

# HSGA QUARTERLY

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by the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Association

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*A stellar moment at Fort Collins this year: Dancer Susie Park-Kelly with Vic Punua (left), Mark Kahalekulu, Victor's son Ed Punua, Guest Artist Alan Akaka and Philip J.K. Swain.*

## Fort Collins 2017 Festival Highlights

*By Frank Della-Penna*

*Aloha kakou* greetings! What an exciting and productive festival we had this past September in Fort Collins. Our Guest Artist Alan Akaka presented the best in Hawaiian music with his vocals and instrumentals. For those who don't know, Alan has a long history performing at venues such as the Hawaiian Regent Hotel (now the Marriott) and the Halekūlani Hotel with Hawaiian music icons, Sonny Kamahale, Benny Kalama, Genoa Keawe, the Keawe 'Ohana, and many others. I was there for some of these amazing performances. Alan performed every day of the festival, led a steel guitar workshop on Saturday, and was the feature performer at our big

floorshow following the Saturday Night Lū'au. As many of you know, Eddie Palama was slated to be our guest artist but had to cancel his trip due to health concerns. Writes Jackie Luongo, "Big mahalos go out to Alan for first coming to Fort Collins on such short notice, and then sharing his musical abilities and extensive theoretical knowledge in such an educational and enlightening way."

### Member Performances

Performances by Kaua'i pros Ed Punua and his father Victor Punua are a regular feature of our recent festivals. But this year, attendees were treated to the talents of the greater Punua 'Ohana. Writes Ed, "The 2017 HSGA Hawaiian

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## HSGA QUARTERLY

Volume 33, Issue 127



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### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Hawaiian Steel Guitar Association is a tax-exempt, nonprofit educational corporation in the State of Hawai'i under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Our primary purpose is to develop a global network of players and lovers of traditional Hawaiian music and to encourage the study, teaching, and performance of the Hawaiian steel guitar. Our primary financial goal is to provide scholarship assistance through donations to steel guitar students who demonstrate the ability and intent to become accomplished performers.

### MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to all steel guitar players and non-players around the world who support the perpetuation of the Hawaiian steel guitar. Annual dues are US\$30. The membership year begins July 1. Members receive the *HSGA Quarterly* and other group benefits. The *Quarterly* is mailed four times a year First Class to addresses in the United States and by Air Mail to foreign addresses. Members can obtain an Associate Membership for a spouse or family member at a cost of \$10, added to the annual dues; an Associate Member is entitled to discounts at certain HSGA functions and can vote in HSGA Board elections.

### SUBMIT ARTICLES & COMMENTS TO:

HSGA Quarterly, 3442 Greystone Ct, Fort Collins, CO 80525 USA. Our e-mail address is [hsga@hsga.org](mailto:hsga@hsga.org). Submitted items should also be e-mailed directly to the editor at [johnely@hawaiiansteel.com](mailto:johnely@hawaiiansteel.com). Letters to the president can be sent to: Frank Della-Penna, P.O. Box 18323, Washington, DC 20036.

*FORT COLLINS Continued from Page 1*

Music Festival was fun for the Punua 'Ohana as we were able to attend together as a family: Grampa Vic [Victor Punua], my wife Vanessa and our two youngest children, Lilikalani and Leimomi. Usually they hear all about the festival when we get back home; this year they were able to experience it for themselves. It was great to see steel guitar friends again this year, relax in the Colorado community, listen to the sharing and the love of the Hawaiian steel guitar, and laugh with Alan Akaka and his 'Mainland Islanders'. Looking forward to hopefully seeing everyone again next year!" Ed's son Lilikalani is hot on his father's footsteps as a performing Hawaiian steel guitar artist and was a real crowd pleaser at this year's festival. He is a Kamehameha School graduate and now attends Kaua'i Community College pursuing a degree in accounting.

Other notable member performances this year included Roberto Alaniz on steel with brother Jorge on rhythm guitar, giving eclectic performances of Hawaiian tunes and popular

songs using a multi-track recording system. Artist, musician and wood carver Keoni Lagunero displayed his 'ukulele technique and joined in with vocal harmonies during a brief but very enjoyable appearance. It was great to have Gerald Ross back with us this year providing expert backup on rhythm guitar and choice solo performances on steel guitar and 'ukulele.

### The Workshops

Our popular workshops consisted of five sessions covering a wide variety of topics. Hawaiian language expert Philip Joseph Kahaunaele Swain used a whiteboard to display guidance on pronunciation that one would use for reciting Hawaiian lyrics and speaking in the Hawaiian language. Philip discussed commonly used phrases in Hawaiian poetry and lyrics.

Chris Kennison taught C6th steel techniques and focused on forward and reverse bar slants, which is the sole method for altering chords on the Hawaiian guitar. It's a real challenge to figure out the correct slant angle, which varies continuously as you move up and down the fretboard!

*The Punua 'Ohana front and center at Ft. Collins: (l. to r.) Alan Akaka, Kamaka Tom and steeler Ed Punua with dad Victor; wife Vanessa and daughter Leimomi. Sweet!*





*Manteca, California member Roberto Alaniz playing his frypan with brother Jorge on rhythm guitar. They played a varied repertoire with their unique multi-track automated backup system.*

Mark Kahalekulu explored several tunings and finger-picking styles in his slack key class. The slack key guitar, which demands a coordinated effort to play bass runs while executing the melody, was made easy in Mark's class.

Stuart Yoshida's class covered 'ukulele as both a rhythm and solo instrument. If you missed Stuart's class, go to YouTube and search on 'Stuart Yoshida and Hawaiian style ukulele'. Also, take a listen to Eddie Kamae or Ohta-san. Check out Ohta-san's version of "Star Dust" for an example of his 'ukulele technique.

Special this year was Alan Akaka's workshop on Pa'ani and Fills for steel guitar, demonstrating how to use fill-ins to complement a vocal. Students kept busy reading the charts Alan prepared, as they played like true professionals. Alan taught improvisation through the use of rhythmic variation, chord substitution and general theory.

Delving further into Alan's class, Jackie Luongo wrote, "This C6th-based workshop was very hands-on and lots of information was covered. In just under an hour, Kumu Alan got a roomful of beginner and intermediate players playing a Hawaiian vamp and chord progressions in unison while he played 'Henehene Kou Aka'. Amazing as that was, the take-away was that you can choose practically any of the fills, even changing the order you play them in, and still not conflict with the melody. You can even combine them to make an improvised solo. Alan inadvertently taught me how to trick people into thinking I'm a good player!

"Playing Hawaiian steel guitar fills quickly captures the attention of an audience, invoking the listener to imagine the South Pacific. As such, I found it very helpful for choosing notes and chords that add musical 'atmosphere' to a Hawaiian event. Best of all, the workshop was free with festival registration."

## Saturday Night Lū'au Floorshow

Our fine show band this year consisted of Alan Akaka on steel guitar, Ed Punua and John Coelho on guitar, Philip Swain and Kamaka Tom on 'ukulele, and Mark Kahalekulu on bass. Wrote Tony Fourcroy, "Most of the guys are Kamehameha graduates and know each other well so we had some idea of how it was going to work. Alan then pulled everything together on Saturday to produce the floorshow. The best part about the Lū'au this year was that the Hilton Hotel finally nailed the food!" Victor Punua joined Ed, Mark and Kamaka for some tight harmonies on the hula numbers as the audience viewed the stage with a magnificent backdrop of a fiery volcano.

Lū'au show hula dancers were once again provided by Janna Alohalani Yoshimoto's Northern Colorado Hula Studio with help from Susie Kalani Ki'eki'e Park-Kelly who runs a halau in Boulder. Dancers included Janna, Maile Bergknut, Veronica Brush, Susie Park-Kelly, Sammy Gundlach, Rene Beri and MaryAnn Ellis. A bonus this year were dancers from the Punua 'Ohana: Ed Punua's wife Vanessa and his daughter Leimomi, who danced together to the delight of all. Leimomi is an eleventh grade student at Kamehameha School.

## Lū'au Show Summary

- "Hele On To Kaua'i" (Alan Akaka)
- "Aloha Week Hula" (Mark K., hula by Janna)
- "Hula Breeze" (Alan Akaka, hula by Susie)
- "Haleakalā Hula" (Ed Punua, hula by group)
- "Somewhere in Hawai'i" (John Coelho)
- "Hasegawa General Store" (Alan Akaka)
- "Hanalei Moon" (Victor Punua, hula by Susie)
- "Ku'u Hoa" (Philip Swain, hula by Janna)

*Continued on Page 4*

*Graceful Janna Yoshimoto of the Northern Colorado Hula Studio with Jacque Delaguerre on bass and Philip J.K. Swain on 'ukulele.*



- “Pua Hone” (Philip Swain, hula by group)
- “Goodnight Leilani E” (Ed Punua)
- “He U‘i” (Ed Punua, hula by Vanessa)
- “Show Me How To Do The Hula” (Ed, hula by Leimomi)
- “Hawai‘i Aloha”/“Aloha ‘Oe” (John Coelho)

### Festival Mahalos

Kudos to several who donated steel guitars to HSGA at this year’s festival! Non-member Steve Luscinski of Frederick, Maryland donated a custom-built console steel guitar that had been gathering dust in his closet for nearly 50 years. A silent auction was held and Ivan Reddington submitted the winning bid of \$300 and promptly donated it to Alan Akaka for his students at Ke Kula Mele Hawai‘i. At our annual membership meeting, I presented Guest of Honor Alan Akaka with my Dickerson steel guitar to take back with him to Hawai‘i. The guitar will go to one of Alan’s fine “NextGen” students, Mālie Lyman. We got word at press time from Vice-President John Limbach that Margie Mays is also giving Alan Akaka a steel guitar for use in his school. She and Don are headed to Hawai‘i in December and are planning on hand-delivering it to him.

Luthier Bob Moore was appointed to the HSGA Board at the membership meeting and will chair the HSGA Membership Committee. Thanks to member Roberto Alaniz and brother Jorge who started the effort to recruit new members by taking some fliers to the Music Department of Colorado State University. Thanks go to Roberto and Jorge also for donating some pictures of steel guitars and hula dancers. We raised \$295 on tickets for those! Additionally, we had several HSGA members volunteer for work on our committees. Joining Bob Moore on the Membership Committee are John Limbach, Roberto Alaniz, Larry Lenhart and Frank Della-Penna. The Scholarship Committee, chaired by John Lim-

*Boulder Member Bob Backlund playing his homemade dobro!*



*President Frank Della-Penna (left) donating his vintage Dickerson steel guitar to Alan Akaka for use in Alan’s Ke Kula Mele school.*

bach, includes Gerald Ross, Rick Aiello, Tony Fourcroy and Frank Della-Penna. Mahalo, all! Oh, and before we forget, we must thank John Mumford and Mike Wittmer for taking some great photos at this year’s festival!

### Final Thoughts

Former HSGA board member and recording secretary Jackie Luongo wrote the following about our new Fort Collins venue that pretty well sums up our festival: “In September, as the scent of spruce spreads over Colorado, the soothing sounds of millions of aspen leaves resonates. It is only fitting that Fort Collins is the site for our HSGA mainland convention. The sounds of steel guitars are as instantly recognizable and unforgettable as the iconic fluttering leaves. Seeing old friends and new in the freshly renovated Hilton underscores how many of our members share the same attributes regardless of cultural background. What great people steel guitar players are, both the famous and the obscure!

“If I had to characterize our festival in one word, that word would be *kokua*, exemplified by the Hawaiian spirit of everyone coming together to help make something fantastic happen. See you next year!

### On To Fort Collins 2018!

The dates have been set for next year’s festival at the Fort Collins Hilton: September 27-29, 2018. Save the dates for more music, learning, fun and friendship at our annual mainland get-together. ■

### Did You Pay Your 2017-2018 Dues?

*This is your FINAL issue if your newsletter envelope still shows “X 6/17” next to your address. Dues are \$30, which includes First Class delivery (Air Mail overseas). Mahalo!*

# Membership Meeting Notes

By Jackie Luongo

Our Fort Collins event saw a well-attended general meeting at the Hilton Hotel with both *kama'āina* (local Hawaiian) and *malihini* (non-Hawaiian) members participating. As with all Hawaiian-inspired meetings, an atmosphere of good fellowship and *laulima* (cooperation) prevailed.

First, President Della-Penna called for a big year ahead for the association. As an auction sheet for a steel guitar given to us by Steve Luscinski was passed around, several members volunteered their time and talents towards the board's vision of increasing membership and supporting Hawaiian music. Additionally, Dr. Gil O'Gawa accepted an appointed position on the board. Mahalo to all for agreeing to be part of a new chapter in our association, which promises to be better than ever before.

Next, outgoing board members Chris Kennison, Kamaka Tom and Ivan Reddington were recognized and thanked for their service. Each served for many years and were instrumental in helping to smoothly transition our festival from Joliet to Fort Collins. Also, gratitude and appreciation was expressed to Secretary-Treasurer Tony Fourcroy for his work in producing our Fort Collins festival.

Additionally, President Della-Penna shared with the membership that the tracking of HSGA funds will be moved into the Twenty-First Century by the end of November 2017. That is to say, the association is consolidating all funds in Fort Collins and will be henceforth utilizing online banking and digital reporting. President Della-Penna then spoke about the association's reinstatement of 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, which was met with vigorous applause—big mahalos to Frank and HSGA Director of Finances, Arsine Kailian, who spearheaded the effort.

*Former HSGA Board member Gerald Ross from Ann Arbor, Michigan "bearing down" on his Fender steel guitar.*



*New board member Gil O'Gawa (left), festival coordinator Tony Fourcroy on steel, and outgoing board member Chris Kennison.*

A big *ho'omai'ka'i 'ana* (congratulations) went out to Bo Bahret on his retirement as HSGA's newsletter delivery point man. Bo had been mailing out the newsletter worldwide since 2005 and shared a few minutes with the membership on what the job entails and how he first became involved with it. Bo won't mind if I tell his age (91), and he said he figured it was time to pass the baton. Member Joe Stewart graciously stepped in to take over the future newsletter mail-out duties.

Well, that about sums up the general membership meeting. Thanks to all who participated in this year's festival. To those who were unable to attend, *hiki iā'oe ke hui pū me mākou* (may you join us soon). ■

## Newsletter Delivery Alert

*We are changing printing companies and apologize for any delays in the delivery of your newsletter. Mahalo for your patience!*

*A nice shot of Ocean City, Maryland steel guitarist Bill Thomson with Kamaka Tom on 'ukulele and Alan Akaka on guitar.*



## COCO WIRE

From HSGA President **Frank Della-Penna**: “We have just posted our new HSGA Scholarship application form for prospective steel guitar students.” Point your browser to [www.hsga.org/scholarship.htm](http://www.hsga.org/scholarship.htm) and click the link at the bottom of the page to download the form. Members can also make donations to our Scholarship Fund by clicking the Donate button on this page. Mahalo!

From our webmaster and graphics designer **Amy Pace**: “Hi everyone. An article about [Hawaiian steel guitarist] **Annie Kerr** has been published on the *SheShreds* magazine blog for all interested. They gave a link to HSGA, too! Go to: [sheshredsmag.com/legends-annie-kerr/](http://sheshredsmag.com/legends-annie-kerr/).

From member **Wally Pfeifer**: “Of the 234 Teacher of the Year Award candidates in the State of Illinois, ten finalists were chosen. At a banquet on October 28, 2017 in Bloomington, Illinois, our granddaughter, **Lindsey Jensen**, received the 2018 Teacher of the Year Award in the State of Illinois. Quite an honor. She teaches at Dwight High School and is making Dwight proud.”

From St. Catharines, Ontario member **George Rout**: “I’ll be 80 next week, still playing and still taking long bike rides on some of our excellent long trails here in S.W. Ontario.” For those wondering how **George “Keoki” Lake** is doing following his fall last year, George Rout added, “George is still in a lot of pain. I spoke with him this past week. It’s a great discomfort. And, of course, he is in an assisted living facility, not in his home, which is hard to take.” [ED: We send our best wishes to Keoki for improvement this coming year. Mahalo for the update, George.]

Thanks to **Jeff Kearns** for his fine arrangement of “Moon of Manakoora” in the Spring 2017 issue. Jeff has posted an excellent video of him playing it. Go to YouTube and search on ‘Moon of Manakoora Jeff Kearns’. ■

*At the Hawai‘i Island steelfest, Adam Asing (left), Mark Yamanaka, Dwight Tokumoto and Kaipo Asing. (Courtesy of Don Touchi)*



*A nice pre-80th birthday shot of Ontario, Canada member George Rout playing his Rickenbacker Bakelite steel. Congrats!*

## Steel Guitar Sounds Fill the Air at Mauna Lani

*By Addison Ching*

The first annual Hawai‘i Island Steel Guitar Festival, held on November 10-12, 2017 at the Mauna Lani Bay Hotel, was met with enthusiasm, excitement and appreciation for Hawaiian music and the Hawaiian steel guitar. Brief showers and the threat of heavier rain wasn’t enough to dampen the spirits of festival guests.

The festival launched earlier in the week with a steel guitar construction workshop at the hotel conducted by luthier Bob Gleason, who conducts similar workshops at the annual Aloha Music Camp on Kaua‘i. A handful of enthusiastic steel guitar builders sanded and finished their own personal 6-string instruments with Bob supervising the installation of tuning machines and pickup electronics. Attendees left the workshop with their own personal hand-crafted instrument!

Several area schools were visited by presentation teams that included seasoned steel guitar masters and youth steel guitar players. Students were given an introduction to the steel guitar by the presentation teams and afforded an opportunity to ask questions about the instrument. Musical selections featuring the steel guitar were performed for the students, and hands-on opportunities were offered to the students, with youth members of the presentation team working hand-in-hand with the students.

The Friday and Saturday evening programs were moved indoors at the last minute due to potential rain in the area. Friday’s program featured Iaukea Bright, Ke Kula Mele Next Generation steel guitarists Mālie Lyman and Joey

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# Steel Guitars Abound At Helumoa

By Addison Ching

The First Annual Waikīkī Steel Guitar Week was held this past July 14-15 at Waikīkī's Royal Hawaiian Center, presenting a variety of steel guitar artists to standing-room-only audiences at the Royal Grove Stage. Previously a single-day program, the annual event was expanded this year to include steel guitar presentations for the entire week. One-hour programs were offered Monday through Thursday, and the 3½-hour ho'olaule'a programs were presented Friday and Saturday evenings. The Royal Grove Stage is located at Waikīkī's Helumoa, the former playground of Hawaiian royalty and the site of the Royal Hawaiian Center. The events were emceed by Hawai'i celebrities Kimo Kahoano and Harry B. Soria.

The Steel Guitar Week kicked off on Monday with four Next Generation steel guitarists from Alan Akaka's Ke Kula Mele Hawai'i School of Hawaiian Music. They were accompanied by

other young musicians from Ke Kula Mele and adult musicians Ronald Tolentino, Addison Ching and Alan Akaka. The hour-long program featured three selections by each of the four steel guitarists.

Greg Sardinha and Po'okela, which includes Zachary Castro and Kata Maduli, performed on Tuesday, while The Casey Olsen Trio (sometimes known as the Hiram Olsen Trio) with Casey, Hiram and Dennis "Bla" Keohokalole performed on Wednesday with surprise guest and longtime hula dancer at the Halekūlani Hotel, Kanoe Miller! Alan Akaka and The Islanders, which includes Adam and Kaipō Asing, performed Thursday night. Steel guitarist Alexis Tolentino, also an accomplished hula dancer, provided hula for the programs on Monday through Thursday.

The Friday evening guests were treated to programs by Alexis Tolentino, Steve Cheney, Wayne Shishido, the Bobby Ingano Trio and Maui's Geronimo "Geri" Valdriz, while Saturday

*Continued on Page 20*

*Alexis Tolentino in her debut as feature artist at Waikīkī Steel Week with Bobby Ingano (left), Ronald Tolentino, Alan Akaka, and Addison Ching. (Photo courtesy of Don Touchi)*



## HSGA Donations

Thanks, HSGA members for your generous donations this past quarter!

Big mahalos go to perennial donor **Bill Thomson** of Ocean City, Maryland who donated a generous \$100 to our General Fund, so vital to the day-to-day operations of our association.

The following members donated at least \$10:

- Frank D. Brandenburg, Largo, FL
- Pete Burke, Shell Beach, CA
- Robert Clifford, Tumwater, WA
- Frank Della-Penna and Stephanie Ortoleva, Washington, DC
- Wade H. Hargrove, Raleigh, NC
- Beat Iseli, Winterthur, Switzerland
- Grattan H. Lyng, Paraparaumu, New Zealand
- Rebecca Woo, San Francisco, CA



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## EVENTS CALENDAR

### December 16, 2017—Winter Concert in Kāneʻohe

Enjoy the music of Ke Kula Mele School of Hawaiian music under the direction of Kumu Alan Akaka at this year's Winter Concert held on Saturday, December 16, 2017, 11 AM at Windward Mall in Kāneʻohe, Hawaiʻi. Students will perform songs with the theme of Ka Manu (birds), as well as Christmas songs on steel guitar, ʻukulele, guitar and Hawaiian style bass. Free to the public. For more information call Alan at (808) 375-9379 or visit [kekulamele.com](http://kekulamele.com).

### February 2-3, 2018—Kauaʻi Steel Guitar Festival

The Third Annual Kauaʻi Steel Guitar Festival will be held on February 2-3, 2018 at the Courtyard by Marriott Kauaʻi at Coconut Beach in Kapaʻa, Kauaʻi. Friday performances are from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM with music workshops from 5:00 to 8:00 PM. Saturday performances are from 10:00 AM to 8:00 PM. Kanikapila jam sessions from 8:30 to 10:00 PM both evenings. Free and open to the public. For details contact Alan Akaka at (808) 375-9379.

### March 17, 2018—Steel Festival at Ka Makana Aliʻi

Location: Ka Makana Aliʻi Shopping Center in Kapolei, Oʻahu (tentative). Details TBA...

### April 11-12, 2018—Hawaiian Steel Guitar Camp

The Hawaiian Steel Guitar Camp precedes the Maui Steel Guitar Festival and will be held on April 11-12 at the Kāʻanapali Beach Hotel, Lahaina, Maui from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM both days. For details go to [www.mauisteelguitar-camp.com](http://www.mauisteelguitar-camp.com) or contact Alan Akaka at (808) 375-9379.

### April 13-15, 2018—Maui Steel Guitar Festival

The Tenth Annual Maui Steel Guitar Festival will be held on April 13-14, 2018 at the Kāʻanapali Beach Hotel, Lahaina, Maui, 10 AM–8:30 PM, and on April 15, 2018, at Queen Kaʻahumanu Center in Kahului, Maui, 12:00–5:00 PM. This free, three-day festival features a series of performances, presentations, instructional workshops and nightly jam sessions. For details go to [www.mauisteelguitarfestival.com](http://www.mauisteelguitarfestival.com) or contact Alan Akaka at (808) 375-9379.

### June 2018—Ke Kula Mele Summer Concert

Location: Windward Mall, Kāneʻohe. Details TBA...

### July 12-14, 2018—AISGC Winchester Convention

The 2018 Aloha International Steel Guitar Convention will be held on July 12-14, 2018 at the Towne Square Community Centre in downtown Winchester, Indiana. There will be performances, seminars, and a Saturday night lūʻau show. For details check the club website at [www.aisgc.org](http://www.aisgc.org). ■

## Windward Mall 2017 Steel Festival Report

By Addison Ching

The 2017 Hawaiian Steel Guitar Festival at Windward Mall was held on Sunday, June 11, 2017, featuring steel guitar performances by Next Generation steel guitarists Pono Fernandez (11) and Alexis Tolentino (18), Alan Akaka, Eddie Palama, Isaac Akuna, Bobby Ingano, Steve Cheney and Greg Sardinha. The event was hosted by Leilani Kahoano, substituting for previously announced host Kimo Kahoano.

The versatility of the steel guitarists was demonstrated when some took up other instruments in support of the featured player. At one point Alan Akaka could be seen on upright bass, and Bobby Ingano played ʻukulele for several performers. Wayne Shishido, another steel guitarist who will be featured in the upcoming Waikīkī Steel Guitar Week, helped out on ʻukulele for Isaac Akuna and Eddie Palama. Backup musicians were Adam Asing on upright bass and Kaipo Asing on guitar.

Pono Fernandez sang and played “No Ke Ano Ahiahi,” “Henehene Kou Aka” and an Alan Akaka arrangement called “Waikiki Medley.” Alexis Tolentino played “Maui Chimes” and Alan’s arrangement of “Sand” and “Whispering Lullaby.”

As with many other festivals, the finale featured many of the day’s steel guitarists in a round-robin kanikapila-style version of “My Little Grass Shack in Kealakekua Hawaii.” The video has been posted to YouTube and shows the stylings of Alan Akaka, Greg Sardinha, Bobby Ingano, and Steve Cheney with Kaipo Asing on guitar and Kata Maduli on bass—go to YouTube and search on ‘Windward Mall jam session finale 061117’.

The Hawaiian Steel Guitar Festival is a series of festivals positioned for community outreach and offered at Honolulu County shopping centers. The festival at Ka Makana Aliʻi in Kapolei is positioned for Oʻahu Leeward communities, while the festival at Windward Mall in Kāneʻohe targets Windward communities. ■

### Mahalo, Members!

*Keep those great letters and photos coming! YOU are the heart of our association. If possible, send original photographs or output from a digital camera. We cannot use grainy or washed out photos. As always, photos will be returned on request. Please send news, comments, or photos to: HSGA Quarterly, 3442 Greystone Ct, Fort Collins, CO 80525. Email your editor directly at [johnely@hawaiiansteel.com](mailto:johnely@hawaiiansteel.com). Mahalo!*





At nice Steel Guitar Week shot of the Hiram Olsen Trio: Hiram (left), Casey Olsen and Bla Keohokalole. (Courtesy of Don Touchi)

**New Email Address?**

Please notify us of changes to your email address. Send updates to both our office ([hsga@hsga.org](mailto:hsga@hsga.org)) and to John Ely ([johnely@hawaiiansteel.com](mailto:johnely@hawaiiansteel.com)). Mahalo!

**Weekly Steel Guitar Spots**

**Bobby Ingano Trio**—Bobby performs every Monday with Kaipo and Adam Asing at Dots Restaurant’s “Nostalgia Night,” 6-9 PM. Dots is on O’ahu’s North shore at 130 Mango St., Wahiawā, Hawai‘i 96786-1926.

**Alan Akaka and the Islanders**—Alan and group are playing select Thursdays and possibly some Fridays at the International Marketplace on Kalākaua Avenue, 7–10 PM. We understand that Alan also plays at Duke’s Waikīkī on a weekly basis. Call Duke’s for details.

**Hiram Olsen Trio**—We hear that Hiram, Casey and Bla are back at the Halekūlani Hotel’s seaside patio. We’re not sure which days. Let us know if you find out!

Every other Friday evening there is a public concert at the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center stage, 6–7:30 PM, on the lawn stage area next to Kalākaua Avenue. Contact the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center for details.



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# Christmas Island

(Lyle Moraine)

Arrangement by John Ely

Med. Swing

Intro

C7 F F#0 C7

How'd ya like to spend

E  
C  
A  
G  
E  
C

T 7 6 5 | 4 3 4 3 4 4 3 4 | 6 5 3 | 5 2 | 3 5 4 5 | 5

A

B 5 3 | 5 2 | 3 5

Steel Gtr. (C6th)

A Bb F D7 G7 C7

Christ - mas \_\_\_\_\_ on Christ-mas Is - land? \_\_\_\_\_ How'd ya like to spend the ho-li-day a -

T 6 5 | 8 6 5 | 7 5 | 7 5 | 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3

A

B 5 | 5 | 7

10 F F#0 C7 A Bb F D7

way a-cross the sea? \_\_\_\_\_ How'd ya like to spend Christ - mas \_\_\_\_\_ on Christ-mas

T 4 6 5 3 | 5 4 5 | 5 | 6 5 8 6 9 | 8 6 9 | 8 9

A (5) 5 5 5 5

B 5 3 | 5 6 7 | 5 | 5 6 7 | 8

15 G7 C7 F Bbm

Is - land? \_\_\_\_\_ How'd ya like to hang a stock-ing on a great big co-co-nut tree? \_\_\_\_\_

T 7 5 5 5 | 7 6 5 | 4 3 4 3 4 4 3 4 | 4 6 5 4 3 | 5 1 | 1

A

B 7 | 5 4 3 | 5

20 F F7 **B** B $\flat$  B $\flat$ m F

How'd ya like to stay up late, like the is-land-ers do? Wait for San-ta to

(optional)

T 1 1 1 3 3 5 6 6 5 6 8 6 5 5 5 4 5 6 5

A 0 0 5 4

B 0 0 5 5 5 5

F.H. (let ring) - - -

25 G7 Gm7 B $\flat$ m6 C7 **A** B $\flat$  F

sail in with your pre-sents in a ca - noe. If you e-ver spend Christ - mas

T 7 2 2 5 5 5 5 3 5 3 1 0 5 4 5 6 5

A 7 2 2 5 3 1 0 5 4 5 (5)

B 7 3 5

let ring - - - - -

30 D7 G7 C7

on Christ-mas Is-land You will ne-ver stray for ev-ry-day your Christ-mas dreams come

(optional) P.H.

T 8 6 5 7 5 7 6 5 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 6 5 4 3

A 8 5 7 5 5 7 6 5 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 5 4 3

B 8 5 7

35 1. F B $\flat$ m F 2. F C7 F

true. You will true.

P.H.

T 1 1 5 5 3 3 5 3 5 0 0 1 4 5 5 5

A 5 1 0 0 5 3 5 3 5 3 2 1 0 4 5 5 5

B 5 1 0 0 5 3 5 3 5 3 2 1 0 4 5 5 5

let ring - - - - -

# The Harlin Brothers of Indianapolis and the Birth of the Pedal Steel Guitar

**Part Five—More from 1939: Alvino Rey’s Trial of Epiphone’s Varichord and Jay D. Harlin’s First Pedal Steel Guitar Prototype**

By Anthony Lis

This series (which debuted in the Summer 2016 issue) is examining the development of the pedal steel guitar, from initial experiments with adding pedals, buttons or levers to guitars (or guitar-like apparatuses) in the late 1880s through Paul Bigsby’s custom-built, multi-neck pedal steel guitars of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Particular attention is being paid to the contributions of the Harlin Brothers, a teaching, publishing, and pedal steel guitar-building enterprise active in Indianapolis from the mid-1930s through the early 1980s. (The Harlins also operated a chain of music studios in Indiana and in Illinois.) Jay D. Harlin (1911-1996), the steel guitar-

*Alvino Rey, with a Gibson EH-150 wood-body lap steel guitar. (From Rey’s Modern Guitar Method, Hawaiian Style)*



playing, third-oldest Harlin brother, is known to have developed the Kalina Multi-Kord—an early commercially successful pedal steel guitar—by August 1947. As will be seen in this installment, there is anecdotal and photographic evidence that Harlin constructed a working pedal steel prototype by the late 1930s and a second prototype around 1941.

This series has also been examining the contemporaneous activities of big band steel guitarist and inventor Alvino Rey, who played steel guitar first with Horace Heidt and his Musical Knights, then, beginning in early 1939, with his own Alvino Rey Orchestra. Also covered were the King Sisters, who supplied vocals on a number of Heidt and Rey ensemble recordings. (Rey married Luise King in May 1937.) By March 1939, Rey’s steel guitar-related experimental activities included adding pedals to test-model Gibson steel guitars made of brass, aluminum, and/or wood, assembling a double-neck lap-steel of “hybrid construction” for occasional use during his Heidt gigs, and receiving a modified Console Grande double-neck steel guitar from Gibson with an added pedal mechanism.

The previous installment (Part Four, in the Spring 2017 issue) began with mention of a fifteen-minute program Rey produced for Mutual Network radio affiliates on the West Coast between mid-August 1939 and mid-February 1940, during which he used his “singing guitar” gimmick, effected via the use of a carbon throat microphone worn by either Rey’s wife Luise or Rey himself, who sang along with guitar lines.

The majority of the installment detailed thirty-eight of the transcription recordings Alvino Rey made with the King Sisters and pianist Buddy Cole, his future brother-in-law, for Los



*The Harlin Brothers, in their early days, apparently before Jay started his pedal steel guitar experiments. Here, Jay plies an old-fashioned lap-steel with Winiford on ‘ukulele, Jimmie on bass, and Herb on standard guitar. (From Beth Harlin)*

Angeles’s C. P. MacGregor recording company in likely the second half of 1939. In a letter mailed to the author on March 21, 2017, Sheffield, England record collector and chronologist John D. Marsden kindly shared a list of MacGregor recordings from his collection. Swing era historians Charles Garrod and Bill Korst, who assembled two editions of an Alvino Rey/King Sisters discography between 1986 and 1997, were evidently unaware of Rey and the Kings’ MacGregor recordings, for neither edition includes them. Hawaiian-themed sides included the King Sisters’ rendition of “Blue Hawaii” (MacG 1878), backed by Alvino Rey and Buddy Cole, and Rey and Cole’s cover of “My Little Grass Shack in Kealakekua, Hawaii” (MacG 1900).

Marsden hinted in a recent letter to the author that a few other Alvino Rey and King Sisters transcription recordings likely exist. (Marsden noted in his

March 2017 recordings list that he failed to win a couple of Rey's other MacGregor transcriptions at a recent rare recordings auction.)

The previous installment also detailed the King Sisters' major label recording debut, for Victor-affiliated Bluebird, in Hollywood in mid-November 1939. Accompanied by an eight-piece ensemble (including Buddy Cole and conducted by Alvino Rey), the Kings recorded five sides, including their Bluebird debut single, the Yiddish-inflected "A Bee Gezindt" ("Live and Be Well").

In closing, the installment relayed how in 1938 and 1939 the Harlin Brothers continued their musical instrument sales, teaching, and publishing work in Indianapolis. *Polk's Indianapolis City Directory 1939* shows the Harlins splitting their "guitar studio" and "musical instruments" divisions and personnel across separate downtown Indianapolis locations for the first time; Jay, Herb, and Win Harlin staffed a "guitar studio" at 40½ West Ohio Street where the family business had been headquartered from 1936-38, while George Harlin ran a "musical instruments" department roughly six blocks southeast (on the fifth floor of the Transportation Building at 213 East South Street on the southeast edge of downtown Indianapolis's Wholesale Commercial District).

Research since the release of the previous installment, including perusal of stacks of old sheet music at the residence of Jay Harlin's younger daughter Beth Ann in Plainfield, Indiana on July 20, 2017, revealed that the Harlins actually brought forth at least *eight* arrangements in 1938-39, including steel guitar tablature arrangements of the Hawaiian-themed "On the Beach at Waikiki" and "King's Serenade" (aka "Imi Au Ia 'Oe").

Searching the online archive at Newspapers.com revealed that at various times throughout 1939 the Harlin Brothers



*A signed promotional photo of Jay Harlin (right) at roughly age nineteen in a photo likely taken around 1930 with his older brother Herb (then roughly twenty-eight years old). As a teenager, Jay played standard guitar before a bruised finger led him to pursue the steel guitar. (From Beth Harlin)*

appeared in fifteen-minute segments on Indianapolis's WIBC radio, the city's then new Mutual Broadcasting System affiliate.

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Turning our attention back to Alvino Rey, it seems reasonable to assume that around 1939, Rey began experimenting with Epiphone's Varichord, a seven-string steel guitar with seven hand-operated pitch-altering levers which—according to the third edition of *Gruhn's Guide to Vintage Guitars: An Identification Guide for American Fretted Instruments*—was available beginning in 1939 before being discontinued by 1943. Rey—in the liner notes to the 1977 anthology LP, *The Big Band Steel Guitar of Alvino Rey*—mentions using the Varichord on "a record or two," without identifying specific recordings. *Gruhn's Guide* relates that the Varichord consisted of a rectangular body fashioned from white mahogany wood. Tim Miller, in *Instruments As Technology and Culture: Co-Constructing the Pedal Steel Guitar* (his 2013 PhD thesis for the University of North Carolina) notes that each of the Varichord's strings were "individually adjustable," while Walter Carter, in *Electric Guitars and Basses: A Photographic History*, relates that the Varichord's pitch-altering levers were "built into the top of

*Continued on Page 14*

*The King Sisters in 1940 (including Rey's wife, Luise).*



the instrument,” adding that “the ... pitch-changers were incrementally-calibrated, allowing a player to retune in a matter of seconds.”

An April 1941 article in the jazz-oriented publication *Metronome* titled “Dan Maffei Explains Epiphone’s Varichord” (also kindly provided to the author by John Marsden) related that the “final form” of the instrument was “fitted with cups on the manual into which the tips of the fingers fit, thus enabling the player to make rapid changes.” The article also mentioned that the instrument’s strings were tuned (low to high) E-B-D-E-G#-B-E, “with selectors for each string which permit four changes on each string in semitone steps.” The article, reporting on a demonstration given by Maffei to “an invited audience of well-known Hawaiian guitarists” at Epiphone’s downtown Manhattan showroom, continued that “the selectors have ratchet-attachments which snap into position at the desired point,” adding that “a general release-bar is [also] provided, which returns the string-tuning to the neutral position, or original tuning.”

An enthusiastic two-page spread on the Varichord in Epiphone’s 1942 *Musical Instruments* catalog (titled

“Epiphone Varichord: The Startling New Sensation”) relentlessly praised the new invention, asking—rhetorically—“Do you know of any tuning used on the steel guitar which enables the player to obtain any chord written, such as [an] augmented ninth [chord] or minor sixth [chord] without changing the tuning?” The catalog continued, “... the Varichord is the instrument of the future and you will want to play it,” promising that “modern arrangements will demand it.” Customers were offered either a Varichord alone or a “Varichord Grande” setup including one of four different types of amplifiers. A collapsible stand was also available. And, in case potential buyers missed the two-page spread, the back of the catalog also hawked the instrument, deeming it the only one of its kind, being “fully portable” and “playable on lap or stand,” while “mak[ing] every chord possible.”

Rey—in his album notes for *Big Band Steel Guitar of Alvin Rey*—offered a more down-to-earth assessment of the Varichord, admitting that while the “barrel tuners [Rey’s term for Epiphone’s pitch-altering levers] ... worked really well ... the problem was that I never had a free hand to reset the tuning while playing,” adding that “I did have my feet free and I knew that

**EPHPHONE Varichord**

*The Startling NEW Sensation*

\* Talking about evolution, it required electrical amplification to make room for the Hawaiian, or Steel Guitar in the modern band, but until the advent of the VARICHORD it was impossible to make the Steel, or Hawaiian Guitar any what is necessary and at the right time!

\* This instrument makes unheard of chordal possibilities possible. Do you know of any tuning used on the Steel Guitar which enables the player to obtain any chord written, such as an augmented 9th or minor 6th, without changing the tuning?

\* Just imagine an instrument of this type wherein the only chord not obtainable is "The Last Chord" and you can then picture the possibilities found only in this triumph of engineering and the instrument maker's art.

**The VARICHORD\* is the instrument of the future and you will want to play it. Modern arrangements will demand it.**

No. 2100—VARICHORD only  
 No. 2110—VARICHORD GRANDE with standard Zephyr AC Amplifier  
 No. 2120—VARICHORD GRANDE with standard Zephyr AC-DC Amplifier  
 No. 2130—VARICHORD GRANDE with Dreadnaught AC Amplifier  
 No. 2140—VARICHORD GRANDE with Dreadnaught AC-DC Amplifier  
 No. 2145—STAND, COLLAPSIBLE

The VARICHORD is designed for playing on the lap or in the ELECTAR Grande form which is entirely collapsible, folding into two pieces. Dan Maffei, guitarist at Radio City Music Hall, co-inventor with Clyde Doerr, is shown above posing with the VARICHORD.

\* U. S. Pat. Office U. S. Patent Nos. 22077 and 22078

EPHPHONE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CHOICE OF THE STARS

Page 30 of Epiphone Musical Instruments' Catalog V from 1942, trumpeting the virtues of the Varichord steel guitar. To infer from the ad copy, the new seven-string, E7th-based Varichord made it possible for “the steel, or Hawaiian guitar to say what is necessary and at the right time!”

[i.e., the concept of pedals, emphasis added] would work much better.”

Epiphone’s catalog spread informs us that the Varichord’s inventors were Dan Maffei (“guitarist at Radio City Music Hall”) and Clyde C. Doerr. Maffei is shown in two small catalog photos, playing the Varichord standing up (sans amplifier) and also sitting down (with amplifier). Patient searching at the Ancestry.com genealogical website eventually revealed that “Dan Maffei” was New York-born Dominick Anthony Maffei (1898-1971), the son of Italian immigrants who by the time of the 1930 *United States Federal Census* was married and living in a multi-family dwelling on Grand Avenue in the Bronx, earning his livelihood primarily as an independent music teacher. To infer from several “hits” at the Google Books online database (including a July 11, 1941 entry in the *Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office* for a patent on a

A magnified view of the lower part of the above page, showing Varichord co-inventor Dominick (“Dan”) Maffei with his creation in both an “Electar Grande” pose with collapsible wooden stand, and in lap-playing position with an amplifier.

**The VARICHORD\* is the instrument of the future and you will want to play it. Modern arrangements will demand it.**

No. 2100—VARICHORD only  
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“Harmonic Slide Rule”), by the early 1940s, Maffei had moved southeast to the Bayside neighborhood of Queens.

More patient searching at Ancestry.com and on the Internet in general pinpointed Clyde Charles Doerr (1894-1973) as a Southern Michigan-born bandleader and alto saxophonist. By the time Doerr registered for the World War I draft (on June 5, 1917), he had married and was providing music at a central San Francisco tavern. T. Malcolm Rockwell’s *Hawaiian and Hawaiian Guitar Records 1891-1960* CD-ROM/discography shows Doerr recording five Hawaiian-themed songs with Lou Gold’s orchestra between 1925 and 1930, including “Ukulele Lady” and “Why Have You Forgotten Waikiki?”. Doerr played on the *Major Bowes Amateur Hour* radio talent show, which debuted in April 1934 and by the late 1930s was being carried by the CBS network. Doerr eventually abandoned his musical career, working at the Curran Machine Works in Long Island City, New York during World War II. By 1966, he was practicing as a chiropractor in Daly City, California.

Maffei and Doerr submitted two patents for a “stringed musical instrument” under the classification “Devices for Altering the String Tension During Playing.” Patent #2235717A was submitted on March 31, 1939, while patent #2235718A was submitted a little under six months later. Both patents, which listed Epiphone as the “Original Assignee,” were granted on March 18, 1941.

Epiphone’s 1942 *Musical Instruments* catalog explained that “the Varichord is designed for playing on the lap or in the ELECTAR Grande form which is entirely collapsible, folding into two pieces.” (George Gruhn and Walter Carter explain in *Gruhn’s Guide to Vintage Guitars* that the “Electar Grande” was a wooden stand [and not an instrument] made of white mahogany wood which broke down into “two luggage-like carrying cases.”)

A blurb in the radio section of the *Pittsburgh Press* of March 25, 1942 noted that the Varichord was being used in the CBS staff orchestra, played by Dan Maffei’s brother Vincent. Vin-



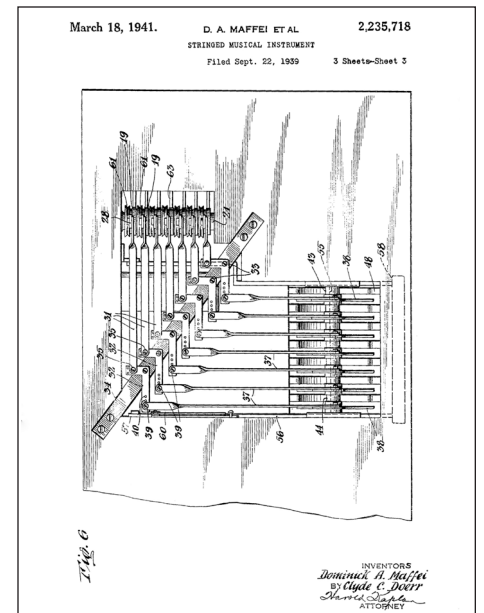
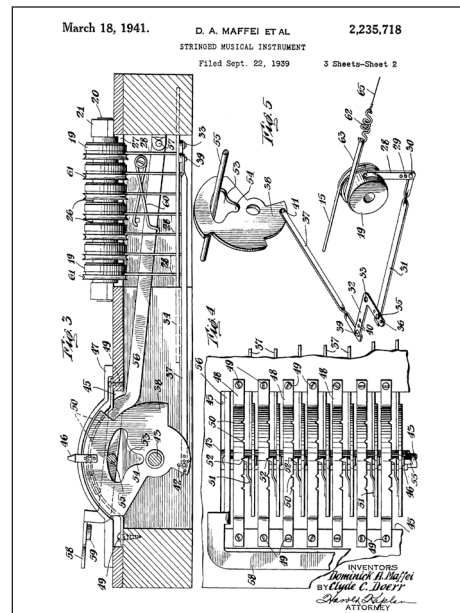
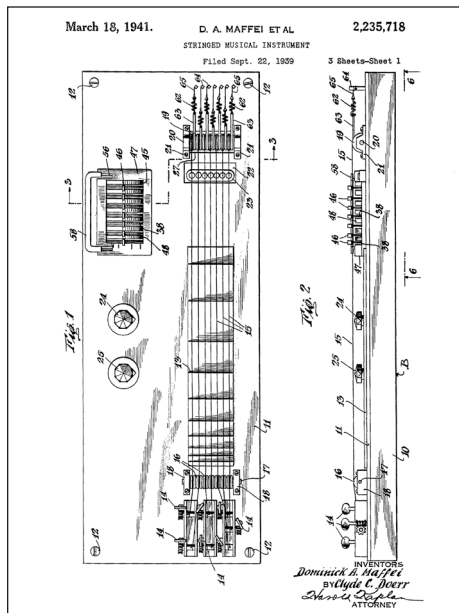
A signed vintage photo of Coldwater, Michigan-born alto saxophonist, bandleader and inventor Clyde Doerr in his early years.

cent, who apparently spelled the family surname as “Maffay,” was pictured standing behind a Varichord on the back of Epiphone’s 1942 catalogue.

In summing up the Varichord, Jim Fisch and L. B. Fred offer in *Epiphone*:

*Continued on Page 16*

The three drawings accompanying Dominick Maffei and Clyde Doerr’s March 18, 1941 patent application for a “stringed musical instrument,” which Epiphone would market as the Varichord. Figure 4, in the lower right corner of the second page, details “the operating levers and cooperating members associated therewith.” The application notes that “the operating-levers [can] ... be engaged retentively in ... several adjustable positions” and can also be “move[d] freely to different positions-of-adjustment at will.”



*The House of Stathopoulos* (p. 42) that Epiphone ... lost a lot of money on [the Varichord],” adding that “it was a marvelous invention, but it required a lot of trial and error and experimentation. Unfortunately, a lot of players and teachers ... weren’t that deeply into the steel guitar. The idea was good, but it wasn’t very practical.”

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Refocusing now on Jay Harlin and the Harlin Brothers, by October 1939 Jay Harlin had completed the assembly of his first fully-formed pedal steel guitar prototype—a black and chrome eight-string model, originally with four pedals—in Indianapolis. A second prototype was completed around 1941, a 12-string model with blonde and white wood construction. Both prototypes are currently held by Arthur’s Music Store on the southeast edge of downtown Indianapolis. Information on these prototypes was gleaned from Amy England—granddaughter of Arthur’s founder Amos Arthur—who currently works at the store as a service manager and instrument repair tech. England relayed information about the

*A recent photo of Jay and Pauline Harlin’s younger daughter, Beth Ann Harlin.*



prototypes in an August 25, 2015 posting on the online Steel Guitar Forum (bb.steelguitarforum.com), an August 16, 2016 e-mail to the author, and an “infographic” history page titled “The Harlin Bro[ther]s’ Kalina Multi-Kord: A Missing Piece of History in the Story of the Pedal Steel Guitar,” created for Arthur’s sales floor display of the Harlin prototypes.

According to England’s forum post, titled “Multi-Kord & Pedal Steel Parts for Sale!”, Arthur’s purchased the two Jay Harlin pedal steel prototypes from Indianapolis-based guitarist and vocalist Louis J. (“Lou”) Urbancic (b. 1928) in 2010 (four years after Jay Harlin’s death from lung cancer). Urbancic is described in England’s infographic as Harlin’s “colleague and trusted friend.” According to England’s forum post, Urbancic “taught guitar and [eventually Kalina] Multi-Kord lessons [for the] ... Harlin Brothers in the 1940s through the 1960s.”

At a July 23, 2017 Harlin Brothers Summit at Arthur’s Music, which the author attended, eighty-nine-year-old Lou Urbancic recalled obtaining Jay Harlin’s first pedal steel prototype when he was fourteen (in 1941), and subsequently playing the instrument at jazz gigs at LaRue’s Restaurant in north-central Indianapolis once he turned eighteen (in March 1946). (LaRue’s was demolished in the 1960s to make room for Interstate Highway 65 and the Pennsylvania, Meridian, and Illinois Street interchange. A September 1959 full-page LaRue’s advertisement in Indianapolis’s *This Week*, perused at the Historic-Indianapolis.com website, trumpeted that it was the “world’s largest, most unusual piano-bar” with two nightly floorshows.)

Urbancic related at the Harlin Brothers Summit that he preferred the tone of Jay Harlin’s first black and chrome pedal steel guitar prototype, with its stronger, factory-made pickup (from the Vega company, as will be



*A July 2017 photo of retired Indianapolis musician Louis J. (“Lou”) Urbancic, who—besides teaching standard guitar and steel guitar for the Harlin Brothers from the 1940s through the 1960s—played Jay Harlin’s first pedal steel guitar prototype in Indianapolis after World War II.*

seen). Urbancic explained that Harlin’s second, 1941 prototype, which he also played, had a self-wound, and hence weaker, pickup that just didn’t “have the tone that the black one [i.e., the first prototype] had.”

England stated in her August 2016 e-mail that her Harlin Brothers infographic “amalgamat[es] ... Lou [Urbancic]’s memories ... with what I know to be fact about the [Harlin] brothers,” adding that “customers and friends of the store ... have come in for years recounting events and experiences with the brothers that have helped corroborate what Lou has said.”

England continued that Urbancic brought the two Harlin prototypes to Arthur’s in a move to remove clutter



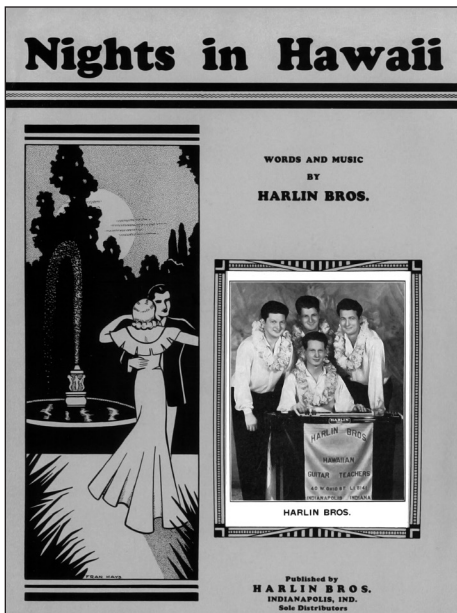
and sell off unused equipment, as both instruments had been gathering dust in his attic (in northwest Indianapolis) for over a half-century.

England added that Arthur's purchased the Harlin prototypes hoping they might be acquired and permanently displayed by the proposed Indiana Music & Entertainment Museum (currently fundraising for a permanent home). "Until then," England related, "[the prototypes] are on our sales floor and act as great conversation pieces!"

England explained in her Harlins infographic that "to save on time and materials, [Jay Harlin's] ... prototypes were ... built from [late-]1930s Vega [brand] console steel guitars." Beth Harlin—in a September 30, 2016 e-mail—remarked that one could see her father's tinkering mind at work in his console repurposing. In a July 22, 2017 in-person conversation with the author, Beth added that her father "constantly tinkered to excel," and that he was always coming up with ideas on how to improve pre-existing objects.

Asked to elaborate further on the above, Beth recalled in an August 30,

*The folio cover of the Harlin Brothers' original composition "Nights in Hawaii" (copyrighted October 5, 1939).*



2017 e-mail how—for vacation visits to a lake west of Indianapolis—her father refashioned the family's boat ladder into a gangway by adding a detachable plank, enabling some hydrophobic family friends to exit the boat without anxiety. Beth also recalled that, for easier loading and unloading at Harlin Brothers gigs, her father attached a heavy-duty luggage handle to the casing of a large amplifier.

Concerning Jay Harlin's first pedal steel guitar prototype of the late 1930s, Amy England related in her Harlin Brothers infographic that the instrument "was built from a black-body Vega eight-string console steel guitar," adding that [Harlin] ... started by setting the steel on a metal frame and wooden base with wheels. [Harlin] then replaced one end with a half-round tube of polished sheet tin to create a vertical compartment to house and hide the four pedal-mechanisms. Although rough in execution, the vertical compartment mimicked the art deco elements of the Vega console steel to create a visually-striking design..."

Leonard Wyeth's essay "Vega, Fairbanks, & Oliver Ditson" (posted at AcousticMusic.org) provides useful information on the Boston-based Vega company's early history. Incorporated in 1903, the firm originally concentrated on making banjos. By 1930, their production emphasis had shifted toward guitars, eventually encompassing electrified models. By 1936, Vega (located at 155 Columbus Avenue in the far southeast corner of Boston's Back Bay neighborhood) was offering an electric violin, an electric foot-pedal volume control for their electric guitars, and electric mandolins and steel guitars.

In April and May 2010, Boston-area author Andy Volk and several other contributors posted to the Steel Guitar Forum photographs of six- and eight-string versions of the c. 1939 Vega console steel that Jay Harlin appears to have "borrowed" for his pedal steel



*Jay Harlin's first fully-formed pedal steel guitar prototype from the late 1930s (photo taken by Amy England, August 16, 2016).*

prototype. In an April 11 post, Volk offered a one-paragraph description of the instrument taken from the FolkwayMusic.com website where a six-string Vega console steel was offered for sale in late-November 2009. The description relates that the Vega had "a figured Brazilian Rosewood fingerboard" and a "humbucking pickup" (a pickup with double coils to cancel out the interference normally picked up by single-coil models; Vega was apparently the first company to offer such a feature). The Vega also included a "Bakelite-knobbed volume-slider and five-button tone-selector (Contra, Bass, Normal, Treble, High)," in addition to the rather eye-catching "rotary tuning-machines," described as "Grover G-98's with specially-designed shafts and thumb-wheels." The Vega console also originally came equipped with "a three-position tuning-bridge which quickly switch[e]d the instrument between [the] A, E, and C# tunings," as well as with "not-particularly functional" legs and a "hard-shell case."

Stockholm-based steel guitarist Fredrik Kinbom—in a May 10, 2010

*Continued on Page 18*

Steel Guitar Forum post—offered additional information taken from the Brooklyn-based Retrofret/Musurgia vintage guitar sales website (Musurgia.com), relaying that the 1939 Vega console steels included a “sliding-lever volume control” as well as a “heavy maple body ... lacquered black with chrome trim,” with a scale length of 23 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches and a nut width of 3 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches. Kinbom added that Vega offered six-, seven- and eight-string versions of the console steel, while carefully observing that “a rather wide [neck] (wider than necessary for six strings) ... was part of the design to be able to accommodate one or two extra strings and maintain decent string spacing.”

Returning to Amy England’s “Missing Piece of History” infographic, England noted that some six to seven years after Jay completed his first prototype, he apparently either sold it or gifted it to young Lou Urbancic, who, as related above, gigged with it at LaRue’s. (Urbancic supplied conflicting information regarding how he came to acquire the prototype.) Regarding the prototype’s fifth pedal, Amy England related that Urbancic “loved [the prototype] design but thought adding a fifth pedal to raise the third string would enhance the functionality of the instrument. So Jay added a[nother] ... pedal at Lou’s request.”

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As related in the previous installment, in 1939 the Harlins brought forth a sheet music arrangement of their brotherly collaboration “Nights in Hawaii,” a foxtrot in F major. The composition was inspired by a month-long residency Herb Harlin undertook in Hawaii in spring 1939 to shoot an educational film for use in the Harlins’ sales offices.

When Beth Harlin gifted me the “Nights in Hawaii” sheet music at our first face-to-face meeting, in Albert Lea, Minnesota in July 2016, she remarked that it appeared as though her father’s first prototype was in the photo on the cover; indeed, the half-round tube of polished sheet-tin hiding the pedal mechanism is clearly seen on the left side of the instrument. The Google Books online database relates that “Nights in Hawaii” was copyrighted on October 5, 1939, which confirms the existence of a Jay Harlin-made, functioning pedal steel prototype by this date.

To place the dating of Jay Harlin’s pedal steel guitar prototype in proper historical perspective, a pedal steel guitar prototype functioning by October 5, 1939 would place Jay Harlin one year, three months, and thirteen days ahead of the first announced advertised demonstration of the the Gibson company’s six-pedal, eight-string Electraharp console steel guitar the author has been able to locate (in the York [Pennsylvania] *Gazette and Daily* of January 18, 1941). Despite the insistence of published sources, the Electroharp was *not* made available to the general public until late spring



*A circa 1939 Vega eight-string console steel guitar (from Noah Miller’s OldFrets.com vintage musical instruments website).*

or early summer 1941, to infer from A. R. Duchossoir in *Gibson Electric Steel Guitars* and the author’s own careful newspaper archive research. A Harlin pedal steel prototype working in early October 1939 would also fall roughly nine years ahead of the first pedal steel made by Chuck Wright (later of the Wright Custom company), more than eight years and four months ahead of Paul Bigsby’s first pedal steel guitar (completed on February 8, 1948 for Speedy West), and a good thirteen years ahead of Bud Isaccs’s acquisition in 1952 of his first Bigsby pedal steel (with financial assistance from Red Foley).

*In the next installment: The 1940 activities of the Harlin Brothers and Alvino Rey, including Jay Harlin’s 1940 census entry and Herb Harlin innovations that the brothers incorporated into a tuner assembly for Gretsch’s Electromatic Hawaiian six-string lap-steel guitar. The installment will also detail Rey and the Kings Sisters’ hectic year, which began with the musicians ensconced in northwest Los Angeles but ended with them transplanted to the Hudson River Valley of New Jersey, amidst gigging in Hartford, suburban Detroit, New York City and Syracuse as well as the making of four recordings with Rey playing a pedal-enhanced steel guitar.*

*Thanks to John D. Marsden for providing the author with a copy of Metronome’s April 1941 article on Epiphone’s Varichord.* ■

### **Did You Pay Your 2017-2018 Dues?**

*This is your FINAL issue if your newsletter envelope still shows “X 6/17” next to your address. Dues are \$30, which includes First Class delivery (Air Mail overseas). Mahalo!*

## CLOSING NOTES

# Island Entertainer ‘Worked His Magic’ As Pianist, Vocalist

By John Berger

Mahi Beamer, a grandson of famed Hawaii island composer and hula teacher Helen Desha Beamer, whose exceptional talents as a singer, pianist and organist inspired several generations of island musicians and vocalists, died Friday morning, [July 14, 2017] at Kuakini Medical Center. He was 88.

Nā Hōkū Hanohano Award-winning recording artist Kapono Beamer said his “favorite uncle,” who suffered from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, collapsed shortly after playing piano at the funeral for his brother, Milton Ho‘olulu Desha “Sonny” Beamer Jr., on Wednesday at O‘ahu Cemetery Chapel. Sonny Beamer died July 5 at the age of 91.

Edwin Mahi‘ai “Mahi” Copp Beamer was born December 5, 1928, in Honolulu. He attended Kamehameha Schools, the University of California at Santa Barbara and the Juilliard School of Music in New York.

His first tour of the mainland with his cousins Winona and Keola (who was known in later years as “Uncle Keola” to distinguish him from Winona’s son, who was also known as Keola) was the start of a career that included engagements at the Hawaiian Room in New York, Carnegie Hall, the Stardust Hotel in Las Vegas and numerous showrooms in Waikīkī.

He recorded his first album, *The Remarkable Voice of Hawaii’s Mahi Beamer in Authentic Hawaiian Songs*, for Capitol Records in 1959. The label released a second album, *More Authentic Island Songs by Mahi ... Hawaii’s Most Remarkable Voice*, shortly afterward.

Hōkū Award-winning recording artist Kaumakaiwa Kanaka‘ole described

Beamer as “the quintessential male vocalist of his era.”

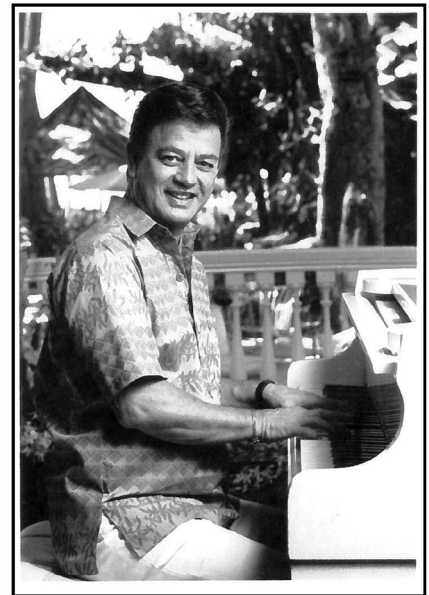
“A true contralto, Mahi Beamer’s voice is the epitome of the counter-tenor tradition,” Kanaka‘ole said via text from the Big Island. Kanaka‘ole praised “the seamless synergy of his piano virtuoso and mezzo soprano voice” and expressed the wishes of the Kanaka‘ole ‘ohana in bidding Beamer “a safe journey to the bosom of your kupuna.”

Horace Dudoit III, founder and leader of Ho‘okena, recalled going to Ward Centre with Robert Cazimero, Leina‘ala Kalama Heine and the hula dancers of the Brothers Cazimero show in the mid-1980s to catch Beamer playing piano at a popular piano bar.

“We’d hear all these legendary singers sing while Uncle Mahi worked his magic on the piano. And it wasn’t only Hawaiian music; there were show tunes and old-time standards. Uncle Mahi was that versatile.”

Beamer was “an amazing ray of light,” said record producer Kauai Dalire. “I can see him playing piano and being so kolohe (mischievous, risqué). I was privileged to have shared some special moments with him.”

Beamer’s talents as a pianist and arranger contributed to the artistic success of the song “Honolulu City Lights,” which was written by Winona’s son Keola and was recorded by Keola and Kapono in 1978 as the title song of what would become the brothers’ biggest album. Beamer played piano on the recording and used the melody of one of Helen Desha Beamer’s songs, “To You,” as a countermelody to Keola’s tune; another member of the production team, Teddy Randazzo, used Beamer’s idea in the musical arrangements for the string section.



**Edwin Mahi‘ai Copp Beamer**  
December 5, 1928  
July 14, 2017

Beamer continued to perform as a pianist and organist after he retired as a singer.

Beamer received the Hawai‘i Academy of Recording Arts Lifetime Achievement Award in 1991 and was inducted into the Hawaiian Music Hall of Fame in 2006.

Hawaii U.S. Rep. Colleen Hanabusa said in a formal statement Friday morning, “He was one of Hawaii’s most prolific musicians of traditional Hawaiian music and dance and was widely known as one of Hawaii’s most notable falsetto voices.” She added that “his musical legacy shall live eternally in the voices and musical compositions of Hawaii’s musicians.”

*Big mahalos to John Berger and the Honolulu Star-Advertiser for permission to reprint the above article, which was posted on July 15, 2017.* ■

## Moving?

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## E Komo Mai! Welcome, New Members

Is your address correct? Please notify us!

### UNITED STATES

DENNIS HAINES, 11300 S. Greenbrier Dr., Idaho Falls, ID 83404  
LARRY LENHART, #7 Hillcrest Dr., Ponca City, OK 74604  
STEVE CUMMINGS, 415 Woodhaven Boulevard, Duncanville, TX 75116  
DAVID M. BROWN, 19750 Benson Lane, Fort Bragg, CA 95437  
ROBERT LAWRENCE-MARKARIAN, 430 W. 5th St., Port Angeles, WA 98362

### OVERSEAS

EINAR BALDURSSON, Lövängsgatan 12, Stockholm, 11544 Sweden  
SAKAE MACHIDA, 5-22-25 Nishijonan, Oyama-Shi, Tochigi Pref. 323-0820 Japan  
NOBUO NUMATA, 8-6-15 Kamirenjaku, Mitaka-Shi, Tokyo, 181-0012 Japan

### *HELUMOA Continued from Page 7*

ho'olaule'a guests enjoyed performances by Alan Akaka and The Islanders, Paul Kim and the Waimanalo Sunset Band, which includes Samuel and Keli'i Makua and Keao Kamalani, Eddie Palama, The Bobby Ingano Trio, which includes Adam and Kaipo Asing, and Greg Sardinha and Po'okela. Adam and Kaipo Asing also assisted steel guitarists who needed a backup band.

A vintage steel guitar exhibit featuring acoustic, lap, and console steel guitars from Alan Akaka's collection was presented at Helumoa Hale, the center's convenience center and meeting room. The exhibit provided an

opportunity for festival guests to see the instruments up close and have their questions answered by exhibit docents.

Honolulu City and County Mayor Kirk Caldwell issued a proclamation for the event, proclaiming the week of July 9-15, 2017 to be Hawaiian Steel Guitar Appreciation Week.

For more information about this year's event and past events go to [www.waikikisteelguitarweek.com](http://www.waikikisteelguitarweek.com). The annual event is presented by Royal Hawaiian Center and produced by Hawaiian Institute for Music Enrichment and Learning Experiences (HIMELE). Next year's Waikiki Steel Guitar Week will be held July 9-14, 2018. ■

*At Waikiki Steel Week, the Waimanalo Sunset Band featuring Keli'i Makua (left), Samuel Makua, Keao Kamalani and steel guitarist Paul Kim. (Photo courtesy of Don Touchi)*



Misailidis, "Konabob" Stoffer, Dave "DK" Kolars, Sonny Lim, and Alan Akaka and The Islanders. Saturday's program featured Alexis Tolentino, Dwight Tokumoto, Mark Yamanaka, Maui's Geronimo "Geri" Valdriz, Greg Sardinha, Pomai Brown, and the Bobby Ingano Trio. Public kanikapila jam sessions followed each evening's programs. In all, five Hawai'i Island steel guitarists were featured.

Saturday's activities included workshops conducted by Alan Akaka, Dave Kolars, Greg Sardinha and Bobby Ingano, as well as demonstrations of various Hawaiian cultural activities such as feather lei making and weaving presented by cultural experts.

The Saturday open stage program featured several steel guitarists and students of the Ke Kula Mele Hawai'i School of Hawaiian Music. Performing on the open stage was Kona's Daniel Toft, Shinichi and Kumiko Kakiuchi from Japan, Jack Aldrich from Seattle, and Kona's Troy Keoho and his group Na Lea Nahenahe o Kona with Addison Ching on the steel guitar.

Steel guitars from the private collections of Hawai'i Island steel guitarists were on display in the hotel's Cultural Center.

Concluding the festival was an "unplugged" interlude by select festival performers during the hotel's Sunday Brunch at the Bay Terrace restaurant to the delight of brunch guests.

Festival planners and festival staff all agreed that the first annual festival on Hawai'i Island was a very enjoyable experience, and all are looking forward to next year's event. ■

### **Please Contact Us!**

Send news, comments and photos to: HSGA Quarterly, 3442 Greystone Ct, Fort Collins, CO 80525. Email us at: [hsga@hsga.org](mailto:hsga@hsga.org) and cc your editor at [johnely@hawaiiansteel.com](mailto:johnely@hawaiiansteel.com). Mahalo!