



KI HO'ALU -- SLACK KEY GUITAR -- MUSIC OF HAWAII



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History 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"



What Is Slack Key? Slack key music is filled with mana ("spiritual force") and aloha ("divine breath, presence"). It expresses innermost feelings and honors the 'aina (land), creatures, events, and ancestors. As you listen, you can feel it touch you and open your heart to help you feel the essence of Hawaii.

Ki Ho'alu means 'to slacken or loosen the keys' and that's the beginning of slack key. The strings were slackened to a tuning that sounded pleasing to the ears. Simultaneously playing a melody line and harmonies on the upper strings with the fingers and using the thumb to play a rhythm pattern on the lower strings is the foundation of slack key. Most important is playing from the heart with great aloha.

♥an alternating bass line played on the lower strings

♥a melody played on the higher strings

♥a slackened key tuning

♥songs that express deep feelings and meanings

♥music that expresses the essence of places, events, and creatures

♥ (and most importantly) playing from the heart with great aloha

Traditional slack key is played very nahenahe ("soft and sweet") either solo or with minimal accompaniment of another guitar, an ukulele, voice or other traditional Hawaiian instruments such as 'ohe hano ihu (nose flute), 'ili 'ili (waterworn stones), ipu (gourd), and pakini (washtub bass).



Tunings Tunings abound in slack key guitar music. Each family developed their own tunings and music. Held as tightly guarded family secrets, they were heirlooms to be passed to the next generation. These are a few of the more common tunings. A fun ukulele slack key tuning is GCEG.

Tuning Name	Strings	Tuning Name	Strings
Taro Patch or G Major	DGDGBD	Raised G (G)	DADGBD
G Major	DGBGBD	Raised G (G)	DADGBE
G Major	DGDGBE	Dropped D (G)	CGDGBD
D Major	DADF#AD	Dropped D (G)	CGDGBE
D Major	DADF#DF#	Dropped G (C)	CFCGCE
C Major	CGEGCE	F or B ^b	FB ^b CFAE
C Major	CGCGCE		DADF#BE
C Major	CGCECE	Old Mauna Loa	DGDEAD
D Wahine	DADF#AC#	G Mauna Loa	DGDEGD
F Wahine	CFCGCE	C Mauna Loa	CGEGAE
Gabby's F Wahine	FCEGCE	C Mauna Loa	CGCGAE
G Wahine	DGDF#BD	D Mauna Loa	DGDDGD
G Wahine	DGBF#BD	D Mauna Loa	GDBDGD
Dropped C or C Wahine	CGDGBD	D Mauna Loa	DGDGGD
Gabby's C Wahine	CGEGBE	B ^b Mauna Loa	FB ^b DFGD
C Wahine	CGCGBE	B ^b Mauna Loa	FB ^b DFAD
Leonard's C	GCEGCE	B ^b Mauna Loa	FB ^b FFGD



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Equipment & Resources

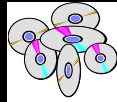
Slack key can be played on any guitar with either nylon or metal strings. Guitars come in many shapes and sizes. Each person needs to find what's right for them. It can also be played on ukulele and other stringed instruments.

Many players use their fingernails or fingerpicks to help give the notes more definition, clarity, and volume. Picks come in different types of plastic material as well as metal and varying sizes and thicknesses.

Strings can be any kind appropriate for the guitar and it's really player preference. The Elixir strings by Gore are coated for longer lasting tone and playability in the salt air. Some string sets have been designed for the looser tension of slack tunings such as the John Pearse slack key strings.

Here are a few good resources for musical supplies in addition to your local music stores:

- www.americanmusical.com 800-458-4076
- www.juststrings.com 603-889-2664
- www.musiciansfriend.com 800-776-5173
- www.elderly.com 517-372-7890
- www.stewmac.com 800-848-2273
- www.fqms.com 800-635-2021



Recordings

The first 'official' slack key was recorded in 1946. Leonard Kwan made the first solo instrumental slack key album in 1960. In 1973, Raymond Kane performed the first solo instrumental concert of traditional ki ho'alu music. There are many wonderful recordings of ki ho'alu in all styles, although most of the great unsung players were never recorded. Here are a few good resources for obtaining Hawaiian slack key guitar music in addition to your local music stores:

- www.hawaiianslackkeyguitar.com
- www.hawaiianparadisemusic.com
- www.hanaleivideoandmusic.com
- www.tropicaldisc.com
- www.amazon.com



Ukulele

The ukulele is a descendant of the *braguinha*, an instrument brought to Hawaii by Portugese immigrants in 1879. Queen Liliuokalani translated it "the gift that came here from afar". Another says it was named after the *ukeke*, the Hawaiian musical bow - "ukekelele" (dancing ukeke). It is best known as the 'jumping flea'. Sizes include the Soprano (Standard), Concert, Tenor (4,5,6, or 8 string), and Baritone. Standard tuning is GCEA. The five string has 2 A strings tuned in unison. The 6 string has 2 C and 2 A strings each tuned an octave apart. The 8 string has 2 G and 2 C strings tuned an octave apart and 2 E and 2 A strings tuned in unison.



Learning Ki Ho'alu - Hawaiian Style

Slack key was traditionally taught only within the 'ohana (family). In the 1960's and 1970's many of the elders began teaching outside the family to help keep slack key alive. Instruction books were also starting to be published at this same time. Hawaiians taught through the 'watch, learn, and play' method.

- ♥ *nana ka maka* (observe with the eye),
- ♥ *ho'olohe ka pepeiao* (listen carefully),
- ♥ *ho'opili* (imitate someone who has mastered what you wish to learn),
- ♥ *pa'a ka waha* (don't interrupt your teachers, concentrate on what they're showing you).

For contemporary resources, visit our

Learning Ki Ho'alu web page at:

www.alohaplentyhawaii.com/learnkihoalu.htm or
download at www.hawaiianslackkeyguitar.com



Ki Ho'alu Newsletter

To Sign up for our free weekly email newsletter, visit the website. Visit our website for slack key information, review, sunset music slide shows, and MORE!

www.hawaiianslackkeyguitar.com

Questions?

E-mail: aplenty@hawaiiantel.net



Documentaries

Ki Ho'alu - That's Slack Key Guitar
by Susan Friedman.