (Mungo Harry Kalahiki), 'ukulele; and Alike (Alex Cash), rhythm guitar.

Because Leonard rarely sang, he often used song titles and medleys to express the important Hawaiian poetic value of *kaona*, or deeper hidden meaning. He enjoyed telling stories with his music and associated many of his tunes with very specific narratives along with the *kaona*.



'Opihi Moemoe 45 rpm, late 1950s

For the full extended version of these notes, go to [www.dancingcat.com](http://www.dancingcat.com), then to the recordings page, then under Leonard Kwan; or to the special Hana Ola Records section

An **'opihi** is a limpet, a type of marine mollusk that clings to tidal rocks. **'Opihi Moemoe**, which means the sleeping limpet (shell fish) on the beach, starts off a series of tunes that, for Leonard, celebrate the life cycle. Leonard always enjoyed talking about the kaona of the story within the "Red Album", and it was wonderful to hear him tell it each time, with slight variations, and to see the looks of astonishment and wonderment on the faces of the uninitiated (and even the partially and the fully initiated). Next in the cycle are **'Opihi Bounce** (which is self-explanatory), and **'Opihi Momona Nui** (the big **'opihi**). According to Leonard, the cycle is continued through **Maori Brown Eyes** (for a newborn), **Manini** (the portrait of an energetic child), **Yellow Ginger Lei** (for graduation from high school, a time when people get smothered in leis from all their relatives and friends), and **Silver Threads Among the Gold** (for old age). Often with Leonard, the **kaona** was expressed in unexpected and always delightful subjects (musical and otherwise).



Leonard with stand up bass

### 3. My Yellow Ginger Lei/ E Huli Huli Ho'i Mai (2:35)

G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

This great medley of the John Keawehawaii classic, *My Yellow Ginger Lei*, composed in the 1920s, and combined with the older traditional love song *E Huli Huli Ho'i Mai*, is another slack key standard, thanks to this beautiful and influential recording. Since Leonard's 1960 recording of this, when most slack key guitarists play *My Yellow Ginger Lei*, they put *E Huli Huli Ho'i Mai* with it.

Leonard plays two verses of the first song, then two verses of the second song, and returns to the first song for two more verses. His medleys sometimes used songs that did not have a chorus, so that the second song, in effect, becomes the "chorus" of the first song.

Here he uses the tremolo setting on his amplifier, an effect which was sometimes favored by Leonard and other slack key guitarists.

### 4. 'Opihi Bounce (2:18)

G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

This composition from the 1950s, the second part of Leonard's famous **'opihi** cycle, features a traditional old-style theme, song structure, and arrangement. He plays the main theme in the first, fifth, and the ninth (last) verses, with the other verses featuring variations. On the seventh and eighth verses, notice the use of natural harmonic chimes at the twelfth fret. A staple technique of the slack key tradition, natural harmonics are played by touching a string lightly at (usually) the twelfth, seventh, or fifth frets with the left hand, while picking normally with the right hand; and the harmonics often are used to answer another phrase.



the lovely **'Akaka Falls** in the early 1900s, and it has become one of the most famous melodies in Hawaiian music. It describes a lover's tryst at the Big Island *waialele* (waterfall) in the title. This version features Leonard's trademark two-finger rolls between two strings, playing the main melody.

**'Imi Au la 'Oe** (King's Serenade), another Charles E. King standard, was composed in 1916. The setting of the song takes place a few miles away in the Puna district. The Hawaiian title is often translated as "I search for you." It was featured in the operetta *Prince of Hawai'i* in 1925, and it also appeared in two versions of the film *Bird of Paradise*, in 1932 and in 1951.

Leonard plays one whole verse and chorus of **'Akaka Falls**, then a verse and chorus of **'Imi Au la 'Oe**, before returning to a brief statement of **'Akaka Falls** again.

### 20. 'Opae Tumatuma (2:45)

D Wahine Tuning (D-A-D-F# -A-C#)

Leonard's version of this traditional and obscure song, which is probably about the intense wind (*tumatuma*) that carries the scent of the **'opae** (shrimp), is played in the older D Wahine Tuning, and this is the only known recording of it. Leonard became aware of its name from Noelani Mahoe,

who had heard a friend sing it, and it features Noelani playing the **'ohē hano ihu** (nose flute), an ancient Hawaiian bamboo flute which in the past was usually played to accompany a vocal chanter. It is usually 10 to 21 inches long, has two or three finger holes, and is played by blowing into it with one nostril while the other nostril is pressed closed. It is used today occasionally to enhance the feeling of an old song such as this one. Leonard plays variations an octave higher in verses five and six, which is unusual for this tuning. In the eighth verse he plays intervals in thirds, with the V7 chord (here the A Seventh).

### 21. Sase (2:44)

G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

A traditional flirtatious travelogue by Joseph Kokolia and Solomon Hiram from the 1890s, **Sase** describes the activities of young ladies in various neighborhoods in Honolulu. Noelani Mahoe recorded a charming vocal version in 1963 on the album **FOLK SONGS OF HAWAII** (Tradewinds Records 110), and helped translate the piece with Samuel Elbert for their invaluable book of lyrics of classic Hawaiian songs, **NA MELE O HAWAII** (1970, University of Hawai'i Press).

Leonard's great definitive and soulful instrumental arrangement here starts with solo guitar for the first verse, and then he adds subtle variations to the main melody as the band kicks in for the second verse on. Also notice his distinct use of the partial A Seventh/Ninth chords in the sixth measure of the song, played with the G bass, since the A root note is not available as an open string (he does play the A Seventh chord with the A bass, barring the second fret, in verses four and eight).

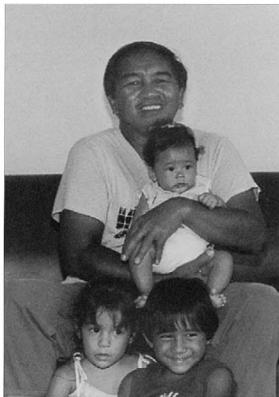
For the full extended version of these notes, go to **www.dancingcat.com**, then to the recordings page, then under Leonard Kwan; or to the special Hana Ola Records section



### 17. Palolo (2:25)

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

Another Charles E. King classic from 1917, this *mele pana* (place song) is about the beauty of the Palolo Valley, a Honolulu neighborhood nestled at the foot of the *Ko'olau* mountain range, and known for its gentle, misty rain and beautiful waterfalls. The *kaona* (hidden meaning) makes it a love song as well. It reflects the influence of ragtime and early jazz, in the use of Dominant Seventh chords with a I-VI7-II7-V7 chord progression (here the C Major, A Seventh, D Seventh, to the G Seventh). Leonard plays partial chords without the root notes for the A Seventh and D Seventh chords, since they are not available on open low bass strings.



Leonard with grandchildren:  
Ke'ala, Pua and Kauanoe 1985

### 19. 'Akaka Falls/Imi Au Ia 'Oe (2:48)

F Wahine Tuning (C-F-C-G-C-E)

A deep and powerful solo guitar recording (a format very rare on records before the Dancing Cat label releases from 1994 forward), Leonard's great medley here combines two beautiful love songs from the early 20th Century. Helen Lindsey Parker (1886-1954) composed

Also note his many variations in three different octave registers. He plays soulful and jazzy high pitched fourth intervals, creating one of the most distinctive sounds on this recording. He plays his signature octave rolls, with the G and F notes, over the G Seventh chord in verse five. Notice his signature D Ninth and G Seventh chords at the end of the verses, and his signature roll on the resolving C Major chord that follows. Leonard also plays this roll for the C Sixth chords on the fourth measure of each verse of the melody, just after the G Seventh chords. He used similar rolls on the C chords in *Ke Aloha* (song # 22), *'Uhe'uhe* (song # 23), and *Hula Blues* (song # 24).

### 18. Grandfather's Clock (2:12)

G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

Leonard's arrangement of a classic 19th Century American song, composed in 1875 by the Connecticut composer Henry Clay Work. Work rose to prominence during the Civil War, and composed songs such as *Kingdom Coming* (Jubilee), and this sentimental gem that uses a pause (when the clock stops). Note Leonard's use again of natural harmonic chimes, played at the twelfth fret to answer the phrases at the end of the choruses and at the end of the verses. The endings of the verses also feature his variations on the main melody.

### 5. 'Opihi Momona Nui (2:25)

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

For his third original composition from the 1950s from his 'opihī cycle, Leonard switches from the G Major "Taro Patch" Tuning to the G Wahine Tuning. Wahine Tunings contain a Major seventh note (here the F#), which gives them their characteristic sound. This open (unfretted) note is also the third of the V chord (here the D Seventh), another characteristic sound of Wahine Tunings.

This song has eleven great verses of variations, and features in the second and third verses an influential technique where Leonard plays a note, then immediately moves to the next fret above on the same string, which is sometimes the same note as the next highest string above that one.

Notice Leonard's great signature run at the end of the seventh verse on the D Seventh chord. Also, in the tenth verse he uses soulful octaves on the first and fourth strings, in the section with the V chord (the D Seventh); these octaves are used much more often by Leonard and others in the C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D), on the V chord (the G Seventh in that tuning — see *Nahenahe*, song # 6).

### 6. Nahenahe (1:53)

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

Although all slack key masters play in a variety of tunings, most have a favorite. Leonard always said that this particularly sweet one was his. To honor him, many slack key guitarists refer to it as "Leonard's C."

A marvelous and unique original composition from the 1950s, combining a bass note, a picking pattern, and lead variations, *Nahenahe* translates as "gentle", "soft", or "relaxing." This performance features a beautiful Latin-tinged bass line, played by the thumb on the open (unfretted) lowest string C note on the first beat; an index finger strum up the strings (in pitch) starting on the beat "one and", and ending on beat two; with the thumb again playing the open third string G note on the beat "two and"; and with the thumb playing the fourth string, fretted on the second fret (the E note), on the beat "three and."



Leonard relaxing, 1979

This track also features Leonard's signature way of playing the bass with his thumb on the sixth or fifth strings, on just the first beat of the measure. Leonard's bass technique here was directly influenced by his playing of the acoustic stand-up (and later the electric) bass.

He finishes each verse with a great signature lick on the G chord, which he also uses in *Po Mahina*, song # 26. Also on the G Seventh chords, he uses the powerful and expressive octaves, played on the fourth and first strings, that are a natural attribute of this tuning.



For the full extended version of these notes, go to [www.dancingcat.com](http://www.dancingcat.com), then to the recordings page, then under Leonard Kwan; or to the special Hana Ola Records section

### 7. Pau Pilikia (3:06)

C Mauna Loa Tuning (C-G-C-G-A-E)

This traditional-based original from the 1950s (which is similar to the song *Ki Ho'alu*, song # 16), translates as “trouble’s end.” Released as Leonard’s second single, it also wound up on jukeboxes throughout Hawai‘i, giving it wider exposure than most slack key recordings of the time. Leonard plays this in an unusual Mauna Loa Tuning, with the fourth string tuned down to C.

Mauna Loa Tunings are usually based on a Major chord, with the two top-pitched strings tuned a fifth interval apart. This way, the two highest pitched thinnest strings in a Mauna Loa Tuning can easily be played in sixth intervals (intervals that in most other tunings are played on the highest pitched first string and the third string; or on the second and fourth strings — since in most other tunings most of the highest four pitched strings are tuned a fourth, a Major third, or a minor third interval apart), producing the recognizably sweet sound that Mauna Loa Tunings bring out.

Leonard here uses the alternating bass (also sometimes called “double-thumbing” in Mainland America, where it has been prominent since the early 1900s), favored by many slack key guitarists, such as Gabby Pahinui and Ray Kane, where the thumb plays a low string on the first and third beats of the measure and a higher string on the second and fourth beats of the measure, while the other fingers play the melody. Leonard here plays soulful slides on the two highest pitched strings, sliding up to the higher notes after the initial note is struck, and sometimes sliding down after a note is struck. Unusually and wonderfully long for a slack key recording from this time period, the first, sixth, and the tenth (last) verses state the main theme, and the other verses feature great variations, again telling a story with instrumental music that Leonard did so well.

The 45 rpm single release of *Pau Pilikia* credits the accompanists as: Mungo (Harry Kalahiki), rhythm guitar; Kaia (Harold Haku'ole), 'ukulele; and Napua (Matthew Wright), upright bass.

For other songs played by Leonard in Mauna Loa Tunings, also see *Maori Brown Eyes* (song # 11), and *Ki Ho'alu* (song # 16).



Pau Pilikia 45 rpm, 1960

### 15. Mi Nei (2:41)

F Wahine Tuning (C-F-C-G-C-E)

One of Hawai‘i’s most famous composers, Charles E. King (1874-1950), composed *Mi Nei*, around 1930 or before, and it a well known standard. It describes a search for love.

Leonard’s beautiful instrumental arrangement here in the F Wahine Tuning (he was the first slack key guitarist to record in this tuning), features his use of the C Seventh chord (here the V7 chord), which is always a strong tonality in the Wahine Tunings.

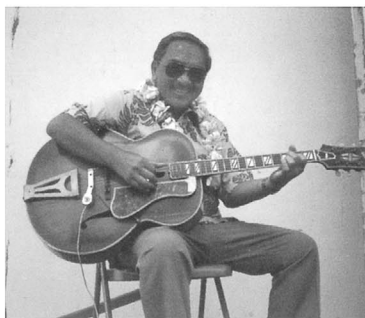
His signature two-finger rolls are featured in the chorus. In the second chorus he plays some soulful and jazzy fourth intervals over the G Seventh chord. Note the partial chords of D Seventh and G Seventh, played without the root note in the bass, since those roots are not available on open (unfretted) strings.

Leonard’s favorite tuning, the C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D), has similar voicings to this F Wahine Tuning (C-F-C-G-C-E), except that everything in the F Wahine Tuning is played one string *up* in pitch.

The background vocals on this song are by Noelani Mahoe and Kekua Fernandes.

### 16. Ki Ho'alu (2:37)

A Mauna Loa Tuning (E-A-E-A-E)



The traditional slack key guitar piece *Ki Ho'alu* (with a similar structure and “double-thumbing” picking pattern to *Pau Pilikia*, song # 7), which translates as “slack key”, features Leonard in this powerful sounding Mauna Loa Tuning, with the third and fourth strings tuned to the same E note (the fifth of the scale). This creates a drone effect for both the tonic (the A Major chord), and the Dominant Seventh chord (the E Seventh chord). The third string also vibrates sympathetically with the fourth string, and he also sometimes plucks the third string simultaneously with the fourth string.

For comparison, on his 1995 recording *KE'ALA'S MELE* (Dancing Cat Records), Leonard redid this song, as a medley with *E Lili'u E*, in the 66th Mauna Loa “*Maori Brown Eyes*” Tuning (D-G-D-E-G-E), one note different from the A Mauna Loa Tuning used here (but tuned down two half steps to the key of G).

For the full extended version of these notes, go to [www.dancingcat.com](http://www.dancingcat.com), then to the recordings page, then under Leonard Kwan; or to the special Hana Ola Records section

*Koni Au I Ka Wai*, by King Kalakaua (1836-1891), probably composed in the 1870s, tells a more exuberant but equally poetic story of love at O'ahu's Waialua Bay. More than a century after its debut, it remains a popular standard with the still-functioning Royal Hawaiian Band, now under the leadership of bandmaster Aaron Mahi.

As its Hawaiian-ized title suggests, *Palisa* moves the setting half way across the world to France's famous city of lights. The song allegedly came in the early 1900s from a youngster in a hospital who was inspired by a silent movie he had seen, and imagined himself in the exotic places mentioned in the song.

Arranging marches has become part of the slack key tradition, and Leonard's beautiful and unique arrangement here is in the older D Wahine Tuning, and is in his trademark style of creating seamless medleys.

Here he plays two verses of each of the three songs. This track originally appeared on the early 1960s Tradewinds album *SLACK KEY* [the "Black & White Album"] (Tradewinds Records 106), and the same track appeared on the early 1960s album *PARTY SONGS HAWAIIAN STYLE, VOLUME 2* (Tradewinds Records 104).

Tracks 14-25 were produced by Margaret Williams and were first released in 1975 on the Tradewinds album *THE OLD WAY*. The musicians are: Leonard Kwan, slack key guitar, with Noelani Mahoe on 'ukulele, background vocals, and *'ohe hano ihu* (nose flute); Kekua Fernandes on bass and background vocals; and Eldon Akamine on rhythm guitar. Recorded by Don Tyler and Bob Lang at Sounds of Hawai'i Studio.

#### 14. New` Opihi Moemoe (2:45)

Bb Wahine Tuning (F-Bb-D-F-A-D), played in the keys of B Flat and E Flat

As mentioned earlier, slack key masters often add variations to their performances. This can lead to new arrangements, some of which, as here, evolve into new compositions. *New`Opihi Moemoe*, composed in the 1960s, was Leonard's first major variation of his most famous song, *'Opihi Moemoe* (songs # 2 and # 12). It is played in the older and rarely recorded (but not obsolete) B Flat Wahine Tuning.

It also features, in three verses, his unique approach to harmonic chimes, a technique that he used in *Hawaiian Chimes* (song # 1). Still composing variations into the 1980s, Leonard crafted a third variation in the G Wahine Tuning (D-G-D-F# -B-D), called *New`Opihi Moemoe # 3*, for his 1995 recording *KE'ALA'S MELE* (Dancing Cat Records).



With Son Kenneth and Granddaughter Pua

#### 8. Kane'ohe (Aloha Ku'u Home Kane'ohe) / Mama E (3:01)

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

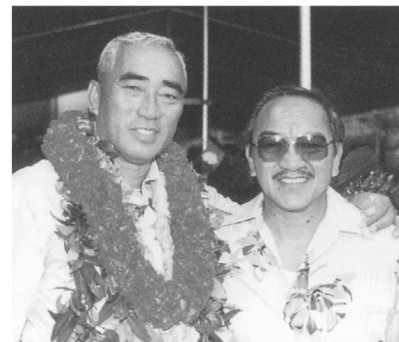
This popular Kwan medley, which has also become the standard way to play these songs in slack key, seamlessly combines two old favorites, neither of which have bridges, so that here *Mama E* functions like a bridge to *Kane'ohe*.

*Kane'ohe* (actually titled *Aloha Ku'u Home Kane'ohe*), composed in the 1930s by Louise Hart Hopkins, honors the greenness and peacefulness of her home in the mountains of the Windward coast on the Island of O'ahu, near the town and district of Kane'ohe. One of the classic versions of *Kane'ohe* that Leonard heard is by Auntie Genoa Keawe, from her 1967 album *GENOA KEAWE SINGS LUAU HULAS* (Hula Records 514).

A *leo ki'eki'e* (falsetto) showcase piece, *Mama E* is a love song composed by Hiram Kaehu, with the original title of *E Mama E* (sometimes it is also called *E Mama Ea* as well), maybe as early as 1913. It tells a story about fishing for excitement at the old race track at the foot of Diamond Head, that lured so many young men away from home in the 1920s. Two of the definitive vocal versions of *Mama E* heard by Leonard are: an early 1950s version by Genoa Keawe for the 49th State label (reissued on the recording *MELE HULA HAWAIIAN STYLE*, on Hana Ola Records); and a 1946 version by Linda Dela Cruz for the Bell label (reissued on the recording *ORIGINAL RECORDINGS FROM HAWAIIAN MUSIC'S GOLDEN AGE*, on Tantalus Records).

Leonard here plays just the four highest pitched strings, leaving the bass notes for the upright bass player, as is common in slack key when playing more jazz influenced songs without open bass strings for those chords. Usually Leonard would play the bass notes for the C and G Major chords in songs like this one, but he doesn't even use those bass notes here. Notice his signature D Ninth chord, influenced by the sounds he heard when playing bass with big bands, and notice his soulful dissonant sliding C chords at the end of each verse as well as his signature C Sixth end chord. Leonard plays three verses of *Kane'ohe*, then two verses of *Mama E*, and reprises with another verse of *Kane'ohe*.

Much of the slack key tradition includes playing classic and traditional Hawaiian songs as instrumentals, such as Leonard does here, as well as often backing up vocals with slack key guitar, and sometimes taking an instrumental break in between the vocal verses.



Leonard with brother, the late Rev. Melvin Kwan 1990

For the full extended version of these notes, go to [www.dancingcat.com](http://www.dancingcat.com), then to the recordings page, then under Leonard Kwan; or to the special Hana Ola Records section

## 9. Manini (1:13)

G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

Another traditional type original by Leonard from the 1950s, this short melody appropriately named *Manini* (a small striped reef Surgeon fish; it is also used to mean “stingy”), provides a showcase for two of slack key’s signature sounds: the hammer-on and pull-off ornaments. A hammer-on is created by putting a finger down somewhere on a string after plucking it in the open position. This creates two pitches, the second a softer tone that rings within the halo of the first.

A pull-off is the reverse, made by plucking a string normally with the right hand, with a left hand finger fretting a note normally on the fretboard, then immediately pulling away the left hand for a second note (sounding either on the open string or with a note fretted somewhere else on the string). Both ornaments are tied aesthetically to *mele kahiko*, the most traditional and ancient known Hawaiian music, which is built entirely around chant and places a high value on sliding between registers, vibrato, and other often subtle vocal manipulations. In the fourth verse, Leonard also features a bass run, one of the sub-traditions of slack key. He also plays natural harmonic chimes on the twelfth fret as an answer to a musical phrase, another prominent technique in the slack key tradition; and he ends the song with the twelfth fret chimes, also commonly done.

## 10. Silver Threads Among the Gold (3:42)

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

Sentimental American parlor songs of the 19th Century traveled the world and certainly found a warm reception in Hawaiian music, serving both as an influence for Hawaiian songs, and as repertoire performed in their original form. Composed in 1873 by Hart Danks and Eben Rexford, this song is a slack key standard, thanks to Leonard’s sweet, gently flowing arrangement. He starts with a beautiful rubato verse, featuring rolls played both up (in pitch) with his thumb and down with his index finger, as well as playing his trademark octaves on the first and fourth strings. He then goes into two verses in tempo, featuring beautiful C Sixth chords, and then, following the D Seventh chord, a great roll up and down in pitch on the G Seventh chord.



## 11. Maori Brown Eyes (2:42)

G6th Mauna Loa Tuning (D-G-D-E-G-D)

This classic *mele ho’opi’opo* (love song), by Claude Malani from the early 1930s, was originally a waltz. One of the earliest recordings of it as a waltz, was by the great steel guitarist Sol Ho’opi’i in 1934. It took on a new life in 4/4 time when Leonard recorded this celebrated and influential version in an unusual and rarely recorded G6th Mauna Loa Tuning, that has become known as “Maori Brown Eyes Tuning”.

For other songs played by Leonard in Mauna Loa Tunings, also see *Pau Pilikia* (song # 7), and *Ki Ho’alu* (song # 16).

## 12. `Opihi Moemoe – (alternate version) (3:04)

G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

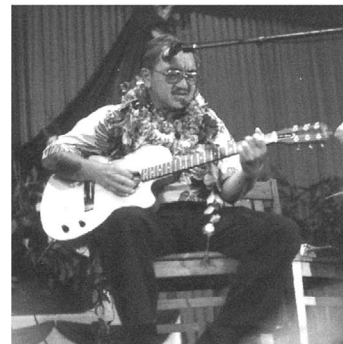
Slack key masters often add variations to each performance, but this alternate take recorded later, stays close to the version heard earlier (song # 2). There are subtle variations, such as the bass run at the end of the next to last verse. This track originally appeared on the early 1960s Tradewinds album *SLACK KEY* [the “Black & White Album”] (Tradewinds Records 106), which also featured tracks by slack key guitarist Ray Kane (all the Leonard tracks from that album have been reissued by Hana Ola Records on this CD, and all the Ray Kane tracks have also been reissued by Hana Ola Records, on the recording *THE LEGENDARY RAY KANE — OLD STYLE SLACK KEY — THE COMPLETE EARLY RECORDINGS*).

## 13. Aia Hiki Mai /Koni Au /Palisa (2:05)

D Wahine Tuning (D-A-D-F#-A-C#), the key of E

In the late 19th Century, marches enjoyed a great vogue in Hawai’i, especially after the 1872 arrival of Prussian bandmaster Heinrich (Henry) Berger (1844-1929). Berger’s fifty plus years leading the official band of the Hawaiian nation had a profound impact on local music, steel guitarists, and slack key guitarists, reflected especially in the first two of these three local favorites:

*Aia Hiki Mai* comes from the pen of Princess Likelike (1851-1887), and describes memories, some flashing in like lightning, others opening slowly like flowering buds.



Big Island Slack Key Festival, 1992