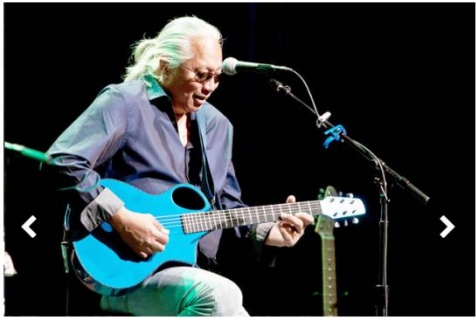


Legacy of a loved art

By [John Steinhorst The Garden Island](#) | Friday, November 17, 2017, 12:05 a.m.



LIHUE — Renowned slack key guitarists will be sharing their musical sound waves on Sunday. The day marks the 25th anniversary of the Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar Festival on the Garden Isle. “The festival is a wonderful showcase for this treasured Hawaiian folk art form,” said Stephen Inglis, one of this year’s performers from Oahu. “Fans will be treated to a diverse group of artists all showcasing the way this tradition has shaped their music.” Slack key, also known as ki ho’alu, is one of Hawaii’s most unique musical traditions. Guitar strings are loosened, or “slacked,” to produce beautiful tunings with unique finger-picking styles. “My favorite part of the festival is how we join each other’s sets for impromptu jam sessions,” Inglis said.

The festival, which began in Honolulu in 1982 to honor the iconic Gabby Pahinui 35 years ago, had its start on the Garden Island in 1992. To celebrate its silver anniversary, the festival is headed back to the Kauai Marriott Resort at Kalapaki Beach where it started. Artists from Oahu, Hawaii Island, Maui, Molokai and Kauai are scheduled to perform.

“Slack key ki ho’alu music is truly a Hawaiian treasure,” said Kamuela Kahoana, another special guest musician from Oahu. “These guys are amazing! It’s an honor to be involved.”

The list of musicians also includes Cindy Combs (Kauai), Danny Carvalho (Oahu), Nani Edgar (Los Angeles), Pancho Graham (Kauai), Ian OSullivan (Oahu), Blayne Asing (Molokai), Ho’okena (Oahu), LT Smooth (Big Island) and Malani Bilyeu (Kauai).

“No matter if I’ve played in Australia, Waikiki or San Quentin Prison, my favorite audience is the ohana on Kauai,” said performing artist, Walt Keale from Oahu.

One Kauai musician who loves sharing his mele and voice of aloha, Walt’s cousin Michael Keale, will also be expressing his passion for Hawaiian culture through slack-key.

“The annual slack key concert in Kaua’i style continues the legacy of a most loved art. Mahalo to Milton Lau, his hard working staff and all the awesome musicians for bringing their aloha and music to the Garden Isle,” Michael said.

A brand new Taylor guitar, valued at \$1,000, will be given away. Free CDs, T-shirts, and other items will be given away to celebrate a quarter century of hosting the event on Kauai.

Native Hawaiian Don Kauli’a from Maui is looking forward to performing for the special music festival.



"I have many family and friends from Kauai like the Kaholokua Ohana," Kauli'a said. "Back in the 1980s, Uncle Lew Lindsey used to fly me over to perform at the Rib & Tails Restaurant in Kapaa." Kauli'a said. Kauli'a is a descendant of Kalaniopu'u and his sister Kekuiapoiwa II, the mother of Kamehameha the Great on his dad's side and to Kahekili on his mother's side. "Their legacy continues through me as a veteran Ali'i in the Royal Order of Kamehameha I," Kauli'a said. "My great grandfather John Kauli'a was Queen Liliuokalani's confidant in music. John and his cousin Antoine Kao'o composes 'E Liliu E' as a Noho hula mele. So today, their legacy continues through me via the Aloha Aina Party and ki ho'alu." Many Hawaiian songs reflect stories of the ocean, volcanoes, mountains, waterfalls, plants and animals layer with multiple meanings of love and gratitude. Vocal techniques often mimic falsettos rooted in ancient chants, while open guitar tunings allow the notes to resonate for sustained times.

"For some people, including myself, slack key is a form of healing," said Kauai performer Paul Togioka, a featured artist on the two-time Grammy-nominated and Na Hoku Hanohano award-winning CD, "Hawaiian Slack Key Kings". One day he received a phone call from a woman who said she continuously played Togioka's music until her husband recovered from a coma. On another occasion, Togioka received a letter stating that he played at a couple's wedding over three years ago and they played his CD while their son was born, the two most important days of their lives. In 1996, Togioka became Kauai's first recording artist to be invited to open the Kauai Style Slack Key Guitar Festival and also received the Hawaii Music Awards' "Best Recording by a Slack Key Artist" for his CD titled Ohana 'O Kauai Slack Key Instrumentals. In 1998, he also received the "Best Hawaiian Instrumental Recording" award for "Ohana 'O Kauai Instrumentals from the Garden Isle".

"Without people getting the word out and associating our names to the art form, no one would know who we are," Togioka said.

What began in 1982 as one festival has now grown to 18 festivals in Hawaii, the mainland and Japan.

"It's been a pleasure from the very start to perform at all the slack key festivals throughout the islands," said longtime performer, Brother Noland Conjugacion of Oahu. "I have watched and experienced the festival grow and blossom into a 'must see' annual event." "To have that many artists on stage at one time is truly a testimony of our dedication to the perpetuation of this unique style of performing the guitar," Conjugacion added. "It's the culture and atmosphere of aloha that we bring."

Doors open Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., and there is a \$10 admission that benefits the Ki-ho'alu Foundation, whose mission is to promote, preserve and perpetuate slack key guitar music that began in 1830 on Hawaii Island.

