



Song of Life

A Story

By Sandy McMaster

Ki Ho'alu

Slack Key Guitar — Music of Hawaii

Soft, magical, and sweet, ki ho'alu (slack key) guitar, was created by the people of Hawaii in the 1800's. In ki ho'alu music, the hands enter into a beautiful and intricate dance through which the essences of the mystical islands of Hawaii are expressed.

The people of Hawaii created and evolved ki ho'alu using guitars left by European sailors as well as Spanish and Mexican cowboys who taught the Hawaiians how to manage the cattle that had been introduced to the islands. In the late 1800's, King David Kalakaua was responsible for the resurgence of support for Hawaiian cultural traditions. His sister, Liliuokalani, who became queen after his passing, was a prolific composer and excellent musician credited with over 200 compositions.

Almost lost in the early 1900's with the adoption of jazz, swing, and other modern musical forms, a number of artists emerging in the 1950's revitalized the tradition and began teaching and inspiring others.

Thanks to them and their students, ki ho'alu lives on!

E Ola Mau Ki Ho'alu
“Long Live Slack Key”



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Dedication

Mahalo nui loa to the children who inspire us and reassure us of the future with their insights, creativity, and genius. Children like Emma Rose, Peter Aloha (Mr. Akoni), Koben (Buster the Magic Tiger Cub), Dannin, and more. May they always remember and find smooth sailing on their path to their destiny!

Tiw (pronounced "tuh-why-oo"), a menehune, loved to sing. From sunset to sunrise, she sang. She sang to the land, to the birds, to the forests, to the oceans, and to all creatures, great and small. She learned to sing from her parents.

One night, as she sang on the beach, she heard a sound. She looked and her friend Owo (pronounced "oo-why-oo"), a dolphin, had arrived in the bay. He wanted her to come and play. So, she and Owo played. He let her hold onto his dorsal fin and he swam very fast through the water and then leaped into the air. It was great fun! Being only one and a half feet tall made it easy for Tiw to ride on Owo's back. When they came up for air, they laughed and giggled. Then Tiw would sing for Owo. And sometimes they would sing together.

Owo asked Tiw where she learned to sing so beautifully. She told him of how her parents taught her to sing. They taught her to sing to the sky, the clouds, the stars, the waters, the land, the creatures, the pohaku (pronounced "po-ha-koo" a Hawaiian word meaning stones), the plants, and to every other thing. She watched her grandparents sing to bring the stars out to guide their voyaging canoes on their travels to other islands. She saw her tutu bring the rain with her sweet songs. She saw plants grow large and fertile when they were sung to each day.

He asked her if she knew how the menehune learned to sing. She said no. Owo also wondered how the dolphins had learned to sing. He knew the whales sang too and he loved to listen to their sweet songs. Owo told Tiw the story of her homeland, Yomurd (pronounced "yo-moo-ruhd"). She had never seen Yomurd since it disappeared beneath the waves before she was born. Owo's ancestors had been there. So were many other creatures. As creatures arrived in Yomurd and the oceans surrounding her, they learned from those who already lived there. This Owo knew from his mother's teachings.

Neither Owo or Tiw knew where they learned to sing. And this is how they began their adventure to learn the true story of how singing had come to all the creatures of the world and to the land and waters themselves. Owo said, "Hold on! I know who we can ask." And off they swam, at dolphin speed, to visit a special cove on the island of Maui.

This cove is inhabited by many noddy terns who are quite knowledgeable about all the happenings of land and sea. Owo was

sure they would know the answer. When they arrived, Tiw called out to the noddy's, "Does anyone know where we learned to sing?". The noddy terns chattered lively for several moments and one of them swooped down and landed on Tiw's arm. "Quite a puzzle you have there. Where did we learn to sing? No one knows for sure. You should ask the eel that lives in the reef off the north shore of Kauai. We're sure that he knows and if he doesn't, he'll know who to ask.", said the noddy tern and off she flew back to her perch on the black lava rock.

So Owo and Tiw were off again, this time headed back for Kauai's north shore. As they approached each reef, they asked for directions to the old eel's home. After stopping three times, they found the reef and the home of the eel. The eel was old and a bit annoyed at being bothered by a talkative young menehune and chattering dolphin. Several times, he poked in and out of his cozy hideaway as if thinking and rethinking his answer. Finally, he said, "I have no answer for you, go ask the shark that lives outside Nawiliwili bay. He's older than me and maybe he'll have an answer."

Off they went around the island to Nawiliwili bay. And the home of the oldest shark in the islands. After Owo asked the shark if he knew where they had all learned to sing, the shark darted to and fro becoming increasingly agitated. He thought he had the answer and he searched all his memories to remember. But remember, he could not, as he did not have a memory of where and how they had all learned to sing. "I am sorry but I have no memory of where we learned to sing. There are those older than I and the record keepers of our earth's history who may have your answer. Go see the whales.", he said.

Fortunately, for Tiw and Owo, it was the season where the great whales visited the islands and so they began their quest to find the oldest and wisest of the whales. The whales are the record keepers and should have the knowledge of how they all learned to sing. They followed the songs from whale to whale asking as they approached. They were led to a particularly old and wise whale, the keeper of many, many records. The whale poked her head above the water and asked, "What are you seeking my fine friends?" Owo whistled and clicked, interspersed with some chatter from Tiw, until the whale understood that they were seeking the source of all singing. The whale thought and thought, running through all her memory clusters

about singing. And she had a lot of them. Memories of all the songs of her families and friends, memories of all the songs of all her ancestors and her friends ancestors. After much thought, she said, "You'll have to seek the oldest of all creatures, she will know the answer to your puzzle. She is the great sea turtle that lives in a cove on the coast of great green cliffs."

Tiw and Owo headed for the Na Pali on the north shore of Kauai where the green cliffs rose thousands of feet straight from the sea into the sky. At each cove, they asked for the great sea turtle. They were sent further and further until finally they reached the cove where the sea turtle lived. Good fortune was with them, for she was at home and not on one of her great migration journeys. When they asked their questions, they knew they had come to the right place.

The great turtle slowly nodded her head and closed her eyelids as if in deep thought. And then they heard it. And felt it. It was a deep resonating song and it felt like everything reverberated gently with the rhythm. They felt the water sing and all her creatures sing in harmony with the original tone sung by the great turtle. And they knew, with no words shared, that this was their great teacher.

She had been there since time began and had taught all the creatures and beings to sing. She had taught Tiw's ancestors and Owo's ancestors and all the creatures as they arrived, to sing, to sing the song of healing and celebration of life. For the creative vibration of song is the heart of us all. And when she sang all who listened sang with her. For she is the mother.

Tiw and Owo sang throughout the night until the turtle's song ended at sunrise and they thanked her for sharing such great knowledge. And from each day on, they sing and always sing a song of thanks to the turtles for bringing such joy and harmony to the world. For without song, the world would not be.

Wish to help preserve, promote, and perpetuate traditional slack key music? Here are ideas for ways you can —

Give the gift of slack key with CDs and concert tickets.

Be a sponsor of slack key concerta or workshops.

Attend slack key concerts. Learn to play slack key guitar.

Refer friends to concerts, email lists, and CDs that you enjoy.

Donate slack key documentaries to schools, public radio stations, music professors, or libraries.

Support fellowships and other forms of artist support.

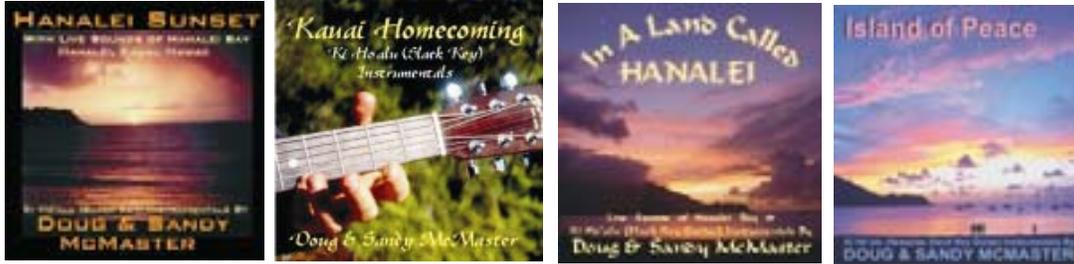
Recommend slack key music at your favorite places and stores.

About The Artists



Doug McMaster has been playing slack key guitar since he was six years old. Over the years he's learned that along with being given the gift of music in this lifetime is a kuleana (responsibility) to ho'omau (continue the tradition). Doug studies traditional songs and educates people about slack key guitar and its Hawaiian origins. He is a prolific composer whose songs come from the heart and are gifts from special places, events, and creatures.

Sandy McMaster is a musician, writer, and artist. She fell in love with the man and his music over twenty five years ago. Together they are dedicated to sharing the beauty of ki ho'alu and the islands creating Aloha Plenty experiences for all. By touching the hearts of visitors to the islands, they help spread the aloha spirit throughout the world.

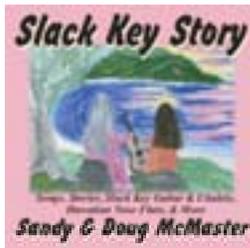


Island of Peace (2003), Hawaiian slack key guitar and ukulele instrumentals with Hanalei Bay in the background. This is an enhanced CD which plays in any regular CD player and if you put it into your computer, a window pops up allowing you to download a screensaver, view a sunset photo gallery, or watch a 5 minute video of slice of Hanalei life, sunset, and 'ohana (family).

In A Land Called Hanalei (2001), Hawaiian slack key guitar and ukulele instrumentals with Hanalei Bay and Hanalei River in the background.

Kauai Homecoming (2000), ki ho'alu guitar and ukulele instrumentals with soothing surf background.

Hanalei Sunset (1998), ki ho'alu instrumentals with gentle Hanalei Bay surf in the background.



Slack Key Story (2002): Songs & stories telling the history of slack key guitar & ukulele.

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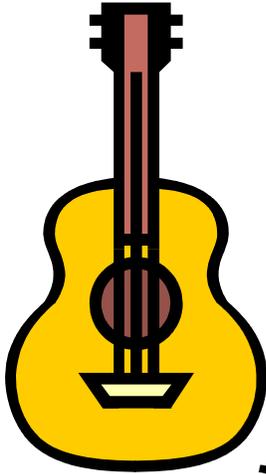
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