

# HSGA QUARTERLY

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by the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Association

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*Lt. Governor James Aiona, Jr. signing Governor Lingle's Proclamation of June 2009 as 'Steel Guitar Month in Hawai'i' while Georja Skinner and Ka'iwa Meyer look on.*

## June '09 Proclaimed 'Steel Guitar Month'

After months of back and forth with State of Hawai'i officials about gaining more recognition for steel guitar in Hawai'i, Lorene received the following communication from Georja Skinner of the tourism department: "I am pleased to report that the Lieutenant Governor will preside over a proclamation ceremony honoring June 2009 as Hawaiian Steel Guitar Month, highlighting the inventor Joseph Kekuku, steel guitar players in Hawai'i, our educators, and the Hawaiian steel guitar festival on Maui this month." Nice work, Lorene!

The signing ceremony was held on June 15, 2009 at 10 AM in the Governor's office in the State Capitol. Ka'iwa Meyer, grandniece of Hawaiian steel

guitar inventor Joseph Kekuku, was on hand for the event and delivered a historical narrative on the Kekuku invention as part of the ceremony.

Though both Lorene and HSGA Prez Paul Kim were unable to attend, Paul wrote the following to Georja Skinner: "We are very happy to see that the only native stringed instrument has finally been recognized as an important contribution to the culture and arts of Hawai'i. Many thanks go out to you and to our Governor and Lt. Governor for taking the time to honor such a beautiful and world renown instrument. Hopefully, this kind of publicity will spark the interest of our youth to take up the instrument and

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## HSGA QUARTERLY

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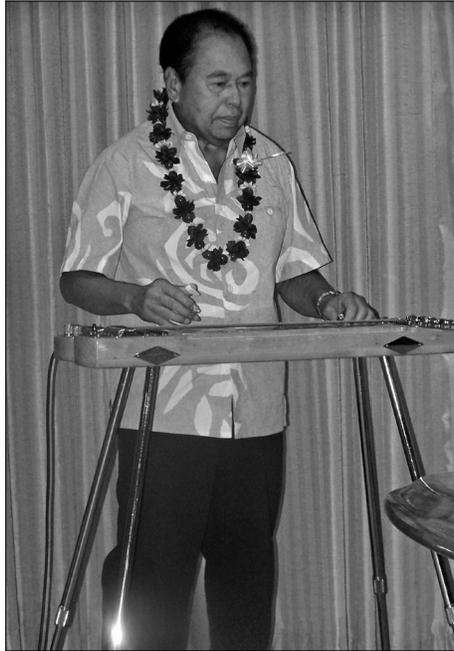
The Hawaiian Steel Guitar Association is a tax-exempt, nonprofit educational corporation in the State of Hawai'i under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Our primary purpose is to develop a global network of players and lovers of traditional Hawaiian music and to encourage the study, teaching, 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 LETTERS & EDITORIALS TO:

HSGA Quarterly, 2434 Waioma'o Rd, Honolulu, HI 96816-3424 USA. Our email address is [hsga@hsga.org](mailto:hsga@hsga.org). Articles and photos can also be emailed directly to the editor at [johnely@hawaiiansteel.com](mailto:johnely@hawaiiansteel.com). Photos are welcome and will be returned on request. Quality original prints or high resolution digital camera output, please. Mahalo!



*Henry Allen performing at the Steel Guitar Month signing ceremony on June 15, 2009.*

## Henry Allen Receives Multiple Honors

On the same day as the Steel Guitar Month proclamation, Governor Linda Lingle gave Henry Allen a special commendation for the Henry Kaleialoha Allen Steel Guitar Festival at the Kaanapali Beach Hotel on West Maui. The festival was held on June 26-27 and featured free concerts and workshops with Henry Allen and friends, including Alan Akaka and the Islanders, the Colin John Blues Band, Skylark Rossetti and special guest Senator Brickwood Galuteria.

On April 3 of this year, the Hawai'i Legislature honored Henry as "One of Hawaii's Living Treasures of Hawaiian Music," and he played a concert for lawmakers in the Capitol Rotunda.

At the Hawai'i Music Foundation Awards on April 4, he received the coveted Legacy Award for his work as a jazz guitarist and master Hawaiian steel guitarist.

Stay tuned for more on Henry Allen's stellar career as a steel guitarist, educator, and jazz musician in an upcoming issue. ■

*PROCLAMATION Continued from Page 1*

perpetuate its beauty. We also appreciate all of you taking the time to hear the pleas of club members like Lorene Ruymar. It is amazing how it takes a person all the way from Canada to fight for the survival and recognition due for the steel guitar. Please let the Governor and her staff know how grateful we are for this wonderful gift to Hawai'i and all those who love the Hawaiian steel guitar."

Also present at the ceremony were Chief Officer Georja Skinner, Ka'iwa Meyer family members, Maui steel guitarist Henry Allen, former HSGA Presidents Alan Akaka and Kamaka Tom, Steve Cheney and two of his sons, Jade Louie. Henry Allen performed "Hana" and "Paradise Isle" on steel guitar as part of the ceremony. ■

## Coco Wire

**Andy Volk** has just published a booklet called *Slide Rules*—a listing of over 70 usable tunings for steel guitar and other slide-type instruments. Also included is a handy section on string gauges and tone bars. For more info, contact Andy at: Volk Media Design, 631 Great Plain Avenue, Needham, MA 02492; Email: [aevolk@comcast.net](mailto:aevolk@comcast.net).

**Alan Akaka** is launching his "Ke Kula Mele Hawai'i O Akaka" Academy of Hawaiian Music in Kailua. Looks like, in addition to steel guitar, he will be offering courses in standard guitar, bass, 'ukulele, and singing. For details, email [info@alanakaka.com](mailto:info@alanakaka.com).

**Isaac "Doc" Akuna**, who won a Hōkū award for his work with Ku'uipo Kumukahi last year, isn't resting on his laurels. He played on "With Aloha" by the group Pali and Ipo's "Let's Hula" CD, which accounted for some six nominations at this year's Hōkūs.

## MEMBERS CORNER

### John Marsden, Sheffield, England

The [newsletter] is always full of interest and beautifully produced. I thoroughly applaud your use of 'okina and kahakō! In the Spring issue, the Ernest Tavares article was of special interest—I was able to provide Lorraine Lewin with a little information and some photos for her original research. Great news about steel guitar being taught in schools, and with the Governor's approval! The article about Kamaka Tom was very interesting—he and I are fellow “round robins.” Sad to learn of Pat Gerow's death, however.

We shall miss Bruce Clarke's Cumquat compilations, but I hope the catalogue which he built up will continue to be available. The Lukewela tracks, which are advertised on page 9 [of the Spring 2009 issue] are especially valuable, as the original recordings are for all intents and purposes impossible to find.

I always felt that Bruce would have done better to issue the Crown LPs by the Polynesians as complete albums, rather than mixing up the tracks. I think some confusion has been caused with regard to personnel. The original LP sleeves did generally list personnel, though not which instruments they were playing! Perhaps it might be of interest to identify the steel players in the “Hilo Bay” selection which John Ely reviewed. Bob Nichols is the steel guitarist on “Hilo Bay,” “Land of Flowers,” “Whispering Sea,” and possibly “Hawaiian China Doll” (impossible to say from the brief oriental phrase). Freddie Tavares is featured on “Orchid Lei,” “Nā Hala,” “Lei Makamae,” “Ua Like No A Like,” and possibly “Hawaiian China Doll.” All the other tracks with steel guitar feature Lani Sang, the composer of “Mapuana” and other standards.

I don't agree with John that track 11, “Loch Lomond” is ‘unmemorable’. It is, of course, Sol K. Bright's composition, “Hawaiian Scotsman,” and an extremely feisty rendition in my opinion. Anything but unmemorable!

Anyway, I thought I'd pass on the above identifications. The series is a very good one, in my opinion, with an interesting combination of performers from the Hollywood-based Hawaiian musicians of that time. On tape somewhere I have an old Radio KCCN interview with Harry Baty, in which he mentions the Crown series. [ED: Thanks, John, for your great comments and additions to the “Hilo Bay” CD review.]

### Beat Iseli, Switzerland

Our band (Rocksack) here in Switzerland had to play at a birthday party and the people wanted some cocktail music before the dancing part, so we played our Hawaiian set, very softly, but it was good practice for me as I still don't have the routine to play steel comfortably. People found it interesting but they are not so crazy about Hawaiian music here.



*Member Beat Iseli from Winterthur, Switzerland playing a Hawaiian set with his band Rocksack at a recent local gig.*

### Gerald Ross, Ann Arbor, Michigan

This past February my Klezmer musician friends from Cleveland, the band Yiddishe Cup, came to Ann Arbor for a concert. Klezmer music has been described as ‘Jewish Jazz’. It's an improvised horn-based music that was born in Europe and flourished in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century.

I sat in with the band on my Hawaiian steel guitar for a few numbers during the show. The concert was taped for the band's new CD and my steel tune wound up on the disc! You can hear a sample of the song at <http://www.yiddishecup.com>. It's the Steve Lawrence and Edie Gorme tune “Hallelujah.” This is further proof that the steel guitar can fit in with all types of music. ■

## Financial Report

*From Secretary-Treasurer Don Weber*

As of June 30, 2009, the HSGA accounts show the following balances:

|                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| General Fund     | \$30,183.46        |
| Scholarship Fund | \$21,035.89        |
| Joliet Fund      | \$3,327.77         |
| Japan Fund       | \$1,610.00         |
| <b>Total:</b>    | <b>\$56,157.12</b> |

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# Joliet Convention Preview

From Joliet Chairman, Don Weber

When writing an article, it's said the best way to begin is to get the reader's attention. Therefore, did you know that everyone has mystical powers?? Do I have your attention?? If I do, then you will want to come to the HSGA Joliet convention this year when Don Fullmer, Carol Hidy, and Phil Bender will open the door to your mystical powers. It will all happen at their Thursday night steel guitar seminar.

## Honored Guest

This year's Honored Guest is John Ely. It's been a number of years since John appeared as the Joliet guest and literally gave a "lights out" performance on stage. Some say it was a power outage, but we all know it was a way to save his best playing for the lū'au .

John is an alumnus of western swing band Asleep at the Wheel and has toured with Johnny Gimble, Leon Redbone, and made TV appearances with Lyle Lovett, Dolly Parton, Jerry Jeff Walker, and host of Texas artists. In 1995, Jerry Byrd got him his first gig in Hawai'i playing at the Old Lahaina Lū'au, which he soon had to quit due to a repetitive stress injury to his "vibrato arm." After returning to the mainland and completing extensive rehab, John returned to the Islands in 2000. After working up to a full schedule of 30-plus gigs a month around Waikīkī, he was again forced to leave the islands—this time due to the economic devastation following September 11. John played the Asleep at the Wheel 2002 summer tour, and did a five-month tour of Germany, Eastern Europe, France, and Spain, including an appearance as guest artist at Dobrofest in Slovakia. He currently lives near his original home in Northern Minnesota doing casuals, sessions, select tours and teaching.

John will be playing a set each day of the convention, and will be center stage at Saturday's Lū'au Show.

## Convention Registration

The 2009 convention is being held October 8–10 at the Joliet Holiday Inn Hotel and Conference Center located at 411 S. Larkin Avenue in Joliet. The Joliet Committee needs your help in planning the convention. To set up playing schedules, we need to know if and when you are coming. *Don't wait.* Fill out and send in the registration form included in your newsletter. You can also download it from the website at [www.hsga.org](http://www.hsga.org). Just look under 'Upcoming Conventions'. The convention fee is \$25 per person. Please send it along with the registration form by September 1 to Wally Pfeifer, 115 N. Clinton St., Dwight, IL 60420. You can also pay your registration fee when you arrive, but we need your registration form in advance.



*John Ely performing at the 2004 Mr. Banjo Festival in Barcelona with the Silver City Ramblers on a 5-month tour around Europe.*

## Hotel Reservations

Make your hotel reservations directly with the hotel. Your reservation must be received by the Holiday Inn Hotel and Conference Center before October 1. After that date the rooms being held for HSGA will be released to the general public and are no longer guaranteed to be available. Please send in the hotel reservation form included with your newsletter OR better yet, call the hotel directly at 1-815-729-2000. Be sure to tell them you are with HSGA to get the special discounted room rate which is good from October 5 through October 11.

## Room Rates

The room rate for this year is \$67.50 plus tax. The rate does not include breakfast. However, a full breakfast menu is available at your own expense in the hotel restaurant. The restaurant and bar are located adjacent to the lobby and convention meeting room.

## Lunch and Dinner

All lunches and dinners are on your own. They are *not* included in your registration fee. No group dinners are planned except for the Saturday Night Lū'au. The hotel is providing pre-ordered lunches only. You must pre-order from their menu of available items by 10:00 AM for noon-time serving. Pre-ordering is done during the morning music sessions in the convention room.

## Member Playing Slots

Playing time is again 25 minutes *including setup* and will be strictly enforced. Failure to comply will result in lost time for other players. Playing times will be assigned by the Joliet committee. No matter if you're a first time or long time attendee, *we need your registration form.* We can't

make up a program if we don't know who's coming and who wants to perform. If Wally doesn't get your registration, you *will not* have a playing slot. We cannot guarantee which day or time you will appear on stage, but we will honor preferences where possible. When all playing slots are full, you will go on a standby list. We can't just "squeeze" you in. *Last minute registrations will not be guaranteed a playing time.* Don't wait. Register now.

### **Limousine Service**

Reserve your limo from the airport in advance. It's a good idea to schedule your return trip at the same time. OR, get a group together at the convention and share the ride back to the airport to save money. When reserving, give the limo service your airline, flight number, arrival time, arrival airport (O'Hare or Midway), and the number of people. When you arrive at the airport, *get your luggage first.* Then call the toll-free number provided by the limo service for further instructions. Cox Livery Service (815-741-0583) provides good service. Cash, check, or credit cards are accepted. For credit cards add 5 percent. Cox charges a base fare for the first person, then \$5 for each additional person. For service after 10 PM and before 5 AM there is an additional one-time charge of \$10.

We cannot tell you at this time what the limo rates will be for October. Fuel surcharges or rate increases are possible. Inquire when making your limo reservation. If you need further information, call Cox Livery Service at the number listed above.

### **Vendors and Seminars**

Vendor information is not available at this time, however, we would be surprised if John Hatton didn't show up with his usual array of merchandise. There is nothing scheduled for Wednesday evening; just eat, talk story, relax, or jam. Thursday evening it's the steel guitar seminar with Don Fullmer, Phil Bender, and Carol Hidy, showing tunings, chords, techniques, and drawing out those mystical powers you all possess. On Friday evening, join in the "talk story" session with honored guest, John Ely. John will discuss the steel guitar, his background and what he's doing now. Then it's the popular Q&A portion of the evening where you learn all John's steel guitar secrets.

### **Convention Sound**

Mahalo to Fred Campeau and Paul Watkins who provide the professional quality sound for our Joliet convention. Again this year, they will provide this important service we cannot do without.

### **Jam Sessions**

Same as always. Need we say more?? ■

## **Joliet Schedule**

### **Wednesday, October 7**

Check in, talk story, have dinner, sleep or jam.

### **Thursday, October 8**

9:00-9:30 Opening ceremonies

9:30-12:00 Music sessions

12:00-1:30 Lunch (on your own)

1:30-6:05 Music sessions

6:05-8:00 Dinner (on your own)

8:00-???? Steel guitar seminar with Don Fullmer, Phil Bender, and Carol Hidy. Jam session after.

### **Friday, October 9**

7:00-8:45 Board of Directors meeting

9:00-10:00 Annual membership meeting

10:00-12:05 Music sessions

12:05-1:30 Lunch (on your own)

1:30-6:05 Music sessions

6:05-8:00 Dinner (on your own)

8:00-???? Talk Story with John Ely. Jam session after.

### **Saturday, October 10**

9:00-11:55 Music sessions

11:55-1:30 Lunch (on your own)

1:30-2:45 Music sessions

2:45 Lū'au Show rehearsal

5:30-7:00 Cash bar and social time

7:00-8:00 Lū'au dinner

8:00-???? Lū'au show and time for aloha

## **Buy & Sell**

### **Instruments Wanted**

Wanted continuously by Michael Cord for his awesome collection: All models of vintage lap steels (like Hilos, Konas, Weissenborns, Rickenbackers), vintage amps and basses. Contact Michael Cord toll-free at 877-648-7881.

### **Lap Steels For Sale**

1976 Fender 6-string + original hard case; Allen Melbert 8-string "House of Flames" custom made, flame paint, soft case; 1946? Dickerson 6-string, gray, "mother-of-toilet-seat" (MOTS), original hard case; 1950s? Magnatone double neck 6-string, gray, MOTS, original chipboard case; all very good condition. For pics and details email [vintageguitar@hotmail.com](mailto:vintageguitar@hotmail.com) or call Dennis at 610-329-8445 (email preferred).

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# Hawai'i Convention Roundup

By Lorene Ruymar

Our biennial convention in Honolulu was held April 28-30, 2009. All I can say is we wish you were there! Before we left for Hawai'i, Art and I worried that the financial distress our nations are in might cause people to save their money and stay home. But, I guess there's no cure for steel guitar fever. Our turnout was close to normal, maybe 85 percent of the usual attendance. And what compensated for the few who didn't turn up, is that we saw more of the local steel players than we usually do. They dropped in to visit with us during the three days in the Ākala Room and at the Jerry Byrd Ho'olaule'a. So we had more chat time with them than usual. I think they were just as happy to see us come there as we were to be there.

First, a special salute to those who came from distant lands: Ron and Joan Carter and Jim Hassall from New Zealand, Rolf Hansen from Denmark (it took him 21 hours to fly), Jan Kurt Claussen of Norway, and John Mills from Western Australia.

And now my statement in praise and appreciation of our Japanese members: Tom Tohma reported that of 51 paid-up members, 32 of them came to our convention in Hawai'i. And 13 of the 32 performed for us on stage. They always bring their own backup players and their own singers and dancers. So we don't just see a steel player going on stage looking for who's going to play the backup—we see the whole band going on stage, all well rehearsed and prepared to do a great show. The biggest surprise was the two very young steel players. As I write this, I am hot on the trail of *who* those Japanese youngsters are and how old? Keep reading. I might get the answers for you before quitting time.

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*Our photographer Paul Weaver with lovely steel guitarist Hideko Kobayashi at the Halekulani Hotel's 'House without a Key'.*



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*Derrick Mau flanked by Naoto and Michiko Nakamura, who made a key donation in the effort to teach steel in the Hawai'i schools.*

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This year before we left home, I emailed the players in Hawai'i to find out their show times and places. Then I typed a schedule and emailed it to everyone I knew of who'd be coming. That worked very well. Why didn't I think of it long ago? As we get older we get smarter, yeah?

Okay, now for the list of who played on stage during the three days in the Ākala Room. The time slots were 30 minutes long starting at 9 AM and going to 3:30 PM. As always we enjoyed a buffet lunch in the Ākala Room, a good chance for talk times with buddies old and new.

## Tuesday, April 28

Performing for the morning session were Ivan Reddington, Don Kellett, the Yukinobu Ujii Group with great falsetto singing, Motoyuki Suzuki with pre-recorded backup, Hideko Kobayashi, and Hal Smith. After the American buffet lunch, Tom Tohma with "Nā Kama'aina," a 4-piece band including Gary Aiko who sang with them; Warren Slavin with our most beloved Bobby Ingano and Derrick Mau playing backup for him; and Yoshinori Nihachi. Internationally famous luthier Michael Dunn, who was in Hawai'i for the first time, closed the show with his fabulous performance on one of his own wooden acoustic creations.

## Wednesday, April 29

Morning performers were Dave Kolars, Art Ruymar, Ron Carter, Kuniharu Yamamoto, Kunihiko Anzawa, and Don Woods. After the Chinese buffet: Don Fullmer and Carol Hidy playing a steel duet, Don Keene, then Buck Giles. Closing the show was Uncle Ronald Kanahale to the huge delight of all of us. In one of Uncle's numbers, our past President Kamaka Tom sprang to his feet and danced the ancient hula while chanting. Moments to live forever! It just can't get any better than that!

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## Thursday, April 30

Morning performers included Phil Bender (see page 18 of the last newsletter about Phil's new steel guitar tuning changer), Isaac "Doc" Akuna, Frank and Donna Miller, Jack Aldrich, Yuichiro Seki, the Setsuo Yamazaki group of four, then Jim Hassall. After the Hawaiian buffet, Bobby Ingano, Ted Kuwabara and group, Lion Kobayashi and group, and then Yoshihisa Okano.

During the three days in the Ākala Room, we got to know a new member, Marty Curnan, who lives on Kaua'i and is learning from Herman Paleka. Maybe at the next Hawai'i convention in 2011 he'll play for us?

Also, during Ted Kuwabara's show we were delighted to see two young steel guitarists from Los Angeles. First, 13-year-old Kevin Sato, a keen athlete but determined to start a steel guitar group in high school. Next, Yuyu Ikeda, who was born in Japan and came to the U.S. at the age of 4. She started Hawaiian steel guitar lessons with Ted at age ten and has been playing violin and piano since age 4. She made her solo debut on the violin with two orchestras when she was 11 years old. Yuyu has won numerous awards, including second place in the Junior Strings Division in the MTAC-VOCE Competition this year. In her free time, she enjoys reading and playing Go games, and her goal is to bring peace to the world by using her musical skills! Yuyu celebrated her twelfth birthday at our convention and came on stage playing her violin, then switching to steel guitar. She played both extremely well. Her birthday cake was brought on stage and we all sang the usual jingle. Do you sense a new generation of super stars coming up? In Lion's segment of the show, he introduced his superstar student, the lovely Yumiko Takahashi!

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*At the Kapi'olani Park bandstand show, Don Kellett and Michael Dunn (right) with Don's fiancée Susan Vigneux on rhythm guitar.*



*Jamming at Greg Sardinha's house in Kailua—Yuyu Ikeda on violin, Nobuko Takahashi on uke, and Yumiko Takahashi on steel.*

## Friday, May 1

The Lei Day concert in Kapi'olani Park. Among others, performers on the HSGA stage were Tom Tohma, Kuniharu Yamamoto, Kunihiko Anzawa, and Don Kellett.

## Saturday, May 2

At the Waikīkī-Kapahulu Library concert: Don Keene, Tom Tohma, Warren Slavin, Derrick Mau, and Don Woods. (I wasn't present on May 1-2, so my notes are incomplete.)

## Sunday, May 3

The Jerry Byrd Ho'olaule'a at the Ala Wai Golf Course Clubhouse. This event was pure delight because it was done casually. I kept incomplete notes as follows. Stage band: Isaac Akuna, Wayne Shishido, and Henry Makua III. [ED: Isaac Akuna told me Henry is an outstanding musician and is just getting started on steel. His grandfather, Henry Makua I, is in Lorene's book and was a longtime local player and steel artist.] First to perform was Steve Cheney, then our President Paul Kim while the beautiful Gloria Akuna, hostess of the event, danced. Bobby Ingano played steel backed by Jeff Au Hoy and Derrick Mau, then Greg Sardinha on steel with Gordon Freitas on backup guitar. Lion Kobayashi and his student Yumiko Takahashi, then Jeff Au Hoy, and Uncle Ronald Kanahale. Man! He keeps getting better and better. Uncle Ronald got a standing ovation. Everyone was so happy to have him there and hear his great music of the old days again. Then Alan Akaka played steel with Gary Aiko and by this time I was hugging old buddies from long ago and joining in the spirit of celebration. It could be that Alan closed the show. Not sure.

One old buddy was in a wheelchair. She came closer to us and said how great was her joy to see us all again. Art's

*Continued on Page 15*

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# 'Steel in the Schools' Update

By Lorene Ruymar

I'm happy to say this project is still on the "go" track. We started in early April with nine music teachers in O'ahu high schools volunteering to give it a try. The plan was to quickly get steel guitars into their hands so they could learn to play over the summer and prepare to teach steel guitar in the fall. But it wouldn't be so simple, because when school resumes in September they have to be all set up with whatever number of steel guitars they'd need for a class, ready to start teaching on Day One.

Art and I started immediately on the impossible task. What guitar brands should we use? What dealer? What kind of steel bars, extension nuts, string gauges, finger picks, chromatic guitar tuners?

## Dealers

Scotty (DeWitt Scott in St. Louis, that is) gave me lots of advice and offered to sell items at crazy low prices in memory of his dear friend Jerry Byrd. But he agreed we should work with a Hawaii-owned dealership of long standing. The cheapest student model guitars sold by Harry's Music in Hawai'i were \$100 each. We ordered 12, but they were not in stock. Then by chance I walked to the back of the Sam Goody store (Ala Moana Center, head office New York) and found five better deals for \$69.95. Hey! They gave a 10 percent discount, too. We bought all five. We talked to Harry's again about the \$49.99 Rogue guitars sold by Musicians Friend in Oregon, to see if they could deal with the manufacturer in China and get those same guitars shipped direct from China to Hawai'i. I'm holding my breath. Those are great guitars for such a low price!! I own one. I know. Can Harry's do it?

## Steel Bars

Dunlop steel bars are the best, size #919 for 6-string guitars. We asked Harry's to act as our dealer for that item.

## Extension Nuts

I expect you know what these are used for, but maybe I'd better clarify. It's for converting a 6-string standard guitar to steel guitar by raising the strings higher off the fretboard at the nut. Lots of these on the market look good but are not. They should provide a strong grip over the existing nut and should be grooved to account for the increasing thickness of the strings from top to bottom of the tuning. Extension nuts at Micro Musical Products Corporation work well. Their headquarters is at 18008 Liberty Avenue, Jamaica, New York 11433, catalog #1103. We hope Harry's can stock them for the schools.



Lorene Ruymar (right) working with instructors and the new instruments at McKinley High School in preparation for the fall classes.

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## String Gauges

The guitars are built to be played in standard guitar tuning (EADGBE) but we will need to change three strings for our A Major low bass tuning (EAEAC#E). We prefer the fourth string to be flat wound for smoother sound. Harry's Music can supply those.

## Picks

Students must buy their own thumbpick and fingerpicks because they will bend them to fit their fingers.

Before we met with our instructors on May 2, the five guitars from Sam Goody's were delivered by taxi to McKinley High School where teacher Michael Lucich was kindly acting as coordinator. The 12 we had ordered from Harry's were not in stock yet, plus the steel bars, extension nuts, and strings. Naoto and Michiko Nakamura had that very day put *five* brand new U.S. hundred-dollar bills into my hand and said, "This is for the guitars in the schools program." Happy day! Thank you so much for your generosity, Naoto and Michiko! We applied their \$500 to the Harry's Music bill and put the rest of the costs on our Visa card. Then, we went with Jade Louie to get those ten guitars out of storage. Art and I paid the \$300 storage fee. Hurray! Now we had more than enough guitars for the meeting with the teachers, even if Harry's 12 guitars didn't get there in time. [ED: We just learned from Tom Tohma that the greater Japan membership donated another \$450 for this project. Mahalos to our Japan members for everything they bring to our club!]

How did the meeting go on May 2? Each teacher had a steel bar in hand, fingerpicks on, and that weird kind of guitar on their lap. These are highly trained musicians, but how are they to learn? Well, in the year 2000 I had specially designed an instruction course for use in Hawaiian schools. Yes, I do sell it on my website (<http://members.shaw.ca/>)

steelguitar/) but for the schools I gave full permission for them to make all the copies they ever need. No charge. One book and 3 DVDs each.

To start them off without the drudgery of learning scales, I brought along five simple songs including “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” and “Yankee Doodle” and demonstrated how to strum and sing with the class. Great opportunity to learn how to hold the steel bar, how the picks go on, where the chords are on the fretboard, how to do harmonics, slants, glisses, vibrato, an’ al’ dat. You can’t sing and strum with pro-level tunings like C6 or B11, but you can with the simple A Major low bass tuning, which is actually a slack key tuning. It’s perfect for class instruction. That meeting with the teachers on May 2 went very well.

Now I sit here a-wondering how it goes as the teachers “struggle” to learn at home. So far, we have supplied them with 27 guitars, but not all have been fitted with extension nuts and the three strings. We have more on order and hope they arrive before school closes for the summer.

Last week we got a surprise note from Ed and Bonita Bettinger. They had contacted Musicians Friend and ordered three of those \$49.99 guitars to be shipped to McKinley High, plus three steel bars and two guitar tuners. I don’t know how long it will take until delivery, but I do know they had to pay extra for shipping charges. About that promise on the website for free shipping on orders over \$90, they forgot to say, “But not to Hawai’i.” What we learned from that is that the Sam Goody deal is still the best, unless Harry’s can get the \$49.99 Rogue guitars straight from the manufacturer in China.

If any of you kind hearted club members would want to donate a few guitars to this project, contact me first to find out which way the wind blows. For example, if you think of buying tuners, don’t buy *guitar* tuners; it has to be *chromatic* tuners. Little things like that. And how to ship to the schools when they are closed. Art and I are excited about the good spirit we found among the teachers and the chance that for once maybe the kids in Hawai’i will be learning to play just like the kids in China, and one day we’ll be able to ask them “What is a steel guitar?” and they will know the answer. “Who invented it?” Maybe that, too.

Kids who do extra well in school music classes will be able to go to Alan Akaka’s new music school for private lessons and learn a professional tuning like C6 or B11.

What a steel guitar revival that will be! And all of us old HSGAers will clean out our closets and find millions of electric steel guitars we didn’t remember we had to donate to the kids after they graduate from beginner level. Beautiful!

One last point. Financing. Whatever expenses Art and I are covering are *our* contribution to the cause, and we expect that the Scholarship Fund will kick in when it has been proven that this program is working well, produces keen young steel guitarists, and will carry on for years to come. ■



*Duke Ching sporting his award for Best Hawaiian Steel Guitar CD at the Hawai’i Music Awards with producer Greg Sardinha (left), HMA director Johnny Kai, and Gordon Freitas.*

## Duke Ching Wins at the HMAs

*By Sandra Sardinha*

At an April 4 ceremony held at Honolulu’s Mamiya Theater, the Music Foundation of Hawai’i honored the winners of its annual Hawai’i Music Awards (HMAs). Duke Kaleolani Ching won for Best Steel Guitar CD—Hawaiian Steel, Vol. 5—which was produced by Greg Sardinha and Duke Ching and is on Greg’s label, Keala Records.

The HMAs recognize the accomplishments of Hawai’i-based recording musicians, Hawaiian and Polynesian musicians living abroad, and international artists who perform Hawaiian- or Polynesian-style music.

Winners were determined through an online voting period that was held from January 15 through February 7. This year a staggering 1,455,666 music fans voted for their favorite Hawaiian artists! Congratulations, Duke. ■

### **Mahalo, Members!**

*Mahalo for the great articles and photographs. Send news, comments, and photos to: HSGA Quarterly, 2434 Waiomao Rd, Honolulu, HI 96816-3424. Email us at [hsga@hsga.org](mailto:hsga@hsga.org).*

### **Did You Pay Your 2009-2010 Annual Dues?**

*This is your FINAL issue if your mailing label still shows “X 6/09” under your address. Dues are \$30, which includes First Class delivery (Air Mail overseas). Renew today! Don’t miss out on the latest info on Hawaiian Steel Guitar, including news, instruction, and lots of photos.*

# Blue Lei

(R. Alex Anderson – Milton Beamer)

Ballad – C6th Tuning

Arrangement by John Ely

Steel Gtr.  
(C6th)

F dim

F

C7

8 9 8 9 || 4 5 5 9 10 8 7 5 4

C7(#5)

F

8 7 8 10 5 5 6 7 5 6 7

Strum w/ thumb

F7

B $\flat$

8 10 8 10 9 8 5 3 3 6 3

G7

C7

5 5 7 7 7 7 8 9 10 12 8 9 8 9 7 7 10 12



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## The Ernest Tavares Story (II)

*Here is the second and final installment of our story on Ernie Tavares, which was originally compiled by Lorraine Lewin in 1999, and then edited and updated by Jan Tavares in March 2009. The first installment appeared in the last issue (Spring 2009).*

Ernest's first recordings using his pedal steel were 1947 radio transcriptions recorded in Hollywood with The Harmony Hawaiians. One track from these transcriptions is included on a 1999 compilation CD entitled "Hawaiian Memories" (Harlequin HQ-CD-130), a collection of rare transcriptions made between 1936 and 1947.

One night in July 1947, the conductor of the Burbank Symphony Orchestra dropped in for a drink at the Aloha Club where Ernest was playing pedal steel with the Charlie Opunui Trio. Impressed by Ernest's steel guitar virtuosity, he offered to feature Ernest playing the instrument with the Burbank Symphony the following month. The timing was wrong, however, as Ernest had already booked his passage to Hawai'i to introduce his new pedal steel guitar to his fellow Hawaiians through bookings at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in Honolulu.

Ernest first played pedal steel on television in early 1949 for a series of Hawaiian shows shot in Hollywood entitled "Paul Page's South Sea Serenade." In the summer of 1950 Herb Remington took the job while Ernest joined up with T. Texas Tyler and His Western Dance Band. With Tyler he played on the "Range Round Up" television show. An NBC Radio broadcast of a T. Texas Tyler show, recorded on January 11, 1950 in Riverside Rancho, is available on CD. Ernest played backup steel and led the band on two swinging instrumentals, "The Johnson Rag" and "Panhandle Rag." The CD also contains an Ernest Tubb show called "Checkerboard Jamboree" broadcast live from Nashville on November 23, 1946. The CD to look for is: Ernest Tubb-T. Texas Tyler, Radiola CDMR-1141.

In 1952, Ernest designed and started to build a second pedal steel, this one having a cable system and double push pedal action to raise the pitch both a half tone and one full tone. He experienced problems with this design. When raising the pitch the extra half tone, added tension on the nut caused string breakage. Also, because he used a setup requiring 2 or 3 pedals to be pressed at the same time, he realized that figuring out which pedal needed an extra push required too much concentration. Ernest told his brother, Freddie Tavares, who worked with the Fender Company that he was not happy with it and that he was going to make another one. Freddie said, "Well if you don't want it, can I have it?" Ernest said, "Take it." He gave Freddie the blueprint and the instrument was developed by the Fender



*Ernie Tavares on his pedal steel guitar with the Daily Singing Rails TV Western Music Show on KTTV in the late 1940s.*

Company. Later Ernest did solve the tuning problem and built another guitar which he used the rest of his life.

Ernest played pedal steel with the South Sea Islanders, a Hawaiian/Tahitian show band formed in 1954 by Vince Akina. Freddie Tavares played guitar in the group, occasionally taking over the steel guitar chores when Ernest was unavailable. The South Sea Islanders recorded a set of three highly sought after 78s entitled "Dances of Hawai'i, Ancient and Modern" (Bowmar Education Records HD1, HD2, and HD3) and also a great LP entitled "Hukilau Hulas, Vol. 2" (Crescendo GNP-003). This album, together with "Hukilau Hulas, Vol. 1" has been reissued as a double CD called "Hukilau Hulas" (Crescendo CD GNPD-35) distributed by Bear Family Records.

In 1962 Ernest recorded an instrumental album under the alias Duke Kamoku and His Islanders entitled "Golden Hawaiian Hits" available on CD (Crescendo GNPD-73) or cassette (Crescendo GNP-73). It is a fine example of the Tavares brothers' musicianship. Ernest plays pedal steel throughout. Freddie plays bass, 'ukulele and guitar, and on "Sweet Leilani" plays pedal steel on one chorus, then joins his brother for a steel guitar duet on the final chorus.

Ernest went to work for Disney doing soundtrack work for the attraction "The Enchanted Tiki Room," which opened on June 23, 1963. It was the first attraction to use Audio-Animatronics. The show was originally planned to be a dinner show, which is why it is the only attraction that has restrooms. Ernest did the Polynesian drums and lively chant that concludes the audio part of the show.

Ernest was an active member of the Polynesian Society in California and recorded with many fellow West Coast-based Hawaiians. All were fine singers and multi-instrumentalists who recorded, performed live and on Telescriptions

in various aggregations. Ernest played upright bass on one or two of Sol Ho'opi'i's singles.

Harry Owens briefly came out of retirement to put together a troupe of 12 Hawaiian singers, dancers and musicians for a four-week contract at the Tropicana in Las Vegas, starting in September of 1957. Ernest played pedal steel and led the other musicians, including Bernie Kaai on guitar, Joe Ortega on Spanish guitar, Vince Akina on upright bass, and George Kainapau on 'ukulele. The show was so successful that it ran for 6 months.

From 1965 to 1973, Ernest led his own 12-piece Hawaiian stage show. They had extended engagements at the Riverside Hotel and the Mapes in Reno, and at the Tropicana in Las Vegas. The show toured up and down the West Coast reaching as far as Washington State. Ernest stipulated that each of the female hula dancers must be over six feet tall! Bobbie Gentry was the bass player and female singer until she signed with Capital Records to record her million selling "Ode To Billy Joe" in July 1967.

Ernest played a wide variety of music on pedal steel. He played on the "Singing Rails" TV series that promoted Union Pacific Railways. With his own small orchestra he played popular standards and modern classics. Using his own backup tapes, he would often perform solo steel guitar, piano or even Farfisa organ, covering a host of musical styles. He played numerous instruments on many movie soundtracks. He, his brother Freddie and Vince Akina, portrayed Mexican musicians in a few western movies. If they had played on the soundtrack, they would deliberately mime to the different instruments on screen.

Ernest loved jazz and played sax and clarinet in a jazz band that regularly played the Hollywood Palladium. He told his agent never to get him any more rock work after the producer on his only rock session told him he played guitar too well and must "dirty it up" for the project.

He learned arranging and composition from Ed Ross, a protégé of Rimsky-Korsakov, and studied the modern classics of Wagner, Grieg, Ravel, Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky. He enjoyed attending orchestral performances at the Hollywood Bowl, but his wife got no enjoyment accompanying him as, from start to finish, Ernest muttered about the slightest imperfection in the conducting or the playing flaws of the individual musicians.

During the '50s the family moved to Sun Valley, California. Ernest played music every day and after retirement would spend his days in his large music studio. There he would compose and make wonderful private recordings. There are tapes of him singing his own songs, accompanying himself on organ with full rhythm backing, including one stirring patriotic song worthy of being the United States national anthem. There are also tapes of him playing his own waltzes and songs from musicals on piano.



*In the early '60s, Ernie Tavares in his fifties with his Hawaiian Hula-balloo Troupe, a hot item on the Tahoe, Reno, Las Vegas circuit.*

A rare gem is a demo for an album featuring the instrumental trio of Ernest on pedal steel, John Hastings on harp, and Vince Akina on upright bass. The recording includes Christmas songs and old favorites such as "I'll Get By," "Am I Blue," "Bells of St. Mary's" and other goodies. MCA was interested in signing the trio and releasing the album, but wanted to showcase the trio at a large venue. Johnny Hastings was nervous and pulled out. If the occasional distortion on this old tape can be rectified, these recordings should be commercially released. The pedal steel and harp sound so good together, and the wonderful, innovative, full chordal playing on pedal steel by Ernest has to be heard to be believed.

Ernest was forthright and did not suffer fools in silence. He also had a gentle side, as evidenced in the moving love songs he wrote. He never forgot the Catholic Brother who gave him his musical grounding, and he was a devoted family man, annually hosting a gathering of the Tavares clan, at which every member entertained regardless of age. A keen horticulturist, he filled the garden of his first marital home in Hawai'i exclusively with blue flowers. In California, he grew and exhibited prize roses.

The need to perform in public lingered after Ernest retired and he occasionally gigged with his Farfisa electronic organ. He was negotiating a Wurlitzer sponsorship deal when he was taken ill. Ernest died a week later following a heart attack on February 16, 1986 at age 75.

Following cremation in California, the ashes of Ernest Arriga Tavares were laid to rest in a tiny crypt at the foot of his mother's grave in the Tavares family graveyard of Po'okela church in the beautiful foothills of Maui. His son

*Continued on Page 14*

Jan is an active member of the Barbershop Harmony Society of America. Their granddaughter Christine is a high school choir director at Valencia High in Santa Clarita, California and one of the four singers in the very popular World Music Group “Voco.” The Tavares musical dynasty continues.

#### Addendum from Don Keene

I’m pleased that Ernie will be given credit for his fantastic tuning. The basic advantage of Ernie’s open tuning was that he was able to play an entire song with four-part chordal harmony. I remember asking him—after his performance at Cowboy Park in Castaic, California circa 1948—how he achieved all of the chords on six strings, and therefore the question extended to “What tuning are you using?” His correct answer was, “All of them!” That began our relationship and his follow-up instruction on his guitar.

I had great admiration for his abilities, which in conversation extended to many areas. I was truly impressed with him and appreciated our friendship.

Regarding the two Tavares pedal designs: the old clunky design is one I have never seen. The photograph of the second design is the one or similar to one Ernie played professionally circa 1950. I say similar because the one he played had a removable rod-stabilizing strut at the front of the instrument down to the case. The one in the picture appears to be better crafted than the one he played. Here’s what could have happened: Around this time Ernie and I were both planning to build an 8-string. I did a lot of footwork running down contacts for parts, etc. and we got to the stage



*The late Dusty Nall (left) in a TV appearance with his group, the Country Cowboys, in Jackson, Mississippi (full story on page 18).*

where the bodies were cut. But the project went on hold until I finished school three years later in Oregon. I lost track of Ernie at that time, with job hunting, marriage, and those complicating things in life followed by children. The second design in the photograph could be the body of the proposed eight-string with Ernie opting instead to make another, better six-string. It appears to be much better crafted. As practical matter the six-string was so versatile, we questioned the advantage of an 8-string. At one point, I did own a Fender 8-string pedal steel, but I didn’t find much to do with additional strings.

#### Anecdote from Jan Tavares

Ernie and Freddy were very close and played gigs together all the time. While Ernie handled the driving chores, Fred would pass the time in the car by looking up words in the dictionary that were new and different and they were always amusing each other with the words’ meanings and origins. If you had to describe the two brothers in a single word, “intense” would be the word.

A good example was one occasion when they stopped at a café in Nevada for a meal. They left the café and after a half hour or so realized that Freddy’s wife Tamar was not in the back seat. Ernest described his amusement when they stopped the car and Freddy lifted up the blanket she had been sitting under. Immediately they turned around and headed back to the café, remembering, oh yes, Tamar had gone to the restroom right when they were leaving. Tamar knew the two of them well. Seeing them drive off, she went back to their table with a sigh, ordered another cup of coffee, and began reading the book she had brought along for the ride. In due time, the sheepish pair returned for her. ■

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memory got it. This was Auntie Leimomi Agrabante, the beautiful hostess in the restaurant at the Queen Kapi'olani Hotel, who strummed her 'ukulele and sang for guests as she moved among the tables. Those were the days!

In the evenings, our HSGA people formed groups and went to see the places where steel guitar was being played, mostly in Waikiki. Isaac Akuna plays a show once a week at the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center, where everyone sits on a rock or a grassy hill to enjoy the huge cast of singers and dancers, plus the four musicians. When break time came, most people went on walking down Kalakaua Avenue, and the next flood of tourists filled the seats eager to catch the music culture, which is what lures them to the islands. I wish the businessmen who manage the hotels and restaurants could get the message that it's the culture of Hawai'i, not the palm trees and ocean, that bring them there. If they switch to canned music or mainland junk, their pockets will feel the pinch.

Alan Akaka plays at the Marriott Hotel Thursday evenings with the Auntie Genoa show. When Auntie died her granddaughter Pomaika'i took her place, and does so most beautifully. She often brings one or more of her three little darlings along, and they just love to go on stage to hold the mike and sing or dance. That show is the most friendly, like a party at your friend's house. Volunteers from the audience sing and dance for us. Vic Rittenband was coaxed onto stage to sing, in memory of his beloved Nancy.

We saw an interesting newspaper item entitled "Steeling Chinatown" which said that traditional music of the islands is making a comeback in the night spots of the old Chinatown area of Honolulu where the tourists never go. It's called Honolulu's hottest nightlife neighborhood. The pub Thirty-

*Performing at the Marriott Sundays, Aaron Mahi (unpictured), George Kuo (left), Martin Pahinui and Bobby Ingano on steel.*



*Carrying on a Marriott tradition: Gary Aiko, Auntie Genoa's granddaughter Pomaika'i Keawe Lyman, Auntie Momi, and Alan Akaka.*

ninehotel at 39 North Hotel Street hosts "Hawaiian Nights" every Wednesday night with Greg Sardinha's group Po'okela, Pula Melia, the Daniel Corpus and Paul Dunlap duo, and the Essential Resophonics with Buck Giles on steel. So you never know, do you?

We also heard that Casey Olsen is back in the islands, that Gordo Freitas is back from working the cruise ships, and that Alan Akaka has left Kamehameha Schools where he was the choir director to open his own music teaching studio. If you want to register for lessons, phone (808) 375-9379 or email aloha@alanakaka.com, or write:

Ke Kula Mele Hawai'i O Akaka  
Alan Akaka School of Music  
1296 Auwaiku Street, Kailua, HI 96734

Before I stop talking about this year's convention, I want to propose a toast to Kamaka Tom who worked like a slave to organize this convention, do all the bookkeeping along with his wife Luz, and carry tons of instruments and sound equipment from one venue to another and a hundred other setup chores we don't even know about.

Kamaka has been so dedicated to HSGA for all the years since it began, way back to when he and Merle Kekuku teamed up and John Auna came over from the Big Island to lead us in further adventure. We could never have done it without those people dedicated to the steel guitar and to the culture of Hawai'i. Let's raise our glasses high and salute Kamaka, his wife Luz, and the two angels. Better add another angel... Jerry Byrd. ■

### Changed Email?

*Please send email changes to both our office (hsga@hsga.org) AND to John Ely (johnely@hawaiiansteel.com). Mahalo!*

# China's Secret Hawaiian Steel Guitar Garden

By Xia Jin

As a coordinator of Shanghai Wei Yu Middle School in China, I happened to read the story entitled “Young and Upcoming” in HSGA’s Winter newsletter from my colleague Mr. Hong Yishi. HSGA has done a wonderful job helping Chinese steel guitar students and raising global awareness of the current state of steel guitar in China. Now I want to add something to that great story.

Did you know that among tall French chinara trees here in Shanghai there exists a secret Hawaiian steel guitar garden? For almost five years dozens of children from 11 to 17 years of age have learned and enjoyed the exotic music in this place. Some of these “budding flowers” are so outstanding that they helped our school win awards in national music festivals. Still, this is quite a secret place, since its two gardeners, Ms. Du Ying and Mr. Hong Yishi are both quiet and modest persons by nature.

By early 2004 the first batch of kids had already learned steel guitar basics from Mr. Hong. In one picture, they were playing some nice tunes for the guests including our deputy mayor. Also attending that ceremony were Ms. Du Ying, the first HSGA member from China, and her sister Du Yi. The Du sisters have a very successful trading company in Hong Kong, but they love Shanghai where their famous parents once lived and strived for the welfare of the Chinese people many years ago. Their mother, Madam Hou Yuzhi, an elite legal professor, was herself an accomplished steel guitar player in her time.

To better remember her mother and to re-introduce such sweet music to China, Du Ying set aside a Hawaiian Steel



Posing at “Du’s Hawaii Guitar Educational Base”—instructor Hong Yishi (left); steel guitarist Yao Zhong; (?); Du Ying and her sister Du Yi with bouquets; close friend of the Du sisters, General Manager Tung Kiu Lun; and school president Long Shiming.

Guitar Fund. After gaining support from the local educational board, she invited and sponsored Hong Yishi—one of the top steel guitar players in China—to fly from his hometown and settle in Shanghai. She also brought dozens of steel guitars, both acoustic and electric, and necessary equipment for the students. Du’s “Hawaiian Steel Guitar Educational Base” thus became part of our school.

Mr. Hong has proven to be an exceptionally good teacher. He loves these little Hawaiian music fans. Every year, he chooses about a dozen kids from many eager candidates, puts them into a special music group, and gives them free training after school. These kids should also be good in their school’s main subjects like math, Chinese and English. “Before giving my first lesson,” said Mr. Hong proudly, “I told the school president that my students should be the best all-around, for I was fully aware of the fierce academic competition in junior middle school or even earlier here in Shanghai.” After a few months, he will choose a handful of kids with the most potential and give them additional “musical nourishment.” To make their learning hours more flexible, Mr. Hong turned a cozy attic room on top of the school building into a studio that doubles as his bedroom.

Shanghai once had its golden age of Hawaiian music in the 1930s. Although rarely heard these days, the unique and gentle sound of steel guitar hasn’t completely faded in the older generation’s memory. Former Chinese President Jiang Zheming, for one, learned “Aloha ‘Oe” on steel guitar during his tenure as Shanghai Mayor. The current Beginners Class in our school is already Mr. Hong’s fifth. A lot of his cherished students have since graduated and move on to higher schools,

A duet featuring senior students Feng Siyuan (left) and Xu Jinwen who won honors for their school at a recent music competition.



but they still come with their guitar, knocking happily at that nostalgic attic door during weekends or vacations.

The “Secret Garden” of Hawaiian guitar has grown from a tiny dot into something of a sensation here in town. As early as 2006, a boy and a girl Xu Jingwen and Feng Siyuan, each wearing a lei, helped the school win Second Place in the Shanghai Spring International Children’s Music Festival. Since then, more praise and prizes have come our way.

Du Ying and Hong Yishi have also sponsored many Chinese steel players like young Haijing Huang for tuition-free intensive study. Hong’s students are from Beijing, Canton, Jiangsu and many other provinces and cities, including a dozen primary school kids, the youngest being only nine year’s old. But when that little one places his tailor-made tiny steel guitar on his lap, he looks as if he were inspired by Jerry Byrd himself! Even a retired 90-year-old officer from Taiwan will soon fly across the strait to learn from Mr. Hong, who is only half of his age.

Many other kids have received encouragement and together they have created a beautiful Hawaiian garden in this financial heart of China.

At the opening ceremony of the Du school, Du Ying said, “From this point forward, my sister and I wish that the mellow and relaxing sounds from the steel strings will calm down a lot of tightened nerves, purify a lot of fickle minds, and create a quiet corner in people’s hearts so as to improve their tastes and to build a friendly bridge between China and other countries.”

Du Ying’s kidneys have deteriorated recently, and she is facing a life-threatening operation. Though she is fragile and constantly ill, whenever possible, she will gather strength and learn from Mr. Hong or practice on her own. She once joked that she is not far from heaven now. As for me, I am not sure of that yet, but it seems that her wish for steel guitar’s flourishing in China is not far from being realized.

#### Update on Du Ying

Just before press time we received the following news from Du Ying’s sister Du Yi: “The constantly ill but always diligent female ‘gardener’ of our Secret Hawaiian Garden is approaching the last leg of her life’s journey. The last resort, renal dialysis or a kidney transplant, is no longer possible. The final hours seem to be ticking down.



*A lovely photo of Du Ying taken recently in Hong Kong with very little trace of her struggle with severe kidney disease.*

“Du Ying has fought her illness since infancy. When the Angel of Death was finally hovering over her head, she was both terrified and strangely calm. She even held a “mock parting” with friends recently, saying, “If I am gone, don’t let there be any shrieking and howling beside my bed. Instead, there should be a cozy afternoon tea party for all my friends, with flowers, fruits, and desserts everywhere. No black cloth should surround my portrait on the wall. Instead, decorate it with orange-colored tulip buds. Thus could I still smile to you as before.” ■

*Fledgling kids performing at the opening ceremony for Du Ying’s steel guitar program.*



#### Did You Pay Your Dues?

*This is your FINAL issue if your mailing label still shows “X 6/09” next to your address. Dues are \$30, which includes First Class delivery (Air Mail overseas). Renew ASAP using the renewal forms included with this issue. Don’t miss out on the latest info on Hawaiian Steel Guitar, including news, instruction, and lots of photos. Mahalo!*

## CLOSING NOTES

### Kenneth “Dusty” Nall (1930-2009)

“I don’t remember not playing music”—The opening quotation from his autobiographical memoirs entitled “You Ain’t Nothin’, Boy” by HSGA member Dusty Nall, who passed away peacefully in his sleep on April 24, 2009.

Born in rural Mississippi into a large musical family, he wrote his first song at six years of age. As a young boy, he would hang around with Mississippi River barge workers who would play the delta blues on guitar between work loads. Dusty learned to play guitar in open D tuning from them and soon after his brother Walter showed him how to raise the strings on his guitar with a homemade wedge. The guitar was tuned to open E chord and played with a kitchen knife. This opened up a whole new sound and interest in music, which would stay with him for the rest of his life.

In 1947 at age 17, Dusty and his closest brother Curly Nall enlisted in the post-World War Two U.S. Army and after finishing airborne paratrooper training they were transferred to Eighth Army Headquarters in Tokyo, Japan. They got together with some other musicians and formed a band, the Jubileers, which was soon playing officers clubs, USO shows, and private clubs around Tokyo. They also started playing a radio show, which was broadcast every day via Armed Forces Radio Network from the very same studio where Tokyo Rose had broadcast during the war a few years earlier. Dusty recalled hearing some music from the homeland with steel guitar, then mostly played by Jerry Byrd and Little Roy Wiggins.

After completing their military service, Dusty and Curly returned to the U.S. and went to school for radio broadcasting in Memphis, Tennessee. They also started building handmade guitars and mandolins and soon found themselves in another band which would go on to play behind such notable legendary artists as Tex Ritter, Slim Whitman, and the Louvin Brothers. Dusty would then occasionally cross paths with his boyhood friend, steel guitarist (and fellow Mississippi Musicians Hall of Fame Member) John Hughey, who was touring with their old school mate Harold Jenkins (known by his stage name, Conway Twitty).

Around 1960 Dusty moved with his family and brother Curly to Plainfield, Illinois near Joliet where he and Curly found work at the General Motors plant. They also started playing music with various groups and artists in Joliet area with Dusty playing his newly acquired Multi-Kord pedal steel purchased from Joliet musician, music store owner, and instrument repairman, HSGA member Charlie Brewer.

Dusty’s brother Curly passed away in 1974 but Dusty continued to play and was one of the first professional steel guitarists that I heard playing in local bars when I came of drinking age.



*Dusty Nall during the post-war years with the Jubileers, a western band popular at officers clubs and USO shows around Tokyo.*

In the year 2000 Dusty was hired to play steel guitar with a western group called Prairie Moon, which was fronted by well-known Chicagoland television news anchorman Joel Daily. While not what I would call a smooth vocalist, Daily and his eight-piece band had a minor hit record in the novelty category called “Rocky Mountain Oysters,” which got some airplay. Dusty also played several times at our Joliet convention performing a Hawaiian flavored tune that he wrote called “Back to the Islands.”

Dusty was truly a unique stylist. His trusty MSA double-neck pedal steel was customized with the addition of volume control knobs mounted on the outside of the guitar necks so that he could curl his little finger around the control for volume expression; he did not use a foot operated volume control. This allowed him to use both feet on the floor pedals simultaneously.

Dusty’s final visitation was attended by many longtime friends and fellow musicians who mourn the loss of a Christian gentleman who always had a smile, a handshake, and a kind word for everyone. He is survived by wife Edna, nine children, and several grandchildren. His guitar was set up next to his casket. Behind it, his pack-a-seat [ED: a stool that doubles as a storage compartment—popular with pedal steel players] had a sign that read ‘This seat reserved for Dusty’ and rightfully so. I don’t know anyone else who can fill it in his place!

-Paul Warnik

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**Rick Alexander (1947-2009)**

*Very sad news for HSGA, Joliet convention goers, and friends of steel guitar nationwide. Thanks to Jeff Strouse for the following on one of steel guitar's great proponents.*

On May 22, one of my best friends, Rick Alexander, unexpectedly passed away from complications of open-heart surgery. He was 62. Some of you may remember him as the guy in the white hat. Rick put his heart and soul into the preservation of steel guitar without pedals and was instrumental in the success of "The Non-Pedal Sessions" at the annual TSGA convention in Dallas.

When I was asked to write an article of his musical life, I consulted his beloved wife Cathe, and she was able to locate some sketches he had written for an interview. So luckily, we can hear about his rich musical life in own words:

"I always loved music. In 1950 when I was three years old, I had a wind-up Victrola and three 78 RPM records: "Mockingbird Hill," "Good Morning Merry Sunshine," and "Open The Door Richard." I played them over and over, and pretty much wore them out. Then when I saw Elvis on the Ed Sullivan show in 1956, I knew without a doubt what I wanted to do with my life.

When I was 10 in 1957, I got a \$25 Kay acoustic guitar. I was on my way! I didn't know how to tune it at first, so I made up my own tuning, some kind of weird open D as I recall. I would play it overhand, and "bar" it with the fleshy part of the hand below the thumb. I made up some songs and went with that for a while, until somebody showed me a few chords and how to tune it. How different my life would have been if someone had showed me how to use a bar instead. Things progressed from there until a few years later, when I was 15, I worked in a gas station all summer and got a Harmony Stratotone guitar and an amp for \$50 each, big money in 1962!

So the natural course was to get a band together and play dances and parties. A few years later in 1964, we had the top band in town called the Fortune Tellers. Our manager was also a concert promoter, and he brought in acts like the Dave Clark Five and Bo Diddley, putting us on as the opening act. In April 1965, we opened up for the Rolling Stones. We hung out some with Mick and Keith and the late Brian Jones. That concert was bedlam... girls screaming, everybody totally out of control.

A man named Joe Woodhouse who worked for Capitol Records was at the concert and he really liked us. He became our manager for about a year and we recorded an album's worth of songs for Capitol that was never released. The best thing he did for us was get us on a tour with Roy Orbison. There were 3 opening acts for that tour, and we usually went on first. We got to meet Roy a few times and hung out with him some. I can remember every word of every conversation I had with him. Once I asked him, "Roy, how do you hit those



*A promo shot of Rick taken during his years as a touring act.*

notes every time and never miss?" He looked at me through those dark glasses and said, "Confidence, boy, confidence." Words to live by.

I thought we were on our way to stardom, but of course the band broke up and I lost touch with Joe Woodhouse, Capitol Records, Brian James, Roy Orbison, and all the rest. There was nothing else to do but become a hippie musician, reject society's values, and write weird songs. I did that for a few years, playing in blues bands, rock bands, country bands, or sometimes playing solo with an amplified acoustic guitar. It was either that or work nine-to-five for a living, and to me the choice was clear. I traveled a lot in the '60s and '70s playing clubs and concerts.

In 1979, I toured briefly as a member of the Association ("Cherish," "Never My Love"). Later that year, I met Rob Grill of the Grass Roots who was putting together a new "Roots" to tour the U.S. and Canada. I toured with the Grass Roots for a couple of years. It was a great gig, but after a couple of years playing and singing the same 22 songs, I'd had enough. We parted amicably and I wound up in Florida and became a redneck-cowboy.

I put a country rock band together, and called it the Rick Alexander Band (just to make sure I wouldn't forget the name!). We did real well in the early '80s, tearing it up in honky-tonks, fairs, and expos all around the southeast. We opened shows for George Jones and John Anderson. We did some recording and even had a local hit with a song called "Everything You Do." One of the guys in the band was a multi-instrumentalist; he played guitar, sax, and piano. Not do be outdone, I got myself a harmonica, mandolin, and my

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## *E Komo Mai! Welcome, New Members*

Is your address correct? Please notify us!

### UNITED STATES

JAMES HOLM-KENNEDY, 3215 Pacific Heights Rd, Honolulu, HI 96813

DAVID W. EASTRIDGE, 131 Puako Beach Drive, Kamuela, HI 96743-9710

JULIE HENDRIKS, P.O. Box 167, Boulder Creek, CA 95006

JAMES & SANDY MOUSE, 3781 Knollwood Drive, Beavercreek, OH 45432

LEILANI DUTEIL, 73 Sheldon Drive, Centerville, OH 45459

MARK & WENDY BRAUN, 826 Woodbine Circle, Lake Zurich, IL 60047-3026

MATTHEW DAWSON, 0230 SW Gaines St. #24, Portland, OR 97239

W. J. RICHARD, 9005 Vicksburg Ave, Texas City, TX 77591

### OVERSEAS

YAHIKO MACHIMURA, 4-28-9 Kaijin, Funabashi-shi, Chiba 273-0021 Japan

NOBUKO TAKAHASHI, 6-30-1 Kamiotanaka, Nakahara-ku, Kawasaki-shi,

Kanagawa Pref. 211-0053 Japan

*RICK ALEXANDER Cont. from Page 19*

first steel guitar. Actually it was two steel guitars, a Fender Dual Pro and Fender Champion. I paid \$75 for the Dual Pro and \$50 for the Champion. The salesman just wanted them out of his store. In fact, his exact words were, "Get these crappy things out of my store." I had no clue how to tune them or play them correctly, and I didn't know anyone who did. So I made up my own tunings, DGDGBE for the Champion and A7+9 and E7 for the Dual Pro. I played them at the gig that very night, and we didn't get fired or run out of town!

I started working as a solo performer again in the late '80s. First, with a guitar and drum machine, then using back-up tracks that I created using Cakewalk Sonar or Cubase. All this time I would noodle steel licks into my mixes but I didn't know any other non-pedal steelers, so I was completely on my own in the 'how-to' department.

After awhile I put together my own recording studio and focused more and more on recording my own material. I produced CD projects for clients for the first few years, but that got old and I phased it out in favor of concentrating on my own stuff. I recorded CDs and

sold them at shows, local music stores, and on the Internet.

Then in early 2004, I really became obsessed with steel guitar. I started collecting them, playing them constantly, and learning all I could from tutorial videos and DVDs. I saw Robert Randolph on TV; it struck me that there was no reason a steel guitar player can't be up front, singing, moving around, being the focus of the show.

My latest songs feature steel guitar prominently in the mix, and I've done a lot of experimenting with techniques for recording steel. I don't play pedal steel for two reasons: because for me, non-pedal is more expressive and personal, and because I don't want to sit down. As Zeb Carver once said to his young son, "It looks like you're playing a typewriter!"

Me again. Rick was full of life, an all around great guy, always helping and encouraging others. His website features music and tutorials for beginners, and he was a friend to everyone he met. His family is very thankful for all the support during this difficult time. His musical memorial will be the 2010 "Rick Alexander Non-Pedal Sessions" at the TSGA Convention. I feel very lucky to have known him. Aloha my friend. Rest in Peace. ■

## HSGA Donations

Our members really came through this past spring with some extremely generous donations.

Special thanks to members who did some very heavy lifting in the effort to raise money for Lorene Ruymar's "Steel Guitar in the Hawai'i Schools" project. **Naoto** and **Michiko Nakamura** donated \$500 and the greater Japan membership raised another \$450 toward this worthwhile project. Phenomenal! To boot, **Ed** and **Bonita Bettinger** purchased 3 steel guitars and some needed accessories for a total donation of around \$300. Mahalos to these big contributors.

Big mahalos to San Francisco member **Kris Oka** for a generous \$100 donation to our Scholarship Fund and to Board member **Capt. Ivan L. Reddington**, who contributed \$100 to our General Fund. Awesome!

**Chuck Wilson** made a donation to the Scholarship Fund from the sale of his "Billy Hew Len Archives" CD.

The following members donated at least \$10:

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