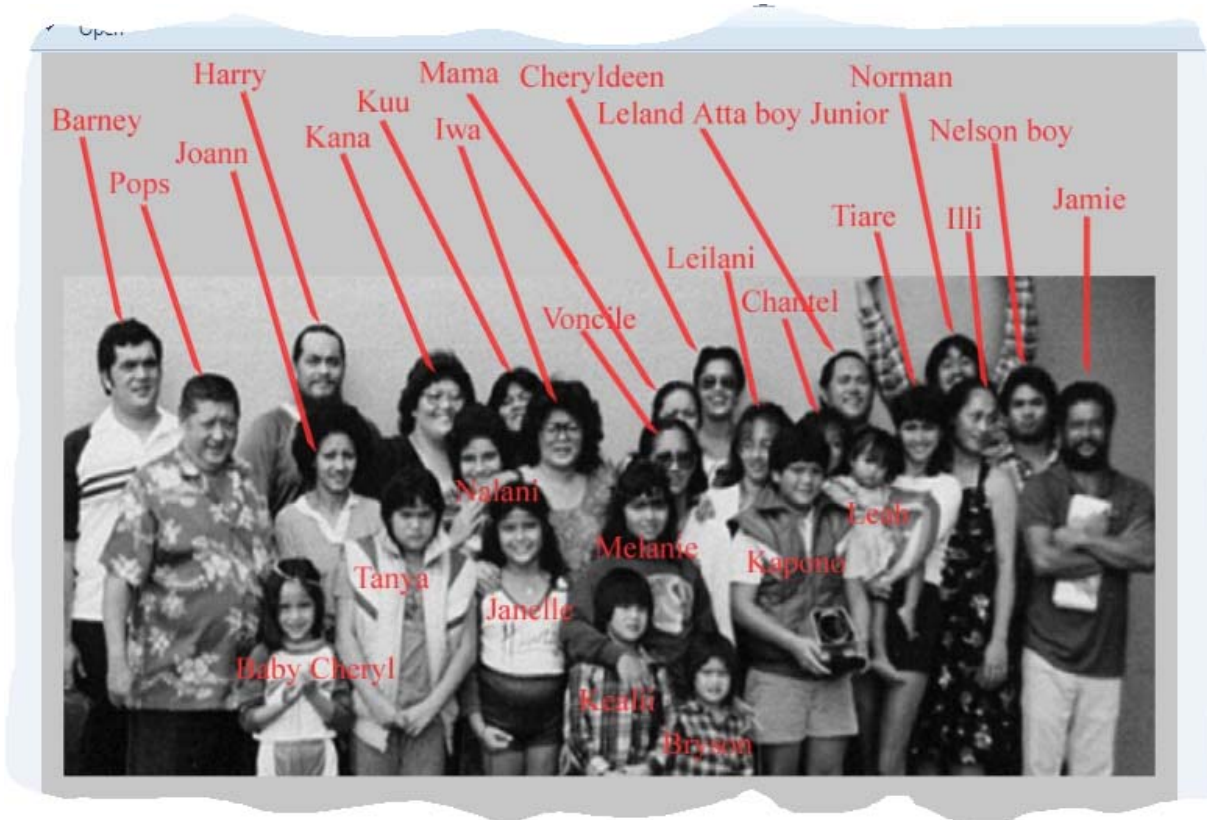


## THE LEGENDARY ATTA ISAACS INNOVATIVE SLACK KEY MASTER



### Annual Christmas Breakfast at Columbia Inn Once on Kapiolani Avenue next to the old Advertiser building

**Back Row up against the wall L to R:** 2<sup>nd</sup> son Barney Kapono Isaacs, 3<sup>rd</sup> son Harry Keonaona Isaacs, 3<sup>rd</sup> daughter Lelynn Kukana Isaacs, 4<sup>th</sup> daughter Winola Kuulani Isaacs, 1<sup>st</sup> daughter Cheryldeen Rebecca Kauikalani Isaacs, 1<sup>st</sup> son Leland Kalani Atta Isaacs Jr, 5<sup>th</sup> son Norman Kealii Isaacs Sr. (hands raised).

**Second Row L to R:** Pops, JoAnn K. Wahinehookae Isaacs, Nalani Anne Isaacs, 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter Maydeen Iwalani Isaacs, Voncile K. Isaacs, Mama-Winola Betty Lee Mokiao Isaacs (face partially visible), Illinois Leilani Isaacs, Chantel Isaacs (hidden between Kapono Jr. and baby Leah), Leah Isaacs, Lydia Tiare Marama Geronimo Isaacs, Illinois Blakemore Isaacs, Nelson Akina Jr, 4<sup>th</sup> son Jamie Kalanikau Isaacs (bearded guy holding newspaper).

**Third row L to R:** Cheryl Betty Lee Kauikalani Isaacs, Tanya H. Isaacs, Janelle K. Isaacs, Melanie K. Isaacs, Barney Kapono Isaacs Jr.

**Fourth row (two boys wearing flannel shirts) L to R:** Norman Kealii Isaacs Jr, Brysan Kainoa Isaacs.

**Parents:** Leland Kalani “Atta” Isaacs Sr. and Winola Betty Lee Mokiao Isaacs

**Eldest to youngest - Children & their families:**

- 1 – Leland Kalani “Atta” Isaacs Jr. and Illinois Blakemore Isaacs
  - Voncile Kuuipo Isaacs
  - Chantel Isaacs
  - Illinois Leilani Isaacs
- 2 – Barney Kapono Isaacs Sr. and Donnalyne Haunani Ah Loy Isaacs (taking picture)
  - Barney Kapono Isaacs Jr.
  - Tanya Hokumalamalamaokalani Isaacs
- 3 – Harry Keonaona Isaacs and JoAnn K. Wahinehookae Isaacs
  - Nalani Anne Isaacs
  - Melanie K. Isaacs
  - Janelle K. Isaacs
  - Cheryl Betty Lee Kauioakalani Isaacs
- 4 – Jamie Kalanikau Isaacs
- 5 – Cheryldeen Rebecca Kauioakalani Isaacs
- 6 – Maydeen Iwalani Isaacs
- 7 – Norman Kealii Isaacs Sr. and Lydia Tiare Marama Geronimo Isaacs
  - Norman Kealii Isaacs Jr.
  - Brysan Kainoa Isaacs
  - Leah Isaacs
- 8 – Lelynn Kukana Isaacs
- 9 – Winola Kuulani Isaacs
- 10 – Nelson Akina Jr. (son of Pops’ youngest sister Nadine Isaacs Akina who had passed away. He was raised with us for a while and will always be our brother.)

Those in this picture who have passed away:

- 1 – Leland Kalani “Atta” Isaacs Sr: August 5, 1929 – April 15, 1983
- 2 – Leland Kalani “Atta” Isaacs Jr: November 24, 1947 – May 1992
- 3 – Winola Betty Lee Mokiao Isaacs: June 30, 1932 – August 10, 1999
- 4 – Cheryl Betty Lee Kauioakalani Isaacs: May 1977 – March 2005

This is 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.

“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 and Atta’s nephew)

“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, 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 and son of Gabby Pahinui)

“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.”

“I love Atta, he’s wonderful, he’s a person that I just stared at him and I would just melt, my eyeballs just open up, his hands were big and his fingers just cut across the whole neck on all the strings and his sound was so clear and clean.”

“Atta was a great guitarist. Together with Pops and Sonny, the best of the best!”

“Growing up and playing music with my father and Atta, there were so many unique moments that I’ll never hear anymore. I miss them so much, but we have to carry on, and thanks to the opportunity they gave us we can.”

- Martin Pahinui (vocalist, Slack Key guitarist, and bassist, and son of Gabby Pahinui)

“He was one of the best, one of the greatest. I was just thrilled that he could play on my album. I thought he was terrific, and just to talk to him was so wonderful. My heart goes out to him and his family. He has done so much for Hawai’i. He was just one of the best Slack Key guitar players I ever came across in my time. Nobody could ever duplicate his music, he was just that good. I played music with Atta and also with his brothers, but Atta was special. I was just so honored to have him play on my album, to have him play for me. And I really don’t want to say that he is a backup person on my album, he was an artist in his own right. He really didn’t need to play for me, he was very much an artist in his own right. He not only played for me but he played for the Sons of Hawai’i and for Gabby [Pahinui] and many others, and he was just phenomenal.” - Bill Kaiwa (vocalist)

“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.”

“But I want to tell you something about that tuning - to make chords, you really have to stretch your guitar. You can do bars with it, too. Pops played jazz in that tuning, too, because one of the guys he admired was Les Paul, and he used to try to sound like him. My mom used to tell us the story that if you were to listen to a record of Les Paul and Mary Ford, and put one curtain up with my Dad playing on the other side, you would think it was Les Paul playing. I guess he would work their songs into his C Tuning.”

- Barney Kapono Isaacs (Slack Key guitarist and Atta's son)

“Pops had a routine. In the morning, I could hear him in the bedroom playing guitar, and when he was done with his day job he would come back home, and after his bath he would wind down by playing guitar, and then go to his night job, playing for Kalo's South Seas Review at the Hawaiian Hut.”

- Haunani Isaacs (Barney Kapono Isaacs' wife)

“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.”

“One of our fondest memories of Dad would be the endless days and nights that he relentlessly practiced his runs and upcoming songs on his guitar. Even when he tuned his guitar it was sweet and melodious. His love for Slack Key is evident in his style and commitment to perfecting his tuning and his endings.”

“There are some who come close to Dad's Slack Key styling but his sound and technique are one of a kind. We still stop in our tracks whenever we hear his music playing on the radio or in stores. Indeed, he has left us a profound and beautiful Legacy!”

“Dad worked for the City and County of Honolulu. He started in the Street Sign department and moved on to the Road Division. He would play music evenings and sometimes weekends, to supplement his income. Throughout the years he performed with Lydia Wong and Wainani Kanealii at Kahala Hilton, Augie Colon and his group at the Queen's Surf, at the 1965 New York World's Fair as part of Teri'i Rua's Polynesian Revue and lead guitarist for Kalo Mataele at the Hawaiian Hut located at the Ala Moana Hotel. There were other groups and concerts that seem to elude me right now.”

“Whenever his friends would ask him to kokua (help out) and play music for a baby luau or birthday, my father would willingly accept and play for free. He knew what it was like to struggle and make ends meet so he was more than willing to give of his time and talents.”

“There are some who come close to Dad's Slack Key styling but his sound and technique

are one of a kind. We still stop in our tracks whenever we hear his music playing on the radio or in stores. Indeed, he has left us a profound and beautiful Legacy!”

“Two Slack Key Guitars was my father’s first “solo” album which Gabby lovingly wanted to accompany him on. I believe that the credits on the back of the album makes mention of it. Gabby and my father have the kind of friendship that few people experience in their lifetime. They were more than mutual friends, as close as brothers no less. This kinship they shared was borne not only by the support they gave each other through personal hardships but also through the musical talent which both men were blessed with and shared between themselves. The mutual respect and reverence they gave each other was extraordinary. Whether playing on stage or at their backyard jams, all it took was a look, a raised eyebrow, or a nod and they knew what the other was thinking and played accordingly. They were connected soul to soul.

Pops (my dad) took an interest in playing the ukulele and guitar from a young age but credited his introduction to Slack Key to my mother’s family after attending a family luau and hearing an aunty play Slack Key live. (He mentions this on the Heritage series recording with Skylark). He was 18 years old when he married my Mom in 1948. She would share with us how Pops loved his music and how Slack Key affected his life. The instant he heard her aunty play Slack Key, he began to ponder and cultivate thoughts of perfecting this beautiful art of playing guitar. He loved the principle of it but felt its mood was a bit ‘morbid’ and slow paced. He also noticed that re-tuning was required when the singers changed the key they wanted to sing in. He instinctively began to search for that perfect tuning. Every waking hour, as soon as he came home from work, was spent tuning and re-tuning, playing various chords to no avail. Time went on and turned into years. But he was persistent and determined to find it. In his search he talked to a close, elderly, family friend who was knowledgeable about music and chords. It was from this meeting that the ‘seed’ was planted that eventually brought forth the creation of that perfect C tuning that would eliminate constant re-tuning and or the need for taking additional pre-tuned guitars onto the stage. This was our mother’s account: “One night Pops was tuning and playing his guitar like every other night. He slacked one of the strings, began playing and shouted, Nola, I got it! I got it! This is the one!” It was just before I was born in 1953 when he ‘found it’. Tweaking the chords and perfecting his craft developed throughout the years that followed. Pops’ quietly guarded his new found tuning and chords until he died. Local guitarists were intrigued by his Slack Key prowess. One even persisted on meeting with Pops to come ‘talk story’. This young man worked with one of my brothers and kept on asking my brother to ‘set him up’ to meet with Pops. Working two jobs daily, my father reluctantly agreed to see this young man one afternoon between jobs. He talked Pops into playing his guitar in a little jam session together on our porch. When they started playing, that young man was too intent on watching Pops’ fingering when holding the various chords. Pops was onto him, stopped playing and excused himself to get ready for work. When he came into the house he told me what had happened and decided not to meet with people of that character. Instead of honestly asking questions outright in seeking knowledge, this person was adamant about taking what my Dad had diligently sought after for years, in a mere few minutes disguised as a casual encounter.

Pops had no formal education in music, couldn't read notes or write music. He played what he felt and heard. Our mom told us that, 'Pops always said that he loves all his children, he loves me as his wife, but his first love will always be his music.' Whenever playing his music and whomever with, he did so with his whole being. He never refused a friend or musician when asked to play for a recording, gig or party. He would always 'kokua' for parties and would not ask for payment.

My father's future was revealed to him by his beloved cousin, Clyde Isaacs, who died in 1952. When my father first found out that Clyde, who was like a brother to him, died in a vehicle accident in Japan, he went into a deep depression. Learning of his state of mind, Clyde's mother, Aunty Josephine gathered pictures of Clyde and came to visit my dad. She presented him with the photographs of Clyde and told him not to be sad. He couldn't understand why Clyde was taken at such a young age of 20. Aunty Josephine comforted my dad and told him Clyde's spirit was standing at his side. 'Clyde said to tell you not to grieve, he is in a good place, and that you (Atta) will live to be a Legend in your own time'. Knowing that Clyde was okay, my father's grief was lightened and facing life was easier. However, he never understood the full extent of Clyde's words 'a Legend in your own time'. Even his success with Slack Key and the development of 'Atta's C Tuning' didn't consume him to the point of arrogance. He has always instilled in us, his children, the fact that 'No matter how good you feel you are, or how great your achievements may be, there is ALWAYS someone better than you. So be humble and always acknowledge the accomplishments of others.' We try to instill this belief in our children.

- Cheryl Isaacs-Kila (Atta's daughter)

"While it is my belief that the development of Atta's tuning is a great accomplishment in its own rite, and while Atta, as humble as he was, was inherently proud of his tuning, it is also my knowledge that his creation of the necessary chord patterns or variations (fingerings) which goes hand in hand with the tuning, is what enabled Atta to play in any key without the need to retune the guitar. His chord fingering is the crowning jewel which makes Atta's tuning achievement so precious. Many artists throughout the world are honored as masters. But to date no one person nor even group of people in history, has ever achieved what Atta had mastered with Slack Key in the short time in which he did.

Whether it was a gift from the creator or just raw talent, I would like to somehow have Atta recognized for his marvelous contribution to Slack Key music. His contribution of creating that tuning and also the required chord patterns or fingering which allows the artist to play in any key without the need to retune, is the holy grail of Slack Key. As elusive as it is for the rest of us, Atta's tuning is the age old quest that Slack Key artists have always dreamt of finding. But now that he has taken it with him, artists again must resume that quest. Atta's historical achievement has come not even once in a lifetime, but only once in history. Even with Atta's tuning at our finger tips today though, we still cannot create the necessary chords which enable the player to change keys at will without the need to retune as Atta had. Listening to the tape, one can hear Atta tune to his tuning, and then play seamlessly, a medley of different songs in various keys without stopping.

This is my humble note to the world with the desire that Atta's light be not lost in obscurity but shown, for all to know of its existence and to remain burning that we may keep the faith with the knowledge that the holy grail is a real possibility and just at our fingertips should we persevere. Now that artists have Atta's tuning, his founding guitar is in perfect tune for us to now kanikapila with, and he will watch us, with the question, as in one of his signature songs titled *How'd You Do?* ”.

– Randy Kila (Cheryl Isaacs-Kila's husband)

“My Dad was very humble. 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 albums, but it was like he did it to help others.”

“Each night, after he came home from his day job with the road gang and before going to his night job of playing for Kalo's South Seas Review at the Hawaiian Hut [in the Ala Moana hotel], Dad would have a bath, a snack, visit my Mom, and then play music until our bedtime. That's how we knew he was home and that's how we fell asleep, listening to his guitar, and when he was gone we missed that.”

“He started playing uke at age 4 and guitar at age 8 [Slack Key??].” When he was four, his sister Anna give him uke, to help keep his mind off things, he had asthma from early age, and from the uke as he got older he started with the guitar and then started learning Slack Key when he was very young. A form of relaxation, calming down.”

“My Mom was from Kaimuki and my Dad was born and raised here in Kalihi. The Isaacs compound was in Kalihi, we were born and raised here.”

“My Dad and Gabby got along very well, Uncle Gabby was funny, they just used to be around each other a lot, we would go to the Pahinui's house and they would come to our house. Our families had a good bond. Sons of Hawai'i didn't work out well for Dad, because he didn't want to sign a contract. He believed music was a gift, and he didn't like folks telling him what to do with it, where to do it, and when to do it.”

“My Dad always told us, ‘You don't have to be out there to prove that you're somebody, just stay in the back helping people. Do things from your heart, that's enough’. That's the reason why he never wanted to sign contracts, because they tell you where and when you can not play - you can't go play for your friends' parties, you can't just go and kokua. If someone asked him to play music for them, he'd say, ‘OK, tell me what time’, he goes, he plays, and he never took any money.

- Ku'u Isaacs-Lilo (Atta's daughter)

“All of us, we try to find our own path, but I remember we always come back to the roots, and that's what Atta's music talks about, ya he has plenty progressive, other musical ideas, but you come back to Hawaiian, a purpose for that, but you always come back to your Hawaiian, but at the same time you want to play other kinds of music, you are versatile, play all kinds and still go back to Slack Key.”

“I can recall that the day after Gabby died, I was performing with the Sons of Hawai’i at our usual place and saw Atta out there in the audience listening to us, and as I watched him I could just see how much he was missing Gabby. Wherever Gabby was Atta would be there, because he was such a great back up man for Gabby, as well as an outstanding soloist. And shortly after, Atta died, and the energy from both of them have to be together now in the after life.”

“I remember he had no ego, he had no ego at all, he was such a down to earth person...so easy to talk to. He sure encouraged a lot of us who were starting to learn how to play into Slack Key, and just watching him and Gabby play was probably the best memory in my career.”

“All of us, we try to find our own path, but I remember we always come back to the roots, and that's what Atta's music talks about, ya he has plenty progressive, other musical ideas, but you come back to Hawaiian, a purpose for that, but you always come back to your Hawaiian, but at same time you want to play other kinds of music, you are versatile, play all kinds and still go back to Slack Key.”

“I used to play with a capo a lot, but Atta had such big hands, and he said ‘You want to see my capo?’ and he showed me his forefinger, he could play just by barring his finger spread [across the strings]. Very versatile.”

“You listen to the recordings of Atta, and you know they are very progressive, how he could translate his musical ideas into that one tuning is amazing in itself. Other Slack Key players like myself have to keep retuning, but Atta could play his tuning in any key - musical ideas were made to include other ideas.”

- Dennis Kamakahi (Slack Key guitarist and composer)

He always made others feel good and was the most humble person. His playing reflected a soft complex style, that he made it look so easy and soothing and interesting.”

“When playing with Gabby, Atta would always be filling in music whenever Gabby took surprise leaves of absence from the stage.”

“I became friends with Atta because after work he would pick-up his son Jamie, who worked at the same Honolulu City & County Board of Water Supply location as me, and Atta & I would talk stories about Slack Key guitar while waiting for Jamie. Then Atta invited me to come to his house to learn from him.”

“His son Barney still works for City and County transportation and his son Jamie works as a Board of Water Supply grounds keeper. When Atta would come by to pick up Jamie, I would talk to him about music and Slack Key guitar. He was just a real great guy to know, he would love to share his music. I would go over to Atta’s place, and he showed me his tuning. He showed me how he played Maori Brown Eyes in his tuning. He learned it from a Samoan guitar player, and he also passed it on to Cyril. Cyril and Atta worked together at the City and County road division.”



“During the day, Gabby worked with Joe Gang and Atta, and they would play music together. That was great – they work together everyday, eat lunch and dinner and then play music together at night.”

“Atta taught me that all kinds of guitar stylings can work, but keep it sounding Hawaiian.”

“He always made sure you had to eat plenty when you go to his place.”

He always made others feel good and was the most humble person. His playing reflected a soft complex style, that he made it look so easy and soothing and interesting.”

“I first met Atta in the early 70s and he was a real kind and humble kind of guy, real regular guy, very soft spoken, of course he had a big family, nine kids. I got to know his father Uncle Alvin, that's how I got to meet Barney. They lived in Kalihi. There were always music parties at Uncle Alvin's...old style family style.”

“Atta played Slack Key very slow traditional style. Atta had his own unique style. Atta's style was different, it was traditional Hawaiian music with jazz, the way Alvin did it. They made up their own style, progressive but still kept their own melody, and still chalangalang.”

- George Kuo (Slack Key guitarist)

“Atta has left a great legacy for us, it's always inspirational to listen to his guitar work on his recordings, it keeps the realization that I'll never stop learning. I really appreciated the kind of mood he created in his work.” “He had wonderful chord voicings in his arrangements and beautiful colors in his chords.”

“Atta always grabbed my attention with his guitar work. It had a thickness to it, his melodic variations were very intriguing and I really appreciated the kind of mood he created in his work. He had wonderful chord voicings in his arrangements and beautiful colors in his chords. He did a lot of inside work in the tunings, he didn't just focus on the melodic strings. He used the lower pitched strings a lot to capture the melodic variations, and he did a lot of triplets. And some of his playing was almost bubbly, there was this wonderful bounce to it. I could always tell when it was Atta playing.”

- Ozzie Kotani (Slack Key guitarist and teacher)

“Those three guys [Gabby Pahinui, Sonny Chillingworth, & 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 where they stored their [road crew] equipment for the night. There was also a kitchen in there, where they could fix snacks to keep them going, so it was an ideal place for them to get together practice. And other folks, like Joe Gang, or whoever else was rehearsing for their next album, would stop by to practice with them, too.”

“Atta first started with the City, then Gabby came in, they both worked for the road crew, they set the cones on the streets and highways. Sonny worked for Parks and Recreation, as a grounds maintenance supervisor. Atta’s sons, and his brother Barney and Barney’s son, always worked for the City, too. At that time, the City hired a lot of entertainers. Mayor Frank Fasi [appreciated Hawaii’s entertainers very much], and took in a lot of them by giving them a position working for the city, because entertainers had no insurance [it wasn’t provided for them by the Musicians Union]. So Mayor Fasi first started them in emergency hire positions, and then he eventually found permanent City jobs for them. He also asked them to be the entertainers at many of The City’s Political, Social, and Cultural functions. I will always have a soft spot in my heart for Mayor Fasi, for all the Aloha he had for Hawaii’s entertainers.”

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

“I guess that low key laid back style, is part of what he inherited from his Dad. Atta had such a great upbringing by his father Alvin, who was a very well known entertainer, and I think that particularly influenced what Atta later became. If you knew Atta’s father Alvin, you’d probably know why Atta was doing what he did. I had the privilege of doing a show with Alvin. He was someone who had done so much in Hawai’i, but he was such a humble man, and his sons (Atta, Barney, and Norman) all kind of mirrored their Dad.

“When I think of someone like Atta Isaacs, the first thing that comes to my mind is that his music reflected his personality. He was kind of a low key guy, kind of a mellow guy, not a showy guy; and the music he played was low key, unobtrusive, and kind of humble. Because he wasn’t a showy guy and wasn’t aggressive, he wasn’t the first guy to hit the stage. He would just wait his turn and let everybody else take the limelight, he just felt comfortable doing what he did. And it kind of struck me with both Gabby and Atta, that both were low key, yet totally enjoyed life.”

- Milton Lau (musician and producer)

## **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, such as *Analani E*, *Nalani*, *E Mau*, *Auhea ‘Oe*, *Leimomi*, *Aloha Nui Ku’upoi*, *Ho’omalimali*, *Nani*, *Taua La*, *Punanani*, *Ho’omanawanui*, *Koula* (aka *Manowaiopuna*), *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 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-D-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 Aunty 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 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. "In the mid '60s it became his obsession to find that perfect tuning and fingering that would allow him to play in any key."

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 in any key. Pops worked on finding his tuning, every night for years. Mom told 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 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 (see the notes for *Lei Ohaoha*, song # 1 below), and he recorded one song in the C Wahine "Gabby's Hi'ilawe" Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E), *Na Tiipaani O Na Tamalii* on

the family album with his father Alvin and with his brothers Barney and Alvin, ALVIN KALEOLANI ISAACS & SONS (Lilinoe Records 101 – out-of-print).

Like his brothers, Atta played the booming 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 ‘ukelele master/ filmmaker Eddie Kamae’s band, 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 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 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, played up high on the guitar neck.

Much of this CD 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 albums, but it was like he did it to help others.”

“Whenever his friends would ask him to *kokua* 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, all of the spaces at Farrington High School were filled, and all street parking was taken. 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.”

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## SONG NOTES:

### PART 1

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 (Atta usually favored playing in the key of G in the C Major Tuning [C-G-E-G-C-E] instead of the G Major Tuning [D-G-D-G-B-D]). In addition to the five included on this CD, Atta recorded in G Major Tuning on seven other songs:

- *Ka Makani Ka'ili Aloha*, and *Kanaka Wai Wai*, backing up 'ukulele player Poki-San (aka Ohta-San), on his album 15 HAWAIIAN FAVORITES (Poki Records)
- *Paliakamoa*, backing up vocalist Melveen Leed, on her album MELVEEN WITH THE BEST OF SLACK KEY (Lehua Records), which also featured the great Slack Key guitarists Gabby Pahinui, Sonny Chillingworth, and Ledward Kaapana)
- *Maui Chimes*, *Kalima Waltz*, *Hanalei Moon* (played in the keys of G and Ab), backing up steel guitarist Jerry Byrd on his album STEEL GUITAR HAWAIIAN STYLE (Lehua Records)
- as well as *Little Drummer Boy* on the Waimanalo Keikis' album MELE KALIKIMAKA (Tradewinds Records).

### 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 verses in the key of C. (Al Ka`ailau also played great harmony parts on Slack Key guitarist Raymond Kane's 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], on the songs *Na Hoa He'e Nalu* and *Keiki Slack Key*).

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 Atta’s dear longtime friend and musical mentor Gabby Pahinui started recording some of them in 1946, and again around 1960.

Atta and Gabby Pahinui also recorded *March Medley: Aia Hiki Mai/Haili Po Ika Lehua*, on their 1969 album TWO SLACK KEY GUITARS (Tradewinds Records 1124), with Atta in his C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), and Gabby in his C Wahine Tuning

(C-G-E-G-B-E – with two strings tuned differently from

Slack Key guitarist Leonard Kwan’s C Wahine Tuning [C-G-D-G-B-D].

Gabby also recorded a march medley called *Slack Key Medley* which included the songs *Kuhio Bay*, *Roselani*, *Henderson’s March*, *Koni Au I Ka Wai*, and *Hui E*, on his album from around 1958, HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY VOLUME 1–WITH GABBY PAHINUI (Waikiki Records 319). Gabby played this in his F Wahine Tuning (F-C-E-G-C-E), which is, interestingly, only one note different from the C Major Tuning that Atta usually used (the lowest pitched F note). Atta may have been inspired to create, or at least to play in the C Major Tuning by hearing Gabby play in the F Wahine Tuning (F-C-E-G-C-E), as well as in Gabby’s C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E). The C Major Tuning combines the concept of the five highest pitched strings of the F Wahine Tuning, with the low C bass of the C Wahine Tuning—in fact, it is only one note different from the C Wahine Tuning (with the second highest pitched string B note tuned up to C), so Atta could also have just decided to change to second string B note, tuning it up to C, from Gabby’s tuning. [*Wahine* means a tuning that is a Major 7th chord, or one with the Major 7th note in it—in a C Tuning it is the B note; in an F Tuning it is the E note.]

When two or more Slack Key guitarists play together, it is common for each of them to use different tunings, to compliment each other’s chord voicings, so very possibly, when Atta Isaacs was playing with Gabby Pahinui, and when Gabby was playing in the C Wahine “Gabby’s Hi’ilawe” Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E), Atta could have wanted to play in a different tuning to compliment Gabby’s playing (as is common with Slack Key guitarists playing together), so he could have tuned the second highest pitched string B note (the Major 7th) up one half step to the C note (the tonic 1st note), to yield the C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E).

Another possibility was that Atta duplicated the four highest pitched strings of the C Major chord in the Standard Tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E), which would be these notes (for the whole chord with the four highest pitched strings underlined): G-C-E-G-C-E (and

Atta would have reversed the pitches of the lowest two pitched strings, to the lowest pitched sixth string having a low C note, and the fifth having a G note). Guitarists might have also tuned the strings to the notes of two other chords in the Standard Tuning: the A Major chord (E-A-E-A-C#-E, and usually tuning it down two half steps to sound in the key of G (D-G-D-G-B-D), to create the “Taro Patch Tuning”, often called “G Major Tuning”; and the E Major Chord (E-B-E-G#-B-E), often tuned down to the key of D (D-A-D-F#-A-D), and often called “Open D Tuning”, or sometimes “E Tuning.”

Atta was the first one to record in this C Major Tuning, and it is commonly called “Atta’s C”.

Arranging marches for guitar is a distinct part of the Slack Key tradition, and twelve other notable examples are:

1. Gabby Pahinui recorded a march medley called *Slack Key Medley* with the songs *Kuhio Bay*, *Roselani*, *Henderson’s March*, *Koni Au I Ka Wai*, and *Hu’i E* in his F Wahine Tuning (F-C-E-G-C-E), on his influential 1960 album, HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY, VOLUME 1–WITH GABBY PAHINUI (Waikiki Records 319).
2. Gabby Pahinui recorded *Nani Wale Lihue* in a march tempo as part of his *Hula Medley*, in his F Wahine Tuning (F-C-E-G-C-E). He recorded it twice: In 1946, reissued on THE HISTORY OF SLACK KEY GUITAR-VINTAGE HAWAIIAN TREASURES, VOLUME 7 (Hana Ola Records 24000), and in 1961 on the album PURE GABBY (Hula Records 567) Sonny Chillingworth also recorded this medley in the C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D) on his album SONNY SOLO (Dancing Cat Records 38005), and Ray Kane also recorded it in 1975 in another C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-E) with the title *Nani Wale Lihu’e / Wai’alae/ Halona (Hula Medley)*, on his album THE LEGENDARY RAY KANE-OLD STYLE SLACK KEY-THE COMPLETE EARLY RECORDINGS (Hana Ola Records HOCD 52000).
3. Gabby Pahinui recorded *Hoi Mai* as part of *Slack Key Medley: Nalani/Akahi Hoi/Hoi Mai* on the album HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY VOLUME 2 – WITH GABBY PAHINUI (Waikiki Records 320).
4. Atta Isaacs recorded *Kohala March* in his C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), on his 1971 album ATTA (Tradewinds Records 1126).
5. Atta Isaacs also recorded *Maikai Makani/ Kui Au* (aka *Ka Makani ‘O Kohala/ Moani Ke Ala* in his C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), with The New Hawaiian Band on their 1975 album THE NEW HAWAIIAN BAND ((Hana Ola Classic Collector Series, Volume 7 HOCD 12000 - formerly released on Trim Records 1975 – [and reissued on this CD).
6. Atta Isaacs recorded *Hilo March* in his C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E) with steel guitarist Jerry Byrd, on Jerry’s album STEEL GUITAR HAWAIIAN STYLE (Lehua Records 7023). This song is played in the keys of E, A, and D and Atta’s solo is in the key of D. This is a rare track featuring Slack Key guitar with acoustic steel guitar.
7. Leonard Kwan also recorded *Aia Hiki Mai/Koni Au/Palisa*, in the D Wahine Tuning (D-A-D-F# -A C#), on the early 1960s Tradewinds album SLACK KEY (also known

as the “Black & White Album”, which also has tracks by Slack Key guitarist Ray Kane, on Tradewinds Records 106) – Leonard’s tracks from that album are reissued on CD on Hana Ola Records HOCD 55000, with the title LEONARD KWAN – SLACK KEY MASTER- THE COMPLETE EARLY RECORDINGS.

8. The Kahumoku Brothers (George and Moses) recorded *Hilo March/Maui Chimes*, in the G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D), on their 1988 album SWEET AND SASSY-HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY STYLINGS, VOL.1 (Kahumoku Farms Record Company KFRC-1010).

9. George Kuo recorded *Wai`alae/Koni Au I Ka Wai*, in the C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D), on his 1996 album HE ALOHA NO NA KUPUNA-LOVE FOR THE ELDERS (Dancing Cat Records 38009).

10. George Kuo also recorded *Hawaiian March Medley: Hilo March/Ainahau/Ka Makani O Kohala*, in the G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D), on his 1981 album NAHENAHE (Hula Records 576).

11. Cyril Pahinui also recorded *Kela Mea Whiffa / Hilo March* in the D Major Tuning (D-A-D-F#-A-D) with acoustic steel guitarist Bob Brozman on their 1999 album Four Hands Sweet and Hot (Dancing Cat Records 38048).

12. Led Kaapana recorded *Hilo March* and *Kohala March* as part of his *Big Island Medley: Hilo March/Kohala March/San Antonio Rose/Yellow Bird*, in the Standard Tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E) - *Hilo March/Kohala March* is played in the key of D (and *San Antonio Rose* is played in the key of G, and *Yellow Bird* is played in the key of C), on his album FOUR STILL PRESSIN’ [with the group I Kona] (Kahale Music 2001).

13. Mika`ele Mike McClellan recorded *Mallonee Slack Key March* in the G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D) on his recording FOUR SOME NEW THINGS ! KI HO’ALU: HE MAU MEA HOU !

### 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 below].

Atta loved to play in keys other than C in his C Major Tuning, especially the key of F, as is played here. He also played often in the keys of G, D, and occasionally A and B flat, in his C Major Tuning. *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 (E-A-D-G-B-E) for his introductions and endings, especially when he accompanied singers, which he was in great demand for. The chords he used in the ending here are: F with an A bass, F minor with an A flat bass, E flat 6th, A Major, D flat Major, G7th, and C Major.

#### 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).

Another song played by Atta in the G Major Tuning, featuring a beautiful use of the II7 chord (here the A7th) to the V7 chord (here the D7th chord) at the end of the verses, similar to the way they are used in *Moani Ke Ala* (with the D7th to the G7th

chords respectively in that song - see the notes for the medley *Kokohi-Moani Ke Ala*, song #3 above).

Slack Key guitarist Cindy Combs also recorded it (with the title *Namolokama*), in the G Sixth Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-E), on her 2007 album *SUNNY RAIN* (Dancing Cat Records). The late great Leinaala Haili also does a beautiful vocal version of it on her album *NO KA OI* (Mahalo Records).

#### 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 (E-A-D-G-B-E), 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.

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## **PART 2**

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 (E-A-D-G-B-E) 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 (also functioning as a G add 9 chord with a suspended 4th).

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 (E-A-D-G-B-E) 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 (Panini Records 1008). Again note the beautiful jazz chords in the introduction and the ending, and throughout this song. The chords in the introduction are: A minor, A flat 7th with an augmented 5th, G minor 7th, to C 13th. The chord progression at the end is: F Major, E flat Major, D flat Major, F# 6th, to F6/9. This song was composed around 1940 by the great steel guitarist and composer Andy Iona (1902-1966), and the lyrics were written by Lew Pollack. Andy also composed the steel guitar standard *Sand* in the 1930s, and was a contemporary of Atta's father, the great composer and bandleader Alvin Kaleolani 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, with the chord progression of: G9th, F#9th, F Major 7th/add 9, G minor 7th, to C7th.

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 *keikis* (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 with the notes A and high E, moving the lower A note down to A flat, G, and then resolving to F# for the D9th chord.

This song was also recorded by Slack Key guitarist Ozzie Kotani, in the C Mauna Loa Tuning (C-G-E-G-A-E), inspired by Atta's version, on Ozzie's 2005 album PAKA UA [RAINDROPS].

## 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 (E-A-D-G-B-E) 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, of: B flat Major, to A flat Major, to G7th, to E flat 7th, to D7th, to the G Major.

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## **PART 3**

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 probably 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, interpreter, 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. Many of his songs, including *Lahainaluna* (aka *Lahaina Luna*) were also recorded by the late great Don Ho, who was a huge fan of Kui and his music.

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 (Atta's brother) 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* (*Waialele 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 *waialele* (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. Note some of the chord progressions they use for this version, such as the chords in the key of D for Atta's solo: with the ii minor 7th chord (E minor 7th), to the V7 chord (the A7th), for the verse; and for the chorus, the IV chord (the G Major), to the flat VII9 (the C9th), to the I Major (the D Major), to the VI7 (the B7th), to the ii minor (the E minor), to the V7 (the A7th), to the I Major (the D7th).

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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. (Other musicians featured on other songs on the original album are Jerry Byrd on steel guitar, as well as Sonny Kamahale and Pua Almeida). 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 above] 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.

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## **PART 4**

Four songs from the album **TWO SLACK KEY GUITARS** featuring Atta Isaacs and Gabby Pahinui both 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: Uluhwa 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. *Uluhwa 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 (her surnames from two different marriages), and who is an ancestor of the vocalist and Slack Key and Steel guitarist Owana Salazar. 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'uauu *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, which has been 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. The chord progression he used in the introduction of the medley (for the beginning of the first song, *Uluhwa Wale Au*) is: A minor 7th with G bass, to A minor 7th, to D minor add 9, to D flat Major, to D Major, to D13th, and then to G Major. The chord progression at the end of the medley (for the end of the last song, *Sweet Lei Mamo*) is: G7th, to G7th with augmented 5th, to G7th again, to G7th with flatted 5th, to B7th with augmented 5th, to E flat 7th with augmented 9th, and then ending on C6/9. He also changes keys in this medley - a different key for each of the three songs (G Major for *Uluhwa Wale Au*, F Major for *Pulupe*, and C Major for *Sweet Lei Mamo*), which is another signature trademark of his.

## **19. *Noho Au A Kupa***

Atta Issacs: 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 in his C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), which are tuned to an E note an octave apart. Other Slack Key guitarists have also played this song in another C tuning, the C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D), where the fourth and first strings are also tuned an octave apart, but to a D note.

Slack Key guitarist Ray Kane also recorded a vocal version playing in the G Major “Taro Patch” Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D) with the title *Ua Noho Au Akupa*, on his album PUNAHOLE (Dancing Cat Records). It also recorded by Slack Key guitarist Cindy Combs, with the title *Ua Noho Au A Kupa*, in C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-E), on her 2007 album SUNNY RAIN (Dancing Cat Records)

## **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. Note the beautiful use of the jazz-inspired chord progression of: C Major, to D minor, to G Major, to C Major, to F Major, to C Major, to A7th, to B flat 7th, to A7th, to D minor, G7th, and again C Major. 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). The chord progression at the end is: D9th with an F# bass, to D9th with an augmented 5th and an F# bass, to G13th with an F bass, to D9th with an augmented 5th and an F# bass, to G6th, to F6th, to F Major, to G Major with a D bass, to F Major with a C bass, to G Major with a B bass, to F Major with an A bass, to G6th, to F6th, to D flat 6/9, and then to C Major add 9.

Slack Key guitarist Danny Carvalho also recorded a version, inspired by Atta, also in the C Major Tuning, on his 2006 album SLACK KEY JOURNEY-ON MY WAY (Lava Rock Music LRM-001).

### **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 subtle 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.

Slack Key guitarist Ozzie Kotani also recorded a version of this piece on two guitars, both in the G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D), on his 1988 out-of-print recording CLASSICAL SLACK, as well as on his recording HO’IHA (RESPECT) – TRADITIONAL HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY GUITAR.

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Original sessions of tracks 1-12 and 18-21 produced by Margaret Williams.

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

Original sessions of tracks 15-17 produced by Bud Dant.

Reissue produced by George Winston

Reissue engineering and audio restoration by Howard Johnston

Disk transfer for songs 1-14 and 18-21 by Joe Bozzi, at Bernie Grundman Mastering, Hollywood, CA

Digital remastering on songs 14-17 by John Golden at K-Disk, Hollywood, CA

Mastered by Bernie Grundman at Bernie Grundman Mastering, Hollywood, CA

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"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

## **SELECTED ATTA ISAACS DISCOGRAPHY**

### **As a Leader:**

TWO SLACK KEY GUITARS (Tradewinds Records 1124) – Approximately 1969

ATTA (Tradewinds Records 1126) – Approximately 1971

### **With the Gabby Pahinui Hawaiian Band**

Atta is featured playing many of the instrumental solo breaks between the vocal verses. The band also features Slack Key guitarists Sonny Chillingworth, Cyril Pahinui and Bla Pahinui, and others.

GABBY [often called “the Brown Album”] (Panini Records 1002) - Especially on the songs *Ka Moa`e*, *Lei Ohu*, and *Luau Hula* - 1972

THE RABBIT ISLAND MUSIC FESTIVAL (Panini Records 1004) - Especially on the songs *Pua Maemae* and *Kaua`i Beauty* - 1973

THE GABBY PAHINUI HAWAIIAN BAND, VOLUME 1 (Panini Records 1007) - Especially on the songs *Aloha Ka Manini*, *Ka Moana Nui*, *Moani Ke`ala*, and *Wahini`Ui* - 1975

THE GABBY PAHINUI HAWAIIAN BAND, VOLUME 2 (Panini Records 1008) - Especially on the songs *How`d Ya Do*, *Po Mahina*, and *Pua Kukui* – 1977

THE WAIMEA MUSIC FESTIVAL (Panini Records 1006) - Includes five tracks by **The Gabby Pahinui Hawaiian Band**, as well as other artists - 1974 - *Also see* Various Artists, section 46, #2.

- You can see Atta playing with the Gabby band in the film GABBY PAHINUI, FAMILY & FRIENDS/ THE PAHINUI BROTHERS (Private Music/ Panini 5103-3)

- Video documentary from 1980 on **Gabby Pahinui**; and **The Pahinui Brothers** (Cyril, Bla, & Martin Pahinui), from 1992 - Available from Panini Records, or at [www.mele.com](http://www.mele.com)

#### **Backing Up Other Artists:**

HAUOLI (Sounds of Hawaii 5026 – out-of-print) – Especially on the songs *Akaka Falls* and *Lahaina Luna*.

THE NEW HAWAIIAN BAND (Hana Ola Records – Classic Collector Series Volume 7 12000, originally issued on Trim Records 1975) – Especially on the songs *Green Rose Hula*, *Haole Hula*, *Kekaupu (Love Song)*, *Lei Aloha*, and *2 Song Medley: Makikai Makani/Kui Au*.

ALVIN KALEOLANI ISAACS & SONS (Lilinoe Records 101 – out-of-print) – Especially on the songs *Ke Kumuhana Nui* and *Na Tiipaani O Na Tamalii*.

THIS IS EDDIE KAMAE & THE SONS OF HAWAII (Hula 513) – 1966 – Especially on the songs *`Opae E*, *Beautiful Ke Ala*, *Ko Hanu Ka`u E Li`a Nei*, and *Ua Noho Au A Kupa*.

MAILE SERENADERS [THE SONS OF HAWAII]: HAWAII`S FAVORITE SLACK KEY & STEEL GUITAR INSTRUMENTALS VOLUME I (formerly titled KANI KA PILA VOLUME I – Hula Records 517) – Especially on the songs *Alekoki*, *Hanohano Hanalei*, *Hi`ilawe*, *Kona Hema*, *Kona Kai `Opua*, *Nani Ko`olau*, and *Ula No Weo*. (sometimes Gabby Pahinui is erroneously credited with being the Slack Key guitarist on this album - Gabby is featured on volume 2 of this group).

MELVEEN LEED: MELVEEN WITH THE BEST OF SLACK KEY (Lehua 7046) – Atta is featured on the songs *Nanea Kou Maka*, *Paliakamoa*, and *Pauoa Liko Ka Lehua* (also featured are Slack Key guitarists Gabby Pahinui, Sonny Chillingworth, and Ledward Kaapana).

BILL KAIWA SINGS AT MAUNALAHILAH! (Hula Records 519) – with the Sons of Hawaii - Especially on the songs *Ka`iunalani*, *Kawiliwili Iho Au*, *Maunalahilahi*, *Pelekani*, and *Wahine Hele La*.

JERRY BYRD: STEEL GUITAR HAWAIIAN STYLE (Lehua Records 7023) – Especially on the songs *Hanalei Moon*, *Hilo March*, and *Pa`au`au Waltz*.

CHARLES K.L. DAVIS AT HOME (Hula Records 532) – Especially on the songs *`Ainamalu*, *`Ekolu Mea Nui*, and *Paoakalani*.

LINDA DELA CRUZ: KUHIO BEACH GIRL (Tradewinds Records 1123 – out-of-print) – Especially on the songs *Come My House*, *Do I Deserve It?*, *Mama*, and *Marcella Wahine*.

LINDA DELA CRUZ: BEST OF LINDA DE LA CRUZ (Tradewinds Records 2201 – out-of-print) – Especially the songs *Come My House*, *Do I Deserve It?*, and *Mama* (these three songs also appear on the Linda Dela Cruz album KUHIO BEACH GIRL).

MARCELLA KALUA: GIRL FROM PAPA KOLEA (LP: Mahalo Records 4012; cassette: Makaha 2052 – out-of-print) – 1960s – With the Sons of Hawaii. Especially on all of the ten songs on the album: *Hali`ilua*, *Ha`upu*, *Kaho`olawe*, *Kahuli Aku*, *Lantana E*, *Lei Hinahina*, *Lei Kiele*, *Po Mahina*, *Punalu`u*, and *U`i*.

WAINANI KANEALII: SONGS OF THE PACIFIC (Lehua 5021 – out-of-print??) – Especially on the songs *Kuhio Bay*, *Puu O Hulu*, *Keanuenue*, *Namolokama* “*Kani Uina*”, *Nani Kauai*, and *Nuku O Nuuanu*.

POKI-SAN [OHTA-SAN] 15 HAWAIIAN FAVORITES (backing up Poki-San) – Also issued with the title INSTRUMENTAL HAWAIIAN FAVORITES – POKI SAN & FRIENDS (Poki Records 9002) – Especially on the songs *Ka Makani Ka`ili Aloha*, *Kaimana Hila/Waikapu Medley*, and *Kanaka Wai Wai*.

WAIMANALO KEIKIS: MELE KALIKAMAKA (Tradewinds Records 1129) – Especially on the songs *Little Drummer Boy* and *Ekolu Mea Nui*.

JOHN LUKELA: THREE `UKULELES (Waikiki Records 125) – Especially on the song *Slack Key Medley: Malekas Lullaby/Na Puanani O Hawaii/Kuu Ipo Kuu Pua Aloha/Honolulu Town*.

The following 16 tracks are the ones from the above albums that Atta appeared on as a sideman that most prominently feature his guitar work:

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1. *Lahainaluna* - From the album HAUOLI (Sounds of Hawaii 5026)
  2. *Akaka Falls* - From the album HAUOLI (Sounds of Hawaii 5026)
  3. *Pu`u O Hulu (Kauli `Ili)* - from album WAINANI KANEALII, SONGS OF THE PACIFIC (Lehua Records 5021)
  4. *Kuhio Bay* - from the album WAINANI KANEALII, SONGS OF THE PACIFIC (Lehua Records 5021)
  5. *Do I Deserve It?* - from the Linda Dela Cruz album KUHIO BEACH GIRL (Tradewinds 1123)
  6. *Nanea Ko Maka* - from the album MELVEEN WITH THE BEST OF SLACK KEY (Lehua Records 7046)
  7. *Paliakamoa* – from the album MELVEEN WITH THE BEST OF SLACK KEY



(1931-2000), Gabby Pahinui (1921-1980), Atta Isaacs (1929-1983), and Ray Kane (1925-2008), four of the five most influential Slack Key guitarists [along with Sonny Chillingworth], after Slack Key recordings began being made with Gabby Pahinui's first recordings in 1946. Singer Linda Dela Cruz mentioned that it was wonderful to sing to Atta's beautiful accompaniment (see the discography), and how nice of a person he was. (For a list of the Tradewinds Records recordings, also see the discography).

### **RECORDINGS ON TRADEWINDS RECORDS:**

- 101 - Mungo (Harry Kalahiki) — PLAYS UKE -1958-1959
- 102 - Various Artists – PARTY SONGS, HAWAIIAN STYLE, Vol. -1958-1960
- 103 - Leonard Kwan - SLACK KEY (the “Red Album”) -1960
- 104 – Various Artists PARTS SONGS, HAWAIIAN STYLE, Vol. 2 – -1960-1961
- 105 —Pascual's Grey Line Maui Troubadours with Nelson Waikiki -early 1960s
- 106 - The Halekulani Girls (Alice Fredlund, Linda Dela Cruz, and Sybil Andrews) - TWILIGHT AT THE HALEKULANI -1961 – probably 1962
- 107 - Leonard Kwan and Raymond Kane (separate tracks for each artist) – SLACK KEY (The “Black & White Album”) - 1961-1962
- 108 - Nelson Waikiki — UKUELELE STYLIST -1961-1963
- 109 – Alice Fredlund, Linda Dela Cruz, and Sybil Andrews (The Halekulani Girls) – ALICE, LINDA, & SYBIL – 1962 - probably 1963
- 110 - Noelani Mahoe – FOLKSONGS OF HAWAI'I -1963
- 111 -
- 112 -
- 113 - Various Artists – EVENING IN THE ISLANDS -1963-1964
- 114 – Kani Nahaki with Pasquals Famous Tour Drivers, the Maui Troubadours - -1964
- 115 - Kaupena Wong w/ Leo Nahenahe Singers – HAWAII'S FOLKSINGERS -1964.
- 116 - -1964
- 117 - Bill Ali'iloa Lincoln – [MAYBE TITLE SAME AS HIS THREE NAMES??] -1964
- 118 - Linda Dela Cruz — LINDA, HAWAII'S CANARY -1965
- 119 - Bill Lincoln — MAHALO NUI -1965
- 120 - Emma Sharpe — LAHAINA'S FABULOUS EMMA'S SHARPE – 1965
- 121 - Linda Dela Cruz — LINDA SINGS, WITH THE HALEKULANI GIRLS -1966
- 122 – The Nahenahe Singers — HAWAIIAN CHRISTMAS -1965
- 123 - Linda Dela Cruz – KUHIO BEACH GIRL -1967
- 124 - Atta Isaacs & Gabby Pahinui — TWO SLACK KEY GUITARS – I'M A LIVIN' ON A EASY - June 1969
- 125 - Bill Ali'iloa Lincoln – MAGIC ISLANDS -1969
- 126 - Atta Isaacs – ATTA - 1971
- 127 - Bill Lincoln — HULA IN FALSETTO - 197?
- 128 - Leonard Kwan — THE OLD WAY--1974
- 129 - The Waimanalo Keikis - MELE KALIKIMAKA—1975
- 130 - Raymond Kane — NANAKULI'S RAYMOND KANE—1975
- 1201 – Waimanalo Keikies – KEIKI O WAIMANALO/ SURF, AND SONG -197
- 2201 - Linda Dela Cruz – BEST OF LINDA

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**Here are some notes for Atta and Gabby Pahinui's album TWO SLACK KEY GUITARS-----song # s 3, 4, 10 & 12 were used in the Hana Old Records double CD:**

TWO SLACK KEY GUITARS (Tradewinds Records 1124) - With **Gabby Pahinui** - The song *March Medley* is actually called *Ka Ua Noe* and is a classic pure duet. The CD also contains four bonus tracks from the out-of-print album ATTA: *Mele Li'i, Kokohi - Moani Ke`ala, Na Molokama, and Sweet Lei Lehua*

NOTE THAT THIS REALLY MORE ATTA'S ALBUM THAN GABBY'S AND WAS ISSUED IN 1969 WITH THE ORANGE ALBUM "ATTA" ISSUED SECOND, AROUND 1971. TUNINGS HERE ARE FOR ATTA UNLESS INDICATED FOR GABBY.

### **Part 1**

#### ***1. I'm A Livin' On A Easy***

*Atta*: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), from the lowest pitched string to the highest, played in the keys of C and G, and vocals.

*Gabby*: C Mauna Loa Tuning (C-G-E-G-A-E), played in the keys of C and G and vocals

Atta, who rarely sang, shares the lead vocals with the band and Gabby Pahinui singing the lead and featuring his chicken-skin (goose bump producing) signature and impromptu (*leo ki'eki'e*) falsetto. Gabby plays the intro and the first solo in the key of C, and Atta later plays the second solo in the key of G, with Gabby playing the final solo again in the key of C.

Gabby plays here in his C Mauna Loa Tuning (C-G-E-G-A-E), which he was the first one to record in. Mauna Loa Tunings are 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. The sixth intervals on the top two strings can also be “frailed” (strummed) rapidly with the index finger, producing another characteristic sound of this tuning

Gabby Pahinui (1921-1980) was the founder of the modern Slack Key guitar era, making the first ever recordings of the Slack Key guitar in 1946, which can be heard on the recording THE HISTORY OF SLACK KEY GUITAR-VINTAGE HAWAIIAN TREASURES, VOLUME 7 (Hana Ola Records) - this compilation including Gabby's 5 earliest recordings from the 1940s - two versions of *Hi`ilawe*

originally issued on Bell Records and Aloha Records, and three other tracks from Bell Records - *Hula Medley*, *Key Kohalu*, and *Wai O Ke Aniani*, and It also has 15 other reissued late 1940s and early 1950s tracks by 8 other Slack Key guitarists. For more on Gabby Pahinui see [www.dancingcat.com/notes/PureGabby.php](http://www.dancingcat.com/notes/PureGabby.php)

## 2. *Wahine U`i E*

*Atta*: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E)

*Gabby*: C Mauna Loa Tuning (C-G-E-G-A-E)

Atta here is featured on a beautiful intro with a rare example of his playing double-thumbing style, with the thumb playing bass notes on the lower pitched strings on beats 1 and 3), and a higher pitched alternating bass note string on beats 2 and 4. He then plays five great verses with Gabby playing a subtle second part in his C Mauna Loa Tuning (C-G-E-G-A-E), which lends itself to the high sixth intervals that he plays here.

This song is also sometimes called *Wahine U`i*, and it was also recorded by Gabby with the Gabby Pahinui Hawaiian Band on his album THE GABBY PAHINUI HAWAIIAN BAND – VOLUME 1 (Panini Records), which included Atta playing in his C Major Tuning, and Gabby playing in his C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E).

## 3. *Keali`i's Mele*

*Atta*: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E)

*Gabby*: C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E)

An original waltz by Atta composed in the 1960s for one of his sons, Norman, describing musically the antics of a youngster. Since his early years, Slack Key guitarist (and Gabby's son) Cyril Pahinui, has lovingly perpetuates the jazz influence he got from Atta.

Note how the song starts in 4/4 time with again beautiful double-thumbing by Atta before going into 3/4 time. Note the beautiful use of the jazz-inspired chord progression of C Major, to D minor, to G Major, to C Major, to F Major, to C Major, to A7th, to B flat 7th, to A7th, to D minor, G7th, and again C Major. Atta's jazz influence has deeply influenced the great Slack Key guitarist (and Gabby's son) Cyril Pahinui. The song twice briefly modulates to the keys of G and F. Note also the distinctive hammered on end run on the notes on the first fret (that Cyril also likes to sometimes end songs with). 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). The chord progression at the end is D9th with an F# bass, D9th with an augmented 5th and an F# bass, G 13th with an F bass, D9th with an augmented 5th and an F# bass, G6th, F6th, F Major, G Major with a D bass, F Major with a C bass, G Major with a B bass, F Major with an A bass, G6th, F6th, D flat 6/9, to C Major add 9.



Slack Key guitarist Danny Carvalho also recorded a version, inspired by Atta, also in the C Major Tuning, on his 2006 recording SLACK KEY JOURNEY-ON MY WAY (Lava Rock Music LRM-001)

#### **4. *Noho Au A Kupa***

*Atta*: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), played in the keys of D and C

*Gabby*: C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E), played in the keys of D and C

A beautiful ballad attributed to Edward Nainoa and Emma Bush.

Atta arranged this 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 verse, 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 octaves, using the 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> strings in his C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), which are tuned to an E note an octave apart. Other Slack Key guitarists have also played this song in another C tuning, the C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D), where the 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> strings are also tuned an octave apart, but to a D note.

Slack Key Ray Kane guitarist recorded a vocal version playing in the G Major “Taro Patch” Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D) with the title *Ua Noho Au Akupa*, on his recording PUNAHELE (Dancing Cat Records).

#### **5. *March Medley: Aia Hiki Mai (Wait Till the Coming)/ Haili Po Ika Lehua (Haila Crowned With Lehua)* - [incorrectly called *Ku'u Hua Aloha* on the Tradewinds Records CD]**

*Atta*: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E)

*Gabby*: C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E)

An arrangement by Atta, inspired some also by Gabby's 1960 recording of a march medley (see below). He sometimes uses his trademark octaves, playing highest pitches first string and the fourth string in his C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E). He uses the jazz chord progression at the end of: C Major, B Major, B flat Major, A Major, A 9<sup>th</sup>, D9<sup>th</sup>, G13<sup>th</sup>, to C Major. Also note his bluesy tinged ending. Atta plays the first song, *Aia Hiki Mai (Wait Till the Coming)* for two verses, then the second song, *Haili Po Ika Lehua (Haila Crowned With Lehua)* for one verse, then the first song for one verse, the second one for a verse, and ending with one verse of the first song again.

Arranging marches for guitar is a distinct part of the Slack Key tradition, and twelve other notable examples are:

1. Gabby Pahinui recorded a march medley called *Slack Key Medley* with the songs *Kuhio Bay*, *Roselani*, *Henderson's March*, *Koni Au I Ka Wai*, and *Hu'i E* in his F

- Wahine Tuning (F-C-E-G-C-E), on his influential 1960 album, HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY, VOLUME 1—WITH GABBY PAHINUI (Waikiki Records 319).
2. Gabby Pahinui recorded *Nani Wale Lihue* in a march tempo as part of his *Hula Medley*, in his F Wahine Tuning (F-C-E-G-C-E). He recorded it twice: In 1946, reissued on THE HISTORY OF SLACK KEY GUITAR-VINTAGE HAWAIIAN TREASURES, VOLUME 7 (Hana Ola Records 24000), and in 1961 on the album PURE GABBY (Hula Records 567) Sonny Chillingworth also recorded this medley in the C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D) on his album SONNY SOLO (Dancing Cat Records 38005), and Ray Kane also recorded it in 1975 in another C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-E) with the title *Nani Wale Lihu'e / Wai'ala'e / Halona (Hula Medley)*, on his album THE LEGENDARY RAY KANE-OLD STYLE SLACK KEY-THE COMPLETE EARLY RECORDINGS (Hana Ola Records HOCD 52000).
  3. Gabby Pahinui recorded *Hoi Mai* as part of *Slack Key Medley: Nalani/Akahi Hoi/Hoi Mai* on the album HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY VOLUME 2 – WITH GABBY PAHINUI (Waikiki Records 320).
  4. Atta Isaacs recorded *Kohala March* in his C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), on his 1971 album ATTA (Tradewinds Records 1126).
  5. Atta Isaacs also recorded *Maikai Makani/ Kui Au* (aka *Ka Makani 'O Kohala/ Moani Ke Ala* in his C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), with The New Hawaiian Band on their 1975 album THE NEW HAWAIIAN BAND ((Hana Ola Classic Collector Series, Volume 7 HOCD 12000 - formerly released on Trim Records 1975 – [and reissued on this CD).
  6. Atta Isaacs recorded *Hilo March* in his C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E) with steel guitarist Jerry Byrd, on Jerry's album STEEL GUITAR HAWAIIAN STYLE (Lehua Records 7023). This song is played in the keys of E, A, and D and Atta's solo is in the key of D. This is a rare track featuring Slack Key guitar with acoustic steel guitar.
  7. Leonard Kwan also recorded *Aia Hiki Mai/Koni Au/Palisa*, in the D Wahine Tuning (D-A-D-F# -A C#), on the early 1960s Tradewinds album SLACK KEY (also known as the “Black & White Album”, which also has tracks by Slack Key guitarist Ray Kane, on Tradewinds Records 106) – Leonard's tracks from that album are reissued on CD on Hana Ola Records HOCD 55000, with the title LEONARD KWAN – SLACK KEY MASTER- THE COMPLETE EARLY RECORDINGS.
  8. The Kahumoku Brothers (George and Moses) recorded *Hilo March/Maui Chimes*, in the G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D), on their 1988 album SWEET AND SASSY-HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY STYLINGS, VOL.1 (Kahumoku Farms Record Company KFRC-1010).
  9. George Kuo recorded *Wai'ala'e/Koni Au I Ka Wai*, in the C Wahine Tuning (C-G-D-G-B-D), on his 1996 album HE ALOHA NO NA KUPUNA-LOVE FOR THE ELDERS (Dancing Cat Records 38009).
  10. George Kuo also recorded *Hawaiian March Medley: Hilo March/Ainahau/Ka Makani O Kohala*, in the G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D), on his 1981 album NAHENAHE (Hula Records 576).

11. Cyril Pahinui also recorded *Kela Mea Whiffa / Hilo March* in the D Major Tuning (D-A-D-F#-A-D) with acoustic steel guitarist Bob Brozman on their 1999 album *Four Hands Sweet and Hot* (Dancing Cat Records 38048)
12. Led Kaapana recorded *Hilo March* and *Kohala March* as part of his *Big Island Medley: Hilo March/Kohala March/San Antonio Rose/Yellow Bird*, in the Standard Tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E) - *Hilo March/Kohala March* is played in the key of D (and *San Antonio Rose* is played in the key of G, and *Yellow Bird* is played in the key of C), on his album *FOUR STILL PRESSIN'* [with the group I Kona] (Kahale Music 2001).
13. Mika`ele Mike McClellan recorded *Mallonee Slack Key March* in the G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D) on his recording *FOUR SOME NEW THINGS ! KI HO'ALU: HE MAU MEA HOU !*

**6. *Ke Oni Nei Ka Huila* (Luau Hula)**

*Atta*: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E)

*Gabby*: C Mauna Loa Tuning (C-G-E-G-A-E), and vocals

Composed by Mary Robins and Johnny Noble (1892-1944) . Gabby sings lead vocals, featuring his incredibly soulful falsetto (*leo ki'eki'e*), sharing them with the band as well, and plays the first intro solo along with Atta, and later two more great solos in his C Mauna Loa Tuning. This version has become one of the definitive versions of this song.

**Part 2**

**7. *Leaping Loli* (Polly Wolly Doodle)**

*Atta*: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E)

*Gabby*: C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E)

A traditional Mainland American song arranged by Atta. Sentimental American parlor songs of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century traveled the world and certainly found a warm reception in Hawaiian music, serving both an influence for Hawaiian songs, and as repertoire performed in their original form. Atta and Gabby play two verses of each song before returning to the first song for a final verse, with Gabby often playing a beautiful subtle high part to compliment Atta's great lead playing throughout the song in his C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E), which lends itself toward playing the high thirds as he does here.

Slack Key guitarist Leonard Kwan also recorded two of the old American songs, *Silver Threads Among the Gold*, Composed in 1873 by Hart Danks and Eben Rexford, on his 1960 album *SLACK KEY* [the "Red Album"], and Henry Clay Work's 1875 composition, *Grandfather's Clock*, on his album *THE OLD WAY* (both on Tradewinds Records, reissued on Hana Ola Records with all of Leonard's other

early tracks on CD with the title THE LEGENDARY LEONARD KWAN–SLACK KEY MASTER-THE COMPLETE EARLY RECORDINGS). Gabby Pahinui also recorded it as part of the song *Slack-Key Medley (Hula Medley)*, made in 1961 and released in 1978 on the album PURE GABBY (Hula 567). Slack Key guitarist Led Kaapana also recorded three versions of it with the title *Silver Strings*: in the late 1970s with the group Hui Ohana, backed by a string section, on the album HUI OHANA – KALAPANA TO WAIKIKI (Lehua Records 7020), (the same track also appears on the recording BEST OF HUI OHANA, VOLUME 1 (Lehua Records); on his LIMA WELA album from 1983 (reissued on Shaka Records), and on his 1994 album LED LIVE- SOLO (Dancing Cat Records).

Led Kaapana also recorded another old song from outside Hawai'i, *Rings on Your Fingers*, a hit from 1909, actually called *I've Got Rings on My Fingers* by the British composers R.P. Weston and F.J. Barnes, on the LIMA WELA album.

#### **8. *Manuela Boy***

*Atta*: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), played in the keys of C and G

*Gabby*: G Major Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D), played in the keys of C and G, and vocals

Here Gabby solos in the key of G, and also sings lead vocals, again featuring his beautiful *leo ki'eki'e* (falsetto), again sharing the vocals with the band. Atta plays the intro in the key of C, and Gabby plays the two solos in the key of G as well as the outro. This traditional *kalohe* (rascal) favorite by Johnny Noble (1892-1944) features some new lyrics written by Gabby and Harold Haku'ole. This version has also become one of the definitive versions of this song.

#### **9. *Vaya Con Dios***

*Atta*: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), played in the keys of C and D

*Gabby*: C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E), played in the keys of C and D

The standard Mexican sentimental song composed by Larry Russel, Inez Mames & Buddy Pepper, arranged by Atta. The chorus briefly modulates to the keys of F and G when Atta is playing in the key of C, and also modulates briefly to the keys of G and A when Atta is playing in the key of D.

Gabby Pahinui also especially loved Mexican music, and you can also hear that influence on his Mariachi-influenced (and now standard) introduction for the song *Lei Nani* on his landmark 1972 album GABBY [the "Brown Album"] (Panini Records).

#### **10. *Waltz Medley: Uluhua Wale Au / Lahilahi (Pulupe Nei 'Ile I Ke Anu) / Sweet Lei Mamo***

*Atta*: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), played in the keys of G, F and C

*Gabby*: C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E), played 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. *Uluhwa Wale Au* was by Theresa Cartright *Lahilahi* (*Pulupe Nei 'Ile I Ke Anu*), best known as Pulupe is by Hawai'i's most beloved composer, Queen 38 (18-1917). *Sweet Lei Mamo* might have been composed by Huilani or Charles Hopkins.

Note Atta's beautiful melodic jazz chords at the intro and the more dissonant ones at the end. This was one of Atta's greatest trademarks, the using of jazz chords that were normally played by other guitarists in the Standard Tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E), for introductions and endings, especially when he backed up singers, which he was in great demand for. The chord progression he used in the introduction is A minor 7th with G bass, A minor 7<sup>th</sup>, D minor add 9, D flat Major, D Major, D 13<sup>th</sup>, and then to G Major, for the first song, *Uluhwa Wale Au*. The chord progression at the end is G7<sup>th</sup>, G7<sup>th</sup> with augmented 5<sup>th</sup>, G7<sup>th</sup>, G7<sup>th</sup> with flatted 5<sup>th</sup>, B7<sup>th</sup> with augmented 5<sup>th</sup>, E flat 7<sup>th</sup> with augmented 9<sup>th</sup>, and C6/9. He also changes keys in this song - a different key for each of the three songs: G Major for *Uluhwa Wale Au*, F Major for *Pulupe* and C Major for *Sweet Lei Mamo*), which another signature trademark of his.

### ***11. Po La`ila`i***

*Atta*: C Major Tuning (C-G-E-G-C-E), played in the keys of C, A and F

*Gabby*: C Wahine Tuning (C-G-E-G-B-E), played in the keys of C, A and F

An arrangement by Atta. By the great Hawaiian composers and cultural preservationists Mary K. Pukui and Maddy Lam (Mary Pukui, amongst many other things, published the definitive Hawaiian'English Dictionary). Here Atta plays the first verse in the key of C, and the second verse in the key of A, with D7<sup>th</sup> and E7<sup>th</sup> chords just before it to lead to the modulation, and the third verse in the key F, using D9<sup>th</sup>, G13<sup>th</sup>, and C9<sup>th</sup> chords to lead to that modulation.

### ***12. Ka Ua Noe (The Misty Rain) - ==INCORRECTLY CALLED "MARCH MEDLEY" ON THE TRADEWINDS CD***

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

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

A classic and evocative original duet from the 1960s of six beautiful verses with just the two Slack Key guitars of Atta and Gabby and 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 subtle feeling of a G Sixth 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.

Slack Key guitarist Ozzie Kotani also recorded a version of this on two guitars, both in the G Major Tuning, on his 1988 out-of-print recording *CLASSICAL SLACK* (Pacific Sound Design Records 1001).

(This song was accidently called March Medley on the Tradewinds CD issue of *TWO SLACK KEY GUITARS*, and on the original cassette issue it did have the correct title, but it was sped up two half steps to sound in the key of A).