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Entertainment

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Posted on: Friday, October 5, 2007

ISLAND SOUNDS

Guitarist rounds up friends to jam

By [Wayne Harada](#)
Advertiser Entertainment Writer

"**Slack & Steel, Kaua'i Style**" by Ken Emerson & Friends; Hana Ola Records

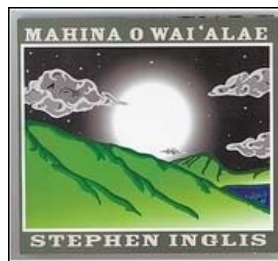
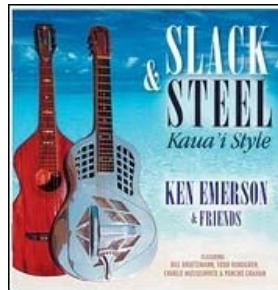
- **Genre:** Acoustic slack and steel guitar, with some vocals.
- **Distinguishing notes:** Ken Emerson is a veteran musician and ki ho'alu player from the CD that won the first Hawaiian Grammy three years ago. With a 30-year (and counting) devotion to Island sounds, he has been a Neighbor Island foundation of things Hawaiian.

This endeavor, tapping buddies in slack and steel, mixes traditional favorites from the instrumental genre, plus a few vocals. The Friends include Todd Rundgren, Bill Krueztzmann and Charlie Musselwhite, but it's Emerson who is front and center, instrumentally and vocally.

Homage is paid to various Island places, like "Miloli'i" on the Big Island and "Nani Kaua'i."

A few tracks are straight from the steel primer, like Andy Iona's "Sand" fave from 1930, and "O Akua," the John Lincoln classic, here performed with the harmonic English lyrics.

Some cuts are exploratory and fun: The Santo & Johnny hit of 1959, "Sleep Walk," is faithful to steel, with a ki ho'alu presence attached; "Endless Summer," from the 1966 surfing saga by Bruce Brown, brings back memories of sunny, watery splendors again with steel, slack and 'ukulele treatment; and a Bob Marley reggae tune from 1970,



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"Small Axe," experiments outside normal realms.

Emerson's brother, Phil Emerson, joins in on "Feelin' No Pain," recalling the times they worked together as the Emerson Brothers, retaining a vintage Hawaiian sound.

For hula enthusiasts, two classics — "Ulili E" and "E Lei E" — are part of the wonderful journey into Island history.

Production notes, including credits, brief explanations of the tracks and selected lyrics, complete a tidy packaging job.

- **Our take:** A twofer: If you like slack and/or steel, this one's a bonanza of delights.

🔊 Sample song: "Miloli'i Slack Key" by Ken Emerson and Friends

"**Mahina O Wai'ala'e**" by Stephen Inglis; 'Aumakua Records

- **Genre:** Traditional Hawaiian.

- **Distinguishing notes:** Stephen Inglis is a seasoned entertainer and slack-key guitarist who invites his mentor, Ozzie Kotani, in an instrumental-vocal journey through 15 titles, mostly Island classics (with a couple of Inglis originals).

The fare is largely familiar — personal renderings of "No Ke Ano Ahiahi," "E Ku'u Sweet Lei Poina 'Ole," "Pauoa Liko Ka Lehua," "Pua Lililehua," "Ka Makani Ka'ili Aloha," "Palolo," "E Nihi Ka Hele," "Kaimana Hila." It's like a best-of-Hawai'i assembly, some with lyrics, others with the nostalgic burst of ki ho'alu.

Inglis' title song, composed for his wife, Christa, is a sentimental newbie; his other original, "Pomaika'i No Kakou," captures the spirit of yesteryear in lyrics (English and Hawaiian) and in melody. To discover more about the artist and to examine lyrics (not on the CD), go to <http://myspace.com/stepheninglis> or www.stepheninglis.com.

- **Our take:** An obvious labor of love — with lovely results.

🔊 Sample song: "Pomaika'i No Kakou" by Stephen Inglis

"**Five Years and Many Miles**" by Darin Leong; Hawaii Guitar

- **Genre:** Acoustic guitar, 'ukulele instrumentals.

- **Distinguishing notes:** Darin Leong has had a long association with guitar and 'ukulele; here, he has exceptional support from award-winning bassist Nathan Aweau, who's also a member of Hapa.

The reflective, melodic compositions have folk, classical and pop seasoning, with an occasional Island influence. "Five Years," the featured tune, was composed by Leong on the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. Anew Wang, one of his guitar guests, co-wrote "Aloha Papalua," which clearly has Island resonance.

Leong has a romantic flair, with performances that are tranquil and emotive, and he's able to send images and remembrances of times and themes that touch the soul. Surely, you'll find the beauty of his imagery in cuts such as "Prayer for the City," "Manoa Morning," "Passing Showers," "Sunday" and "Ukulele Etude." As implied by the CD title, this journey travels well, no matter how near or far you are from home.

- [Ozzie Kotani](#)
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• **Our take:** Add Leong to the roster of artists who talk through fingers — a master communicator through chords and strums.

🔊 Sample song: "Five Years" by Darin Leong

Reach Wayne Harada at wharada@honoluluadvertiser.com.

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