

# HSGA QUARTERLY

Published four times a year in Honolulu, Hawai'i  
by the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Association

Volume 26, Issue 99

Summer 2010



## Inside this Issue...

- 3 "Joliet 2010 Convention Preview" by Don Weber
- 4 Joliet 2010 Convention Schedule
- 5 "Joliet Guest Artist Interviews" by Buck Giles
- 7 "More On Steel Tuning History" by Roger Fletcher
- 8 "Vintage Axes" by Paul Warnik (National Tricones)
- 9 "Coco Wire" – News and Member Gossip
- 10 "Fingering Single Note Runs" by John Ely
- 11 "Swing Riff" – Steel Arrangement by John Ely
- 12 "Hillbilly Hawaiian – Part One" by Anthony Lis
- 15 "Closing Notes" – Stotler, Scott, Rittenband, Kandle
- 16 "The Billy Hew Len Story" by Jerry Byrd
- 18 "Disc 'n' Data" – Recordings Reviews
- 19 "Buy & Sell" – Member Advertisements
- 19 Member Donation Acknowledgements



*Daniel Akaka (left) and HSGA Recording Secretary Frank Della-Penna on hand for the Henry Allen Steel Guitar Festival this past April in Ka'anapali on the island of Maui.*

## Steel Guitar on O'ahu, Maui and D.C.

*From Frank Della-Penna*

This past April, Stephanie Ortoleva and I attended the Pacific Rim Conference on Disabilities held in Honolulu at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Hotel. We gave a lunch hour presentation to the conference participants from all around the Pacific region from Australia to Viet Nam, some of whom were hearing Hawaiian music for the first time. I played Hawaiian steel guitar along with Ramon Camarillo and Kamaka Tom on 'ukulele, Wayne Shishido on rhythm guitar, and Gaynor Kalima on bass. Kamaka started off with an *oli* (chant) specially chosen for the event. For a Hawaiian combo that never rehearsed, we dazzled the audience with

'ukulele improvisations by Ramon and Kamaka, a tight vocal quartet and great steel guitar music.

Along with other leading scholars and researchers, my wife Stephanie Ortoleva (attorney at Bluelaw International) and Akiko Ito (Chief of the Secretariat for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the United Nations) gave presentations regarding the U.N. conventions addressing economic, social, cultural and political issues confronting persons with disabilities as well as the unique challenges faced by women with disabilities during and after a war or conflict situation.

After the conference, we went to hear Alan Akaka and the Keawe 'Ohana

*Continued on Page 2*

## HSGA QUARTERLY

Volume 26, Issue 99



### OFFICERS

Paul Kim, President  
Gerald Ross, Vice-President  
Kamaka Tom, Secretary-Treasurer  
Frank Della-Penna, Recording Secretary

### DIRECTORS

Pete Kahele, California  
Chris Kennison, Colorado  
Terry Miller, Washington State  
Capt. Ivan L. Reddington, Florida  
Mike Scott, Ontario, Canada  
Ian Ufton, Ontario, Canada

### PAST PRESIDENT

Kamaka Tom

### DIRECTOR EMERITUS

Jerry Byrd

### JAPAN COORDINATOR

Tom Ikehata Tohma

### QUARTERLY EDITOR

John Ely

### WEBMASTER

Amy Pace <amy@hsga.org>

### ORIGINAL CLUB FOUNDER

Lorene Ruymar (1985)

### 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 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 should also be emailed directly to the newsletter editor at [johnely@hawaiiansteel.com](mailto:johnely@hawaiiansteel.com).

*STEEL GUITAR Continued from Page 1*

at the Marriott Waikiki Resort and Spa. The smooth vocals, 'ukuleles and steel guitar of Alan's group can't be beat. We had just come from the Hilton Hawaiian Village where one had better wear ear plugs to prevent hearing loss from the loud rock and roll band. Sorry, Alfred Apaka and Henry Kaiser, times have changed.

### In Maui

Our trip allowed us to catch the Henry Kaleialoha Allen Hawaiian Steel Guitar Festival in Maui. Good timing! Ka'ana-pali is beautiful in April. Henry did masterful jazz interpretations on steel, guitar and 'ukulele. Alan Akaka was superb with his smooth touch on steel guitar along with Greg Sardina on rhythm guitar and Gary Aiko singing the old songs in that Alfred Apaka style. Duke Ching performed on his Fender steel. I played "Lei No Ka'iulani" and more *kanikapila* with Daniel Akaka and Greg Sardina. "Lei No Ka'iulani" is the theme song from the new Hollywood movie about the life of Princess Ka'iulani. Though artistic liberty gets in the way of history—for example, the fabricated love story with a young British man and the extensive kissing scenes—it is a movie worth seeing for a sense of how Hawai'i's sovereignty was lost.

### In Washington, D.C.

On June 24, Senator Daniel Inouye gave the opening remarks at the 2010 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which this year focused on Mexico, Asia and the Pacific Islands. The Hawaiian group opening the show was the Hawaiian Serenaders and Dancers consisting of Carol Takafuji on bass 'ukulele, Wendell Yee on vocals and 'ukulele, myself on Hawaiian steel guitar, and dancers Vivian Takafuji, Holly Holman and Manuela Kamai.

The Hawaiian Serenaders also performed on June 26 at a reception for



*Sen. Daniel Inouye with the Inaugural Ball Guitar, signed by the inaugural performers and on display in his Capitol Hill office.*

Lurline Wailana McGregor, author of *Between the Deep Blue Sea and Me*. Lurline was awarded a prize in literature for children for this work by the Native American Indian Museum. This novel, which is great reading for adults and children alike, is a story about a Hawaiian's struggle to understand her ancestral responsibilities and her relationships with men, and to find her identity as a Hawaiian in today's world. To order a copy, contact Kamehameha Publishing, 567 S. King St., Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813.

### Inaugural Follow-up

Recalling the Presidential Inauguration, the Gibson Guitar Company generously donated a Les Paul guitar for the event. It was autographed by all of the performing artists. The Hawai'i State Society President Trippi Penland presented the guitar to Senator Daniel Inouye, and it is prominently displayed in the senator's Capitol Hill office. ■

---

# Joliet Convention Preview

By Joliet Chairman Don Weber

We hope everyone is having a wonderful summer. It seems that the end of summer and the beginning of fall is a long way off. I must say, however, that now is a good time to sit under the umbrella, sip a cool drink, and make some plans to attend the HSGA Joliet Convention. The convention will be held October 7-9, 2010. What a great event we have planned for you this year. Almost everyone has heard of "The Byrd's Nest." The name appears on CDs and it's talked about in Hawai'i's music circles. It's the name given to those great students of Jerry Byrd. All the members of "The Byrd's Nest" have appeared at Joliet... except one. That is about to change at this year's gathering. It's a convention that no one should miss. Let me tell you all about it.

## Honored Guests

This year we have the pleasure of announcing that our Honored Guest is Casey Olsen. Did I say guest?? Let me correct that statement. I should have said Honored Guests because we will also have Casey's Dad with us, the legendary Hiram Olsen. We are including in a separate article member Buck Giles's interview of both Casey and Hiram. The Olsens will be playing a set each day and will be featured at Saturday's lū'au show.

## Convention Registration

The convention is being held at the Joliet Holiday Inn Hotel and Conference Center located at 411 S. Larkin Avenue in Joliet, Illinois. Most folks will be arriving on Wednesday, October 6, the day before the official start of the convention. 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. *Do not wait.* Right now while you are thinking of it, fill out and send in the registration form included in the newsletter. You can also download it from the website at [hsga.org](http://hsga.org). The convention fee is \$25 per person. Please send it by September 1 along with the registration form to Wally Pfeifer, 115 N. Clinton St., Dwight, IL 60420. Remember, you can also pay the convention fee upon arrival, but we need your registration form in advance.

## Hotel Reservations

Make your hotel reservations directly with the hotel. Your reservation must be received by the Holiday Inn and Conference Center before October 1. After that date the rooms being held for HSGA will be released to the general public, and are not guaranteed to be available. The hotel reservation form is included in this newsletter. However, we recommend you call the hotel directly at 815-729-2000. Be



*The "meat and potatoes" of our conventions: the member playing sessions. On the Joliet stage last year, Ron and Arlene Wenger.*

sure to tell them you are with the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Association to get the special discounted room rate, which is good from October 4 through October 10.

## Room Rates

The room rate of \$67.50 plus tax is unchanged from last year.

## Breakfast

Last year the hotel surprised all of our attendees with vouchers for a free breakfast in the hotel dining room for each day they were registered. Well, guess what? Hotel manager Althea Walker tells me that our members will be receiving the free breakfast again this year. A big *mahalo* to Althea and the hotel.

## 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 will provide pre-ordered lunches only. You must pre-order from their menu of available items by 10 AM for noon-time serving. Pre-ordering is done during the morning music sessions in the convention room. This has been a popular feature.

## Member Playing Slots

Playing time is again 25 minutes *including set-up time* and will 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 are a first time or a 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



*Gil O’Gawa (left) and Kamaka Tom cutting up at Joliet last year.*

will *not* have a playing slot. We cannot guarantee which day or time you will appear on stage, but we will honor preferences when possible. When all playing slots are filled, you will go on a standby list. *Don’t wait... register now.*

### **Limousine Services**

Reserve your limo from the airport in advance. You can schedule your return trip to the airport at the same time, *or* get a group together at the convention and share the ride back to the airport to save money. Cox Livery Service (815-741-0583) provides good service, and they are looking forward to working with you. Cash, check or credit cards are accepted. For credit cards, add 5 percent. Cox charges a base fare for the first person, then add \$5 for each additional person. For service after 10 PM and before 5 AM there is an additional charge of \$10.

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 Cox at 815-741-0583 for further instructions.

We recommend that you verify your limo rate when reserving—fuel surcharges or rate increases are possible.

### **Vendors and Evening Seminars**

Vendor information is not available at this time. There is nothing scheduled for Wednesday evening: just eat, talk story, relax, jam or sleep. Thursday evening will be the popular “Talk Story” time with the Honored Guests. You can get to know Casey and Hiram and get all your questions answered (well, maybe not all). On Friday evening, it’s the “Chris Kennison Invitational Jam.” Chris will organize a jam session featuring a few players he selects. We will advertise this to the general public as a free feature of the convention.

### **Convention Sound**

Great professional quality sound is provided each year by Fred Campeau and Paul Watkins. Though Paul will be unavailable this year, Fred guarantees the best sound possible with a little help from his friends.

### **Lu’au and Show**

Tickets for the lū’au and show will be sold during the convention at a cost of \$25 per person. Some of our regular dancers will be attending a hula workshop the day of our event and may not be able to attend the lū’au show. But never fear, folks. Your Joliet committee guarantees a terrific show this year. We have made arrangements with “The Barefoot Hawaiian” to perform along with our great show band. There will be fun and surprises for all.

### **“No Sleep” Jam Sessions**

Enough said. ■

## **Joliet Schedule**

### **Wednesday, October 6**

Set up, check in, talk story, have dinner, sleep or jam.

### **Thursday, October 7**

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  
 6:05-8:30 Dinner (on your own)  
 8:30-???? Talk Story with Casey and Hiram Olsen.  
 “No sleep” jam follows.

### **Friday, October 8**

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  
 6:05-8:30 Dinner (on your own)  
 8:30-???? Chris Kennison Invitational Jam. “No Sleep” jam follows.

### **Saturday, October 9**

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*

---

## Joliet Guest Artist Interviews

*Big mahalos to Buck Giles for the effort it took to coordinate, conduct, and transcribe the following interviews with Hiram and Casey. The Olsens are tough to catch up with!*

### **Hiram Olsen: Born August 15, 1943, Honolulu**

*When did you start playing music?*

Hiram: "I started playing music in 1957. At that time I played rock 'n' roll and was with a group called Baby Doll and the Caravan. At that early age we used to play places like the Civic Auditorium and through high school kept playing the same music, rock 'n' roll. During that time I met my wife and got associated with her father, Billy Hew Len, and then my style of music started to change to Hawaiian. I continued playing Hawaiian music from then on, at lū'aus and many different shows."

*When you started playing music did you always play the guitar?*

Hiram: "In the beginning I played 'ukulele and later in my high school years switched to guitar."

*Did you learn to play the guitar on your own or did you have a teacher?*

Hiram: "I learned pretty much on my own watching and listening to other players."

*Can you tell me when you first started playing with Jerry Byrd?*

Hiram: "Ho, gee. I think it was when Jerry first came to Honolulu and decided to live here in the '80s. When I was in school I used to hear him on the radio playing on a Hawaiian show. That was some time around 1959 or 1960. I kept hearing Jerry's recordings on the radio, and I never thought that I would get to play with a guy that great on steel guitar. After I started to work with him, I just clicked with him because I pretty much knew his style of playing from my younger days listening to him.

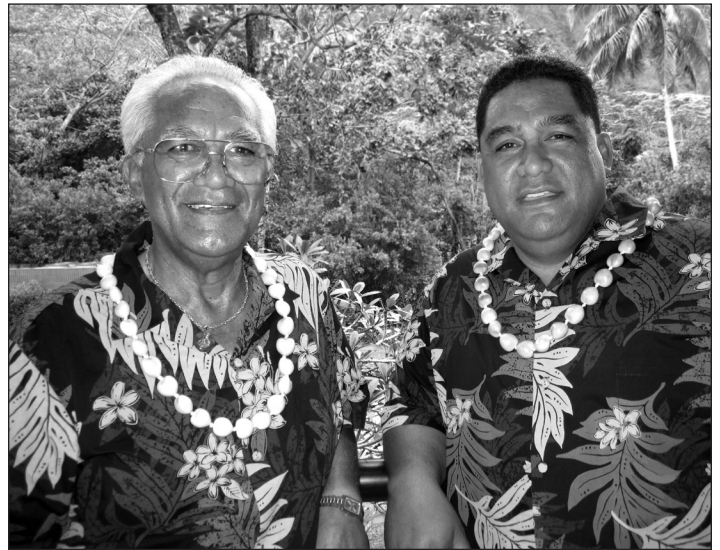
"I learned a lot working many, many years with my father-in-law Billy [Hew Len] and other musicians that worked with him like Pua Almeida, Benny Saks and Sonny Kamaka. I learned a lot from those great musicians."

*Do you have a favorite song or style you like to play?*

Hiram: "Not one song, many songs. And, of course, I love jazz as well as traditional Hawaiian. I enjoy music *period*."

*Anything else you'd like to add, words of inspiration?*

Hiram: "Love what you're doing. Music has been in my heart for many years. I enjoy what I do and that's all!"



*An unbeatable one-two punch in Hawaiian instrumental music, this year's Honored Guests at Joliet, Hiram and Casey Olsen.*

---

### **Casey Olsen: Born March 19, 1967, Honolulu**

*When did you start playing music and what was your first instrument?*

Casey: "Actually, I started at the age of 13 by watching my grandfather, Billy Hew Len, one of the all-time great steel guitarists who played back in the day. I got started from him and also from my dad, Hiram Olsen, who would take me to the concerts, so I started playing steel from him. But before steel, I was going to play drums and took lessons from Harold Chang. Harold was doing shows with my dad at the Halekulani Hotel. They did a show there for a while, so I used to go there a lot and always liked the drummer. So you can say that was the first instrument I actually played. I believe I went to one or two sessions on drums before really evaluating myself and then eventually making the steel my instrument."

*What was the first song you learned on the steel guitar?*

Casey: "I learned my first tune from my grandfather. I would follow him side by side and it took me about two hours at the most before playing the whole song through by myself. The song was called "'Imi Au Ia 'Oe." That was the first song I ever learned."

*What tuning was that in?*

Casey: "He had it tuned down to C6th at that time."

*So what tunings do you play now?*

Casey: "Actually I play a C6th or what you would call a C13th with a C bass. I used to play a C6th with an added 7th, like how Jerry played it with an A bass, but I changed and just play the open C chord."

---

*What kind of steel guitar do you play?*

Casey: “Right now I play a single-neck Canopus at all my gigs, but I sometimes play a double-neck Canopus when I do lū’au shows when it requires me to play another tuning. I also have an old Excel double neck that I play. I will be bringing that one to Joliet to play. That guitar used to be Jerry’s. It was his guitar when he used to go to Japan. He would never bring his guitar, so the company made it especially for Jerry and that’s the guitar he would play. So when I was interested in getting an Excel, Jerry brought it back for me from the company.”

*Do you have any regular gigs in Honolulu?*

Casey: “Yes, right now I play on the *Pride of America*, the cruise liner that goes from island to island. It comes in every Saturday and I play from about Noon to 4 PM for the new passengers that come aboard.”

*Could you share a memorable moment you had with your grandfather or Jerry?*

Casey: “Well, there are so many memories. I could go on and on about my grandfather and Jerry. Some things I remember about learning from my grandfather... you would follow and you watch. Knowing that he had that *mūmū* [deformed] hand and such, I used to try and put the glove on my hand and kind of see how it would feel. [ED: See Jerry Byrd’s article on Billy Hew Len in this issue on page 16, covering how Billy lost use of his hand.] And a couple of times he would catch me doing it and he would look at me and say, “What are you doing?” I would say, “I’m, I’m just...” He would say, “Yeah, yeah, you making fun of me, yeah?” I just wanted to see how it would feel to have the glove on with a bar attached. That’s one of the moments, but there are lots of good moments.

“With Jerry the good times I can remember is going to his house and having my lessons. I never went to Harry’s Music Store; I learned at his house. I would go to his house, Jerry would open his door, I would enter his place, sit down and I wouldn’t say a word until leaving. After, I would say, “Oh, thank you”. I look back now and I just laugh about it.

## **New HSGA Officers**

At the July board meeting, new officers were selected for the 2010-2012 term. Paul Kim will serve another term as President and Gerald Ross will serve his first term as Vice-President. Kamaka Tom will be our Secretary-Treasurer. Frank Della-Penna will continue service as official Recording Secretary. Tom Tohma remains the official HSGA Japan Coordinator.

Maybe I was nervous. I just wasn’t much for words. Jerry knew that and he used to joke around with me a lot, you know. When I’d be coming in and stuff. When Jerry would mention it to anybody he would tell them that I didn’t say anything—I did my talking on the steel.”

*Do you have any students or plan to teach in the future.*

Casey: “Not currently. I’m not teaching anyone. But in the back of my mind that’s something that I want to do soon. I wouldn’t say later, because later may be too late. Eventually I see myself helping pass on the instrument.”

*Do you plan to release your own CD solo recording?*

Casey: “I plan on going into the studio in July or August and laying down a couple of songs and eventually getting to the point where I have enough songs to complete a thirteen-song CD.”

*What would you say is one of your favorite songs to play on the steel?*

Casey: “There are a lot of them. I would say anything that is Hawaiian or *hapa haole*—that’s my favorite. Simple songs like “Little Grass Shack” is one of my all-time favorites. I have a lot of them; I don’t really have just one. I love all songs and I love to play.”

*How about other genres of music with the steel besides Hawaiian?*

Casey: “I like playing different styles, like Hawaiian, country, and a little jazz. I like jazz a lot, so I incorporate a jazz style. Like my father, people are going to notice he’s very progressive in using his chords. So you’ll see a lot of influence from him and his chord progressions that I’ve gained throughout the years playing with him.”

*Where do you see yourself in the future with the Hawaiian steel guitar?*

Casey: “I see myself passing on the instrument, maybe conducting steel guitar clinics, teaching courses and wherever they’re teaching Hawaiian music or anything to do with the instrument. I see myself doing a lot of things to promote the steel, and eventually I want to see steel at its highest level, like winning an instrumental Grammy. Whether it is a recording from me, a bunch of us or just another artist—as long as it gets the recognition it deserves.”

*Is there anything else you’d like to add?*

Casey: “For the Joliet convention I’ll be bringing a CD I did quite a while ago with my dad and Dennis, who plays bass with us. Greg Sardinha produced it and I’ll have some for people to listen to. It’s not yet released, so I’ll be bringing some to the convention for everyone to enjoy.” ■

# More on the History of Steel Guitar Tunings

From Roger Fletcher

I read John Ely's article on tunings with great interest and would like to add a few comments.

I may be stating the blindingly obvious, but the steel guitar was presumably born of the slack key guitar, and the original A major low-bass tuning is just the ubiquitous slack key "Taro Patch" G tuning (DGDGBD) raised in pitch by a whole tone to bring the string tension up to that typical of the steel guitar. Another common slack key tuning was the D tuning (DADF#AD), and similarly raising the pitch by a whole tone gives the Dick McIntire E major tuning.

Taking this thought a little further, if we examine early acoustic steel guitar instructional material, such as the Kamiki method, we can see that some of the arrangements bear a close resemblance to slack key stylings: the melody is played on the top three strings, while an alternating bass rhythm is maintained on the open lower strings.

In a 1944 tutor by Dick Sadleir, the author wrote: "As we have seen, the technique of the electric Hawaiian guitar is

similar to that of the wooden instrument. The manner of approach, however, is different. The electric guitarist must think in terms of the sophisticated harmonic structure of popular songs."

Introducing the high-bass tuning, he continued: "It will be seen that only two notes have been changed—the fifth and sixth strings have been raised in pitch. This is because the basses are no longer needed for the self-accompaniment style of playing. The accompaniment it was possible to produce from them was suitable only for the simplest of folk songs."

Thus John Ely's argument that the explosion of tunings was a response to the evolution of the prevailing popular music is admirably confirmed by a contemporaneous account. However, it was the combination of this with technical innovation which really turbocharged the development. Electrification not only transformed the sound of the steel guitar, enabling it to enter new musical territory, but it also made the construction of eight string and multi-necked instruments feasible.

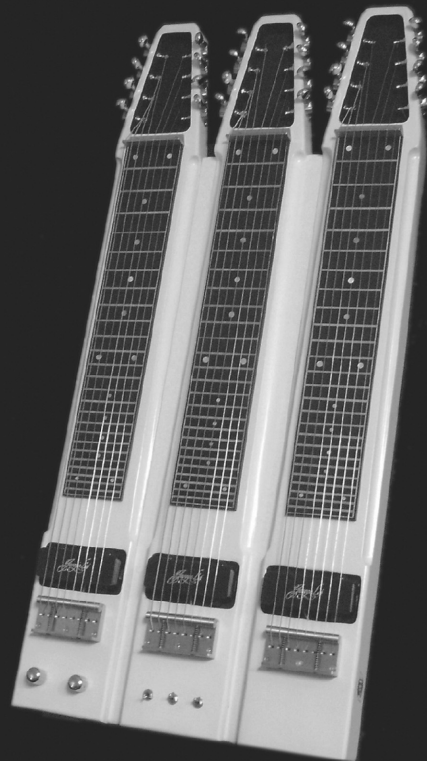
*Thanks, Roger, for your terrific analysis. HSGA is packed with knowledgeable members! We really owe it to ourselves to get a good discussion going on this and other central steel guitar topics. Anyone?* ■



**WEST COAST  
STEEL GUITAR**

8915 NE Winters Rd.  
Camas, WA 98607  
Phone: 360-833-8279

[www.westcoaststeelguitar.com](http://www.westcoaststeelguitar.com)



**QUALITY  
LAP STEEL  
GUITARS**

**Clean balanced tone**

**Double-8 and triple-8 models  
available with legs**

**Quality woods and components**

**Resophonic guitars**

**Custom acoustic and electric  
guitars**

## VINTAGE AXES

*Here's the second article in our series on vintage steel guitars from renowned instrument collector, Paul Warnick.*

Have you ever had a bad dream in which you found yourself marooned alone on a deserted island? Like Robinson Caruso or Tom Hanks in the movie *Castaway*? And then, by a stroke of fortune, a guitar case miraculously washes up on the shore of your island. What kind of guitar would you hope would be inside? For me the choice is obvious, a National Tricone Hawaiian Resophonic!

When I began my quest for vintage steel guitars my first priority was to get myself a pre-World War II National Tricone. So back in 1982, in the days before the Internet, I began making phone calls to hunt down one that was for sale. I soon found myself taking a northbound trip up to a musical resale shop west of Milwaukee, Wisconsin to get the guitar I was hoping for. It was a beautiful sight to behold. The shiny mirror reflective look of the German nickel-silver plating and art deco design of the metal body. After some negotiation on price, I became the proud new owner of a 1930 National Tricone Hawaiian style #1 resonator guitar, which I still have. It is a cherished part of my collection that I fully intend to keep until my dying day.

John Dopyera (July 6, 1893 – January 3, 1988) is known as the inventor of the resophonic system of guitar amplification. He emigrated with family from his native Austria-Hungary to America in 1907. John and his brothers Rudy, Louis, Emil, and Bob all played instruments and had estab-

---

*New York steel ace Mike Neer's "girls," two cherry National Tricones. (Top) A 1929 Style 1 from the Cleveland Guitar Center, where it hung on the wall for two years. Says, Mike, "This is the best sounding tricone I've ever played. I played hundreds of gigs with it and made all my recordings with it." (Bottom) A 1930 Style 1.5 with a squiggle pattern. It was purchased in Boston. The case had stenciled on it 'Hilo Hawaiians' with a palm tree and moon.*



*Berkeley, California member Mark Harpainter's 1931 Style #1 National Tricone with an original case in pretty good shape.*

lished themselves on the West Coast by 1909. Initially working as craftsmen at a sash and door manufacturing company in Los Angeles, John, his father, and brothers soon moved into cabinet making and repair, which then in turn spawned a musical instrument repair and banjo manufacturing business.

One day a vaudeville guitar player named George Beauchamp came by the Dopyeras' shop and mentioned that he was having a problem with his acoustic guitar not having enough volume to compete with other instruments in the orchestra. John would go on to solve the problem after several months of experimentation by placing spun aluminum cones into the body of the guitar, which acted as resonators to amplify the sound. After settling on his three-cone design, which was the first applied for patent in October of 1926, the National String Instrument Company was formed by the late summer of 1927.

The first notable player to embrace this new louder instrument was Hawaiian guitar legend Sol Ho'opi'i who was given two National Tricone guitars with one of them having Sol's name engraved on it. Other notable Hawaiian players like Tau Moe and Sam Ku West would soon be playing them and tricones would continue to be the rage among Hawaiian and many blues musicians until the invention of electrically amplified instruments.

National Tricones were available initially in four styles: the plain Style #1, which had no engraving; Style #2, which had a hand-engraved wild rose design; Style #3, which had more elaborate lily-of-the-valley flowers; and then the profusely engraved Style #4 with chrysanthemum flowers. Later models included the Style #97, which featured a sandblasted scene of a female surfrider colored with airbrushed enamel, and the Style #35, which featured a cartoonish-looking minstrel playing a lute-like instrument also in a sandblasted and enamel colored scene.





Two later much less encountered models are the M-3 Hawaii, which was a budget model with a brass (not nickel-silver) body painted in a yellowish “piano grain” enamel, and the extremely rare model that collectors refer to as the “exploding palm tree,” which had no model designation.

While most vintage National Tricone guitars are square-neck Hawaiian models, they were offered in round Spanish necks for the same cost. Round necks are much more rare and bring several times the amount that a similar model in Hawaiian style does.

In 1988 Don Young and McGregor Gaines launched the new National Resophonic Company in California and began offering a complete and expanded line of updated National models. The resurgent popularity of resonator guitars also gave rise to a number of import makers also offering guitars with resonator amplification based on the original designs. As John Dopyera himself said, they have a tone that “flows like a river.”

For anyone wishing to learn more about vintage National resonator guitars, I highly recommend Bob Brozman’s book *The History and Artistry of National Resonator Instruments*. In the next issue we’ll forge ahead into the realm of electric steels with the Rickenbacher “Fry Pan.” ■

### Did You Pay Your 2010-2011 Dues?

*This is your FINAL issue if your mailing label still shows “X 6/10” 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.*

# Aloha JOE®

America’s Premier Hawaiian Music Station

**Aloha Joe Radio and TV  
playing all your island favorites**



**LISTEN  
on your  
cell phone, too!  
24/7/365**

**www.ALOHAJOE.com**

## COCO WIRE



*Isaac and Gloria Akuna at this year’s Hōkū Hanohano Awards.*

This from one of our convention hula dancers, **Gloria Murawski-Akuna**: “Mahalo nui to all who participated in the online voting for the Hawaiian Favorite Entertainer of the Year as part of this year’s Hōkū Hanohano Awards. Unfortunately, Ku’uipo Kumukahi did not receive that honor—the very talented ‘ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro did, but her CD *Ku’uipo, E Hula Mai Me A’u* did win for Best Island Music Album. **Isaac [Akuna]** helped produce it and performs on it. You can listen to some of the songs on iTunes and some of the award show highlights can be found at [gohawaii.about.com](http://gohawaii.about.com) (search on ‘2010 hoku’).

From **Buck Giles** on the Abrigo ‘Ohana: “Still haven’t seen **Timi Abrigo** perform yet, but I’ve heard good things and caught some cool clips from YouTube.” To view the clips, go to [youtube.com](http://youtube.com) and search on ‘Timi Abrigo Moana Chimes’ and then do another search on ‘Timi Abrigo Across the Sea’. Nice! [Big kudos to Buck for supplying us with stellar interviews of our 2010 Joliet Guests, Casey and Hiram Olsen in this issue!]

Some news from **Wally Pfeifer**: “I don’t know how many of you know or have met **Jack Montgomery** but I’m thinking most of you do. He never missed a convention until the last two or three years. He was at every convention in Joliet, Winchester and Hawai’i. **Mike Scott** just called me to let me know that Jack is in the hospital with multiple problems. He needs our prayers and Elaine needs our support.

“Several years ago—maybe 30 or more—**Frank Miller** would tell me that I had to meet this guy from Toronto that played so sweet and was so very knowledgeable about the old-time steel players. Also, Frank said, “And beside that, he’s a good guy. You’ll like him.”

All of us at HSGA wish Jack Montgomery a speedy recovery! ■

# Fingering Single Note Runs

( $\square$  = thumb,  $\nabla$  = finger)

Material by John Ely

## Alternating the Thumb and Forefinger

Picking using the thumb and forefinger—a few prefer the middle finger—is a very efficient approach to picking. The scheme is ideally suited to groups of two notes (see measures 2 and 5 below) or four notes (measures 3 and 6), which allows you to strictly alternate thumb and finger, especially effective for fast passages. Play through the six patterns below until you get comfortable alternating thumb and finger. We try to avoid the awkwardness of having to “cross over,” that is, using the thumb on the top string of a run, or the finger on the bottom string of the run. Try picking measure 2 or 3 starting with the thumb and then alternate thumb and finger. Ouch! See what I mean? Note that at letter A, the thumb has to cross over to hit the higher string. Starting with the finger at measure 4 would solve this, but it’s not easy to think that far ahead so you have to get comfortable with crossing over with either pick on occasion. [Note: Many players let their thumb predominate due to the superior sound of plastic on metal strings, especially for slower runs.]

### Normal Thumb-Finger Patterns

## Solving the “Cross-Over” Problem

To minimize crossing over with the thumb or forefinger, you can double up with the thumb moving up, or the finger moving down. This makes sense since all you are doing is increasing the picking stroke a bit to catch another string in its path. Play through the examples below to see how this works. The other strategy for dealing with crossing over is to “make friends with it”—strict alternation of the thumb and finger regardless of which pick begins the run. This is called “cross picking” and appears in “Swing Riff” (opposite) in bars 9-10. “Swing Riff” is a good example of swing-style playing popular among both western and Hawaiian players of the ‘40s and ‘50s. Notice that tune is essentially a series of two-bar phrases separated by a slight pause. As a challenging exercise, begin each phrase with the pick *not* indicated and work out how to get back on track using cross picking and/or doubling up with the same pick.

### Doubling Up To Avoid Awkward Fingering



# “Hillbilly Hawaiian”: Lani McIntire’s Influence On Mainland Country Music

By Anthony Lis

This is the first installment of a three-part series examining the influence of Hawaiian-born bandleader and multi-instrumentalist Lani Ululani McIntire (1904-1951) on early country music. McIntire, as John Berger has noted, enjoyed success from the mid-1930s through the mid-1940s with his popular blend of reworked Hawaiian standards, newly written *hapa haole* songs, and “borderline pop” tunes with a Hawaiian feel, as Cumquat Records founder Bruce Clarke put it.

In old-time music circles, McIntire is best remembered for having led a group backing country music pioneer Jimmie Rodgers (1897-1933) on several steel guitar suffused sides in 1930, including the first recording of his composition “The One Rose (That’s Left In My Heart).” This enduring classic has been recorded by nearly two dozen country musicians since the late 1930s and by Hawaiian entertainers such as Sam Koki, Leo Addeo, and

Rudi Wairata, and mainstream pop performers such as Ozzie Nelson and Sammy Kaye.

In short, McIntire’s 28-year career is peppered with connections to the country music field. He led a steel suffused band backing a second country performer Jimmie Davis, co-wrote a second song covered later by country artists, and may also have participated in an early recording of a western swing standard. In addition, McIntire’s floorshow at New York City’s Hotel Lexington—where he was in residence at various times from the late 1930s through the early 1950s—is known to have included at least one hillbilly novelty number.

Lani McIntire was born in Honolulu on December 15, 1904 to a Hawaiian mother and a father apparently from Iowa. The 1904 *Hustad’s Directory of Honolulu and the Territory of Hawaii* shows the McIntires living on Alapai Street southwest of Punchbowl Crater, just southwest of where the Lunalilo

Freeway now runs. Lani’s father William managed the laundry department of downtown Honolulu’s then-new Alexander Young luxury hotel.

Lani’s three siblings included an older brother, Dixon (“Dick”) Kaaihue (1902-1951), who likewise attained fame as a Hawaiian bandleader and steel guitarist, backing Bing Crosby, Dorothy Lamour, Sol K. Bright, and Lena Machado, and a younger brother, Alfred (1905-1960), who, in addition to playing upright string bass on many of Lani and Dick’s recordings, backed a young Jerry Byrd.

Lani attended the Kamehameha School for Boys in northwest Honolulu where steel guitar pioneer Joseph Kekuku had taught his steel method to fellow students in the early 1890s.

Sometime in late 1918 or early 1919, Lani’s father William was appointed manager of the post laundry of the newly constructed Schofield Barracks military reservation adjoining Wahiawa, about 22 miles northwest of Honolulu. Unfortunately, William died within a year or so of his appointment. The 1920 census enumeration at Schofield Barracks, which was made five to six days before William’s death, shows Lani, Dick, and Al already living on their own in the barracks’ Oriental Camp working as laborers at the post laundry with Dick listed as head of the household.

According to Lorene Ruymar and British magazine editor and record collector A. P. Sharpe, Lani and Dick joined the U.S. Navy soon after their father’s death. Lani played saxophone in the Navy band. According to Sharpe, Lani developed an interest in Island music after some of his Navy friends encouraged him to investigate the subject. By the time Lani received his Navy discharge circa 1921, he had apparently educated himself about the genre and mastered the acoustic guitar.

Following his discharge, McIntire eventually made his way to Los Angeles, where he soon entered the orbit of

Lani McIntire (center) and orchestra posing at their Lexington Hotel gig in New York.





A vintage photograph of country music pioneer Jimmie Rodgers.

Honolulu-born steel guitar virtuoso Sol Ho‘opi‘i (1902-1953), who had come to California in 1919.

By July 1923, McIntire was playing rhythm guitar with Ho‘opi‘i in Mackie’s Queen’s Hawaiians, led by ‘ukulele player George W. Mackie. The September 12, 1923 *Los Angeles Times*—dubbing the Queen’s Hawaiians “Radioland’s most consistent Hawaiian trio”—noted that the group was furnishing “string music” at central Los Angeles’s Dragon Cafe and appearing once or twice a week on KHJ radio broadcasts.

By February 1924, McIntire and Ho‘opi‘i were performing in a Hawaiian trio sponsored by Hollywood film director Lambert Hillyer with Glenwood Leslie (1905-1952?) on ‘ukulele. The affiliation with Hillyer seems to have been short-lived; by late August 1924, following an apparent split from Hillyer, Ho‘opi‘i had evidently renamed the group the Novelty Trio.

In 1926, an enlarged Novelty Trio appeared in Warner Brothers’ silent comedy-drama *His Jazz Bride*. A lobby card for the film shows Ho‘opi‘i, McIntire, Leslie, Danny Kalauawa Stewart and an unknown ‘ukulele player being given a “come hither” look by co-star Marie Prévost.

Tradition credits McIntire as the rhythm guitarist on 55 sides, which the Novelty Trio recorded for Columbia between October 1926 and April 1928. British Hawaiian music scholar John Marsden has cautioned, however, that Ho‘opi‘i had quite a pool of musicians to draw from, so his trio lineup

could have fluctuated. Marsden also notes that trying to pick out individual voices on the trio’s recordings apart from Ho‘opi‘i’s own lead voice, is next to impossible.

The Novelty Trio’s 55 sides included three Tin Pan Alley tunes later recorded in steel guitar infused renditions by early western swing bands—“I Ain’t Got Nobody,” “St. Louis Blues,” and Gillespie, Sizemore, and Biese’s 1921 foxtrot “Right or Wrong.” The trio’s second “Right or Wrong” take appeared on Yazoo’s 1976 *Hawaiian Guitar Hot Shots* LP (L-1055). On the recording, the quite audible rhythm guitarist (perhaps McIntire?) plays half notes on the lower strings of his instrument behind Ho‘opi‘i’s steel guitar in the introduction, then sings the chorus with Ho‘opi‘i (and perhaps Glenwood Leslie?).

“Right or Wrong” has been kept alive via recent covers by Reba McEntire, Kelli Grant, and most famously George Strait in his 1983 rendition with Nashville steel guitarist Weldon Myrick.

Lani McIntire apparently parted company with Sol Ho‘opi‘i by late June 1928. By 1929, Lani’s brothers Dick and Al had joined him in Los Angeles, and the McIntires, along with Honolulu-born printer-come-ukulele-player Daniel Kuai (Danny) Kuaana (1903-1970), soon formed a quartet called the Harmony Hawaiians.

Perusals of the *Los Angeles Times* archives between August 1929 and early 1931 reveal at least five references to Harmony Hawaiians radio gigs, including a February 25, 1931 KMTR appearance in which McIntire and Sol Ho‘opi‘i joined forces. “Hawaiians are to be wild tonight,” warned the *Times*, adding that “if you like Hawaiian music, you will find it here.”

In early summer 1930, Lani McIntire accompanied Jimmie Rodgers on seven sides at RCA Photophone in Hollywood. By the time Rodgers met McIntire, he had recorded 15 sides with steel guitar including “Everybody Does It In Hawaii,” with Hawai‘i-born Joseph Kaaia Kaipo (c. 1896-1964), and made a ten-minute talking short entitled *The Singing Brakeman*. Rodgers’s biographer Nolan Porterfield has conjectured that Rodgers may have come to Hollywood with the partial intention of pursuing film offers (which unfortunately failed to materialize).

Six of the Rodgers-McIntire sides include three anonymous musicians playing steel guitar, ‘ukulele, and string bass. With the resulting instrumentation matching that of the Harmony Hawaiians, one wonders if Dick and Al McIntire and Danny Kuaana may *perhaps* have been the other musicians backing Rodgers?

Three of the Rodgers-McIntire recordings live on in recent covers. “Moonlight and Skies” was included on a Don Edwards 2006 album of cowboy and western-themed songs. “Why Should I Be Lonely” was given a soulful rendition in

*Continued on Page 14*

1997 by Aaron Neville with Paul Franklin's prominent steel backing for the Bob Dylan assembled *Songs of Jimmie Rodgers: A Tribute CD*. And "The One Rose" was covered in 1996 by Johnny Cash with Tom Petty's Heartbreakers for Cash's *Unchained CD*.

McIntire composed "The One Rose" circa 1929 with Kentucky-born sojourner Del Lyon (1885-1936). Before meeting McIntire, Lyon had lived in Kansas City with his wife Anna and two young sons. Following the breakup of Lyon's marriage, Lyon did insurance company and chiropractic work in Chicago before moving to Los Angeles, where he worked as a real estate company executive, then salesman, then advertising copywriter, which he pursued fulltime in 1930. It seems likely that McIntire met Lyon though some late-1920s radio appearances.

One wonders if Lyon's lyrics, concerning a man still carrying a torch for a woman he's separated from due to unspecified unfortunate circumstances, might perhaps refer to his broken marriage? Sadly, Lyon apparently never reconciled with Anna or his sons, listing himself as single on the 1930 census, while Anna classified herself as widowed.

Rodgers's "One Rose" recording (JSP 7704C, BCD 15540, Proper Box UK 140) includes a 16-bar verse often cut from later covers, with McIntire underlying both the verse and chorus with a triplet-infused guitar accompaniment, while the unidentified steel guitarist plays a four-bar introduction and an eight-bar solo towards the end of the song.

In the mid-1930s, Lani McIntire participated in three more "One Rose" recordings in Los Angeles, singing vocals with his brother Dick's Hawaiian ensemble on Decca in June 1935 and May 1936 with Dick on *electric* steel guitar, and an August 1935 release with his own group, a quartet dubbed the

Hawaiians on the Perfect label, a Pathé subsidiary.

"The One Rose" was one of 22 sides the Hawaiians recorded during the first week of August. Filling out the quartet were Honolulu-born Robert Keolaokalani ("Bob") Nichols (1907-1976?) on electric steel guitar; 'Ola'a, Hawai'i-born George Kainapau (1905-1992) on 'ukulele and occasional falsetto vocals; and either Al McIntire or Waimea, Hawai'i-born Andy Iona (1902-1966) on string bass. In this rendition of "The One Rose," Lani omits the verse and inserts a few wording changes. The track opens with the doleful sound of Nichols's electric steel, and Nichols also plays a 16-bar solo and a four-bar ending. Bob Nichols is chiefly known today for his later work with the Polynesians. [The Hawaiians' "One Rose" is currently available on Cumquat CQCD-2771, one of five CDs devoted to digital restorations of 94 of McIntire's studio and transcription recordings engineered by the late Australian jazz guitarist and music producer Bruce Clarke.]

The other Rodgers-McIntire recordings with steel guitar include "I'm Lonesome, Too," "For the Sake of Days Gone By," and "Take Me Back Again." Covers of the latter song include Cliff Bruner's 1940 recording with Bob Dunn on electric steel.

The year 1937 was McIntire's "breakout" year. By late February he had garnered his own Decca contract and recorded his first four Decca sides. Two days later, McIntire and his Hawaiians backed Bing Crosby on "Sweet Leilani" and "Blue Hawaii" from Paramount's motion picture *Waikiki Wedding* starring Crosby. McIntire appeared in the film as a musician and provided music for the soundtrack. McIntire himself sings the first verse of "Sweet Leilani" in quasi-falsetto. Only after a quick modulation down a fourth, announced by steel guitar slides from Bob Nichols, does



*From member Gracia Mulligan, a signed promo shot Lani personally sent to her.*

Crosby take over on baritone. "Blue Hawaii" features Nichols answering Crosby's vocals in call-and-response fashion and playing an eight-bar solo.

"Sweet Leilani" has been covered by country musicians Tennessee Ernie Ford and Marty Robbins, while "Blue Hawaii" has been recorded by the likes of Gene Autry, Patti Page, Speedy West, Herb Remington, and, of course, Elvis Presley. Presley's marimba and steel guitar permeated remake of "Blue Hawaii" for Paramount's 1961 film of the same name, was recorded, coincidentally, at Hollywood's Radio Recorders studio housed in the old RCA Photophone building where McIntire and Jimmie Rodgers had recorded "The One Rose" over thirty years earlier!

McIntire backed Crosby on four additional songs in 1937, including "Sail Along Silv'ry Moon," which was covered by Gene Autry a little over two months later with either Frank Marvin or future McIntire band member Sam Koki on steel. Crosby returned the favor, so to speak, by recording McIntire's "The One Rose" with the Victor Young Orchestra in a rather lugubrious arrangement in March.

*Continued on Page 20*

## CLOSING NOTES

### Al Stotler

Sad news from Wally Pfeifer: “Frank Miller just informed me that Al Stotler passed away on June 11 at the age of eighty after a fall in which he broke an arm and suffered other complications. Al was Jerry Byrd’s lifelong and best friend.” Al was a longtime HSGA member up to a couple of years ago and was living in Cincinnati, Ohio when we last heard from him.

### Victor Rittenband

We are sorry to report the passing of early HSGA core member, Victor Rittenband, on Thursday, July 29. We got the news from Vic’s hanai son Thomas Malm. Says Thomas, “He loved Hawaiian music and the way it become known and loved around the world.” Vic had been recently hospitalized at Kaiser Permanente on Moanalua Road and had extensive problems with his heart, circulation, lungs, and not eating. Thomas, all the way from Sweden, and hanai sister Julie were on hand to try and help feed and jump start Victor, but to no avail.

Said Lorene Ruymar just prior to Vic’s passing, “I figured something was wrong when he stopped sending email replies to me, and now I have found out. He and his wife Nancy were very generous in their support of HSGA. Just think of the big stage banner we’ve been using since our first convention in Hawai‘i. It was their work, their design, their gift to us. They attended all our Hawaiian conventions and a surprising number of mainland conventions as well. They both composed songs, which Vic would sing while he strummed his ‘ukulele, and Nancy danced. When I was writing the HSGA newsletter, I used many of their songs in the music notation section because they were given to us, no charge for copyrights. Vic never stopped grieving the loss of Nancy, so I imagine he now goes willingly to be with her again.”

*At Kawaiahao Church in Hawai‘i, Elmer Ridenhour (left), Nancy and Vic Rittenband, and Art and Lorene Ruymar (1987).*



*Letritia Kandle posing with the Small Letar in the late 1930s.*

### Letritia Kandle-Lay

From member Paul Warnik: “It is with great sadness that I inform club members that legendary teacher, arranger, conductor, and performing artist, Mrs. Letritia Kandle-Lay, passed away on June 9 while hospitalized for respiratory disease. She was 94 years old. Among her contributions to the historical evolution of the Hawaiian steel guitar were the earliest development of a “console” model steel guitar, notably the National Grand Letar, and the use of more than two necks for expanded versatility of additional tunings.

Her downtown Chicago Modern Guitar Studio was where club members Kay Koster, Evelyn Brue-Roeder, and Harold Sampson learned steel guitar and music theory.

Thankfully, she lived to see the article about her published in *Vintage Guitar Magazine* just before she gave up her struggle. My friend T.C. Furlong got the magazine in the mail on Saturday, June 5 and scrambled to get it to her in the hospital as he was leaving for New York the next day. He said her eyes got really big, and she smiled from ear to ear when she read it. She was mentally aware of her condition and surroundings pretty much to the end. She passed away the following Wednesday night, just about 72 hours later. Clearly, she was waiting to see her last hurrah in print before she let herself slip behind the curtain.

Something else I want to tell you about. While clearing out Letritia’s house after her death her son found a couple of old 78s with her playing on them. He took the records to a pro sound engineer to have them cleaned up and duplicated and he sent me a CD copy. So I finally got to hear her playing from back in the day.

The first few tunes feature her with the Navy Pier Dance Band circa 1942-43 for a war bond fund raising radio broad-

*Continued on Page 20*

---

# The Billy Hew Len Story

*The following story about the legendary Billy Hew Len was written by Jerry Byrd in 1975 and has appeared in various publications since, including Lorene Ruymar's book "The Hawaiian Steel Guitar and Its Great Hawaiian Musicians." It's a different kind of story and glows with the radiance of true courage. Billy Hew Len, a national hero on the steel guitar, left us on November 23, 1987. But, for now, put yourself back in the mid-1970s when many of Hawai'i's greatest steel guitarists, Billy included, were still among us. Here's Jerry's story.*

I'd heard about this guy long before I met him. His story is inspiring—more so than any other I know of—because he plays steel guitar with only one hand! No—it's no trick or an act; he only has one hand.

Like many of you, I had heard about other such great musicians as Django Reinhardt, who played plectrum guitar with two or three fingers on his left hand; Andy Iona, the great Hawaiian steel guitarist, who had no thumb on his right hand; and others of similar circumstance, but not one without a hand! I can hear all of you saying to yourselves the same thing I said when I heard of this: "How can anyone play any instrument with only one hand—especially steel guitar?"

So let me relate to you an amazing story about one Mr. Billy Hew Len. It should be a complete book, not just one short article such as this must be. Unlike most stories, this is a true story that will sound like fiction.

Let me begin by saying that Billy is a master steel guitarist. Brother, he plays! And I listen whenever I get the opportunity. He never ceases to amaze me, this real son of Hawai'i. Billy Hew Len is of Hawaiian, Chinese, and Spanish descent—a rather odd mixture, but not uncommon in Hawai'i where many are of six to eight nationalities. There were twelve children in the Hew Len family: nine boys and three girls, and they are all musicians or dancers or both! Also not uncommon in Hawai'i.

When he was about ten years old he used to "swipe" his cousin's guitar while he was at work, keep it all day, and when the owner finished work he'd return home only to find his guitar missing. He knew who had it so he'd head for Billy's house in a huff and get his guitar. Same thing the next day. Billy would put a metal nut under the strings, like we used to have to do, to elevate the strings and he would practice playing steel guitar. This kind of routine continued until he was 15 when he quit school and went to work in a garage. Then one shattering day something happened that would change Billy's whole life. In one terrible moment, a planing machine took all of his left hand, cutting it off at the wrist. He was only 17 years old!



*At our first convention in Hawai'i, Billy Hew Len playing at the Kapi'olani Park bandstand with "Keoki" Lake on bass (1987).*

This could justifiably be termed a tragedy in anyone's life, especially one so young. But I sometimes think that these things happen for a purpose. In Billy's case I'm even more convinced of it.

So now, he told himself, he was done. What could a guy do with only one hand? One thing was for sure—he could never play steel guitar again. And he did what anyone would do after the shock and the healing process had passed and the dark depths of discouragement took over—he lay around the house or spent the empty hours loafing with the gang down the corner. What else?

One day his mother suggested that they should talk to a man she knew who might be able to help. Billy told me in our long conversation over cups of coffee that he would not consider it. He just "flat didn't care about doing anything." But he later relented and agreed to go even though "it was a waste of time." And so he met the one person who would change his life. His name was Edwin P. Morrell.

Mr. Morrell was an elder in the Mormon Church and he worked with handicapped people of all sorts and ages. After asking Billy a few questions as to what he wanted to do and what he liked to do—"nothing" were his replies—they stumbled onto the fact that Billy liked to play steel guitar. But when it was explained how a steel guitar had to be played and Morell suggested they figure out a way to do it, Billy said, "No way! Not steel guitar." But he underestimated this man's resourcefulness.

Later on, after some thought by Mr. Morrell as to how to proceed with the problem, they went to a leather shop—a harness maker in those days. Morrell explained to him what was involved and gave him a drawing of what he wished him to make, a sort of glove that would fit over the wrist. Then they went to a machine shop, and again Morrell had



drawings to illustrate what he wanted—this time, a steel bar. It was to be about three inches long, round on both ends, and was to have a flange inserted into a slot into which several small holes were drilled. Those were used to attach the bar to the glove with leather laces, and the whole would fit over Billy's wrist.

When he tried it out later, he was more positive than ever that it “just wouldn't work!” “How could I play and use any vibrato? I'd have to move my whole arm, not only difficult but tiring as well. And the slants. How can I make the necessary forward and reverse slants? Impossible!” But here is where his strong personality and ingrown desire finally won out. He'd do it. Somehow, some way, he would do it!

He joined a band of handicapped musicians and he began the long battle. But at least he was playing music once again. It was decided by Mr. Morrell that Billy needed a new instrument—an electric steel guitar. This was in the late 1930s. They headed for downtown Honolulu at the old Metronome Music Store (still in business). They looked at a relatively inexpensive model—a brand new Rickenbacher “fry pan,” later identified as such due to its shape. While they were talking to the salesman they could hear someone upstairs playing a steel guitar. He, too, was trying one of these fry pan looking things, so the salesman called up to him and asked if this lad could come up and listen to him play. This was Bill's first meeting with the great David Keli'i, who later became famous via the *Hawaii Calls* radio show and on recordings, and who inspired many others to play steel guitar, myself included. But his is another story.

So Billy was hearing sounds he'd never heard before! They bought the guitar on the spot! “But,” Billy told me, “it sure didn't sound that good when I tried to play the darned thing!” He still has and uses this instrument on casual gigs (see the photo opposite).

When pedal steel guitars came into their own in the '60s Billy started using a Fender 4-pedal, 8-string neck to which he added two additional pedals himself. He used A6th as his basic tuning. Like most of us, he spent hours experimenting with tunings, string gauges, and all the rest. Anyhow, he was soon playing at the hotels in Waikiki with his own band, followed by many recording sessions with top Hawaiian groups. He is on more Hawaiian records than any other steel guitarist. He has just finished a new album with our brother steelman, Barney Isaacs, entitled *Steel Guitar Magic Hawaiian Style* [ED: Remember, folks, this article was written in the mid-'70s when Barney and so many others were in top form].

I asked Billy if he had any regrets over not being able to play with two hands and his quick reply was an emphatic “No!” I personally feel that as a result of his handicap—or is it?—he evolved, out of necessity, a uniquely original style and sound that he may not have had otherwise. In fact, he



*Billy Hew Len playing a Fender 400 pedal steel guitar with Myra English on 'ukulele at an unidentified performance.*

may not even have continued in music—as a steelman, especially. He would probably still be in that machine shop!

Billy enjoys playing more than anyone I know. He really has fun when he plays, always flashing that big smile and giving out an infectious laugh occasionally. He appears regularly in the same room as I, the Blue Dolphin Room in the Outrigger Hotel. He plays there with Myra English and Sonny Chillingworth on Friday to Monday, and my trio plays the other three nights. He has been there for about five years now. But he also does lū'au shows (five or six a week), breakfast musicales, luncheon musicales, cocktail hour gigs, and everything else. Well, like I said, that cat stays busy.

And this story has a happy ending because Billy Hew Len did learn to play after what must have been many hundreds of hours of work and mental anguish, despair, impatience, and discouragement. I had these myself and I can imagine how it was with Billy. He became the most sought after, most in demand steel guitarist in Hawai'i.

Hawai'i has produced so many great steel guitarists that by sheer numbers their names have become lost in the cruelty of forgetfulness. But Billy Hew Len's name will not be among those lost because he has too much to say musically to ever merit such a fate. It just goes to show how much we mortals can accomplish with a little love and encouragement from somebody who cares. In Bill's case it was his understanding mother and one Mr. E.P. Morrell. But most of all, it was Billy Hew Len who did it. — Jerry Byrd

*Billy Hew Len left behind his wife Trinity K., four daughters, four brothers and three sisters. Son-in-law Hiram Olsen is the great rhythm, lead, and slack-key guitarist who played in the Jerry Byrd Trio at the Halekulani Hotel in the days before Jerry retired. The group's name now is the Hiram Olsen Trio and the steel guitarist is Hiram's son and Billy's grandson, Casey Olsen, bright star of the future.* ■

## DISC 'N' DATA



### *Hula Island Style, Vol. 2* – Hiram Olsen Trio (Sma-Kine, SKCD-1224)

Review by John Ely

Did you ever see the Hiram Olsen Trio at the Halekulani Hotel and wish your cheesy tape machine hadn't botched the recording? Well, never fear, the group's latest release, *Hula Island Style, Vol. 2*, captures the live sound of the band unlike what you hear on many studio recordings. True, 'ukulele rhythm is added to Hiram Olsen's guitar, Casey Olsen's steel, and Dennis "Bla" Keohokalole's bass—but it doesn't appreciably change the sound of the band live. And some of the tracks feature multiple steel solos between verses as the live shows do.

Throughout the CD, Hiram Olsen gives a clinic on how to play Hawaiian songs with smooth and richly colored rhythm guitar, and Hiram and Bla are smooth on lead vocals.

Casey Olsen's playing is superb as you would expect with that dripping rubato feel of playing slightly behind the beat—milking the phrase, as they say. What I found interesting—perhaps I never noticed it before—Casey doesn't always supply vibrato where you expect it or where you normally hear it. It makes for a "cool" sound and adds another dimension to his playing. It reminds me of how West Coast cool

jazz was such a welcome break from the always edgy sound of hard swinging bebop.

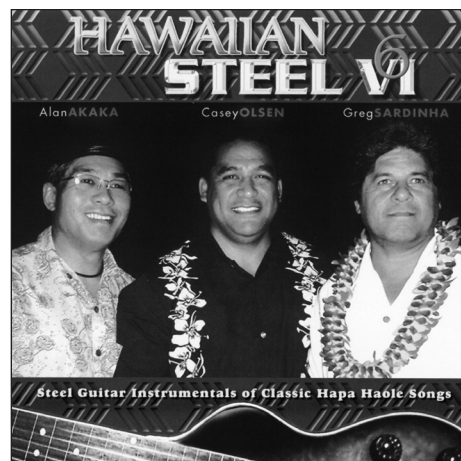
I've always thought that swing musicians tend to play too fast. When "Sophisticated Hula" morphs into a cool swing in the middle of the tune, it's a perfect cool relaxing tempo for both player and listener.

Casey and band hit their stride with "Beyond the Reef," and "Pretty Red Hibiscus." Not a note wasted.

Other tracks featured on "Hula Island Style" include "The Cockeyed Mayor of Kaunakakai," "Hula Oni Oni E," "I'll Weave a Lei of Stars," "Hawaii Calls," "Little Brown Gal," "Golden Sands of Waikiki," "A Church in an Old Hawaiian Town," "Waikiki," and "Leimomi."

The recording—done at Greg Sardinha's Sma-Kine studio—is clear and cleanly arranged, and everything comes through. There's very little on the CD that the band couldn't convey on the bandstand and I appreciate that. Jolieters, this is undoubtedly what you'll be treated to this coming October at our convention, so buy a copy now or in Joliet, and most of all, enjoy!

The price of both Sma-Kine CDs reviewed on this page is \$15, a courtesy price to HSGAers, which includes shipping and handling worldwide. Send a check to Keala Records, 1605 Ulupii Place, Kailua, HI 96734. The CD can also be purchased online at mele.com but the cost will be a little more.



### *Hawaiian Steel, Vol. 6* – Alan Akaka, Greg Sardinha, Casey Olsen (Sma-Kine, SKCD-1225)

Review by John Ely

*Hawaiian Steel, Vol. 6*, also recorded at Greg Sardinha's Sma-Kine recording studio, has a real *Hawaii Calls* type delivery with that "big" studio sound and steel guitar multi-tracking. The release features Alan Akaka, Greg Sardinha, and Casey Olsen both separately and together in this all-instrumental recording.

When you have two or three steel guitars going at the same time you can get seasick pretty fast if the playing is not well thought out. Alan, Greg, and Casey do a great job of blending without confusing.

Alan is featured on "Beyond the Reef" and does some nice violin effects using his volume control. It's an interesting arrangement with nice intro and outro sections.

"I'll Remember You" has an unusual modulation, a typical Greg Sardinha arrangement twist with a very nice interlaced second steel track.

Check out "Pearly Shells" with three steels going at once. Unusual and it works! "Maui Chimes" is gorgeous with all three players lending different treatments and styles that range from Dick McIntire to the Sons of Hawai'i. "Hilo March" likewise covers a lot of ground—check the twin harmonics near the end. "Sophisticated Hula" is another example of a well-mapped trio steel guitar approach.

Alan's version of "Hawaiian Wedding Song" has beautiful harmonic work and his "Blue Hawaii" is reminiscent of a classic Webley Edwards production with key changes and classic Jules Ah See style chording. Ditto for "Million Moons" with Alan playing unusual effects at the 12th fret and in "marimba" style. A beautiful track.

Casey shines on "Waikiki," playing as relaxed and confidently as anything

I've heard from him on "wax." Greg is the featured steel guitarist on "I'll Remember You" and "Lovely Hula Hands," and he closes out the CD with a fine version of "Aloha 'Oe."

There's something for everyone on *Hawaiian Steel, Vol. 6* with fine solo playing and well crafted trio arrangements, the steel guitar equivalent of a high-wire act. Recommended!



***Simply Steel, Songs of Old Hawaii,*  
Alan Akaka (Ke Kula Mele Hawaii)**

*Review by John Ely*

I was a little surprised when I looked at Alan Akaka's beautifully designed CD cover. I couldn't see any musician credits. That's because Alan plays *all* the instruments on *Simply Steel*. When you do all the tracking yourself, you have to have the head for it arrangement-wise and Alan clearly does. And it's a major feat to get the "band" to sound in the groove. Again, Alan does a nice job "sewing" the instruments together.

The steel guitar tone is much brighter than I'm used to hearing from Alan. He told me he used a Rickenbacker bakelite model through a Fender amp for this recording. I'm a great believer in miking amps on steel guitar recordings for overall fatness of tone.

*Simply Steel* is a fine addition to the body of currently made steel guitar CDs, an arena that hasn't produced many all-instrumental steel guitar albums from a single artist of late.

A few notes on the tracks: "Nani Waimea" has some interesting counter-melody backup and marimba-like textures. "E Maliu Mai" has nice harmonics and a well-conceived twin steel guitar treatment.

"Hawai'i Calls" is one of my favorite tunes and Alan does a great job. And those years playing with Genoa Keawe have rubbed off in a very smartly delivered "Ke Aloha" with some of that classic "backyard" steel sound.

Alan's playing on "Mapuana" and his jazzy grips on "Puamana" prove that he has a special feel for the B11th tuning, also apparent on *Hawaiian Steel, Vol. 6* just reviewed.

Check out the unusual single-string solo on the lower strings on "How D'ya Do." It almost has a sax-like sound. Very interesting. Other tracks on the CD include "Makalapua," "Hula Blues," "Haole Hula," and "Sand."

The final track, "Beautiful Kahana," is just about perfect and has Alan's sound and arrangement stamp on it. It's hard to breathe new life into the same set of classic Hawaiian standards and Alan has done it.

The CD is available at [www.mele.com](http://www.mele.com) or [www.HawaiianMusicStore.com](http://www.HawaiianMusicStore.com). You can also order directly from Alan. The price is \$20 including shipping and handling. For orders of two or more CDs to the same shipping address the price is \$18 per CD including shipping. Make checks payable to 'Ke Kula Mele Hawaii' and please indicate the number of CDs you are ordering. Send snail mail orders to: Ke Kula Mele Hawaii, 1296 Auwauku St., Kailua, HI 96734. ■

## Treasurer's Report

(Current as of June 30, 2010)

General Fund	\$24,443.22
Scholarship Fund	\$16,059.77
Joliet Checking	\$2,963.11
Japan Account	\$2,844.43
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$46,310.53</b>

## 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.

*Note: Buy & Sell ads are offered free to paid up HSGA members.*

## HSGA Donations

Thanks to the many HSGAers who made donations this past quarter despite tough economic times!°

Perennial donors came through once again in a big way. **Bill Rhyne** gave to both our General and Scholarship Funds for a total of \$170. **Margo L. Klundt** donated a total of \$100. And **Bernie Endaya** gave \$100 to our Scholarship Fund. Mahalo for these generous donations!

Big mahalos to everyone who contributed. The following members donated at least \$10:

- Clifford & Barbara Adams, Huntington Station, NY
- Frank D. Brandenburg, Largo, FL
- Pete Burke, Shell Beach, CA
- Roger Fletcher, Sandy, Beds., U.K.
- Jim & Mary Hamblton, Coarsegold, CA
- Beat Iseli, Winterthur, Switzerland
- Solomon M. L. Kam, Honolulu, HI
- Dick & Donna Lloyd, Glendora, CA
- Edwin K. Maunakea, Jr., Killeen, TX
- Gene McGowan, Wilsonville, OR
- Serials Dept., UH Library, Honolulu, HI
- Stanley Polanski, Lowell, IN
- Greg & Sandra Sardinha, Kailua, HI
- Dennis Scott, Greenfield, IN
- Doug Smith & Barbara Kuhns, Medway, OH
- Donald & Donna Weber, New Lenox, IL

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

Is your address correct? Please notify us!

### UNITED STATES

JANE B. CLYDE, 3112 St. Albans Dr., Los Alamitos, CA 90720-4505  
EDWARD COTHAM, JR., 3416 Tangley Rd., Houston, TX 77005-2248  
NANCY AND PAUL HINDEL, 4606 W. 97th Place, Oak Lawn, IL 60453  
LARRY G. JEFFERSON, 9 N. Clay St., Apt. A, Coldwater, MI 49036  
JANET KING, P.O. Box 2628, Watsonville, CA 95077  
ANTHONY S. LIS, 1010 Forest St., Apt. 9, Brookings, SD 57006-3263  
KEN LISZEWSKI, 1289 S. Lawler, Lombard, IL 60148  
LARRY & CAPTOLA MCFALL, 332 Inverness Dr., Huntsville, AL 35802-4570  
BRENDAN MONROE, 20 Humphrey St., Wakefield, MA 01880  
MATT NUA, 435 Seaside Ave. #205, Honolulu, HI 96815  
TED ROWDEN, 764 Peaks St., Bedford, VA 24523  
ALEXIS TOLENTINO, 3323 Esther Street, Honolulu, HI 96815

### CANADA

VAUGHN PASSMORE, 19 Drayton Ave., Toronto, ON M4C 3L7 Canada

*LANI MCINTIRE Cont. from Page 14*

Crosby's recording reached #8 on the pop charts in October.

Country musicians covering "The One Rose" in 1937 included Leon Chappelle and Derwood Brown, brother of then recently deceased western swing pioneer Milton Brown. The recording features Wilson "Lefty" Perkins playing striking arpeggiated steel guitar harmonics.

Gene Autry waxed "The One Rose" four times between May and November with Marvin on steel. He also sang the tune to Judith Allen in Republic Pictures' *Boots and Saddles*, released in early October. In an October 13, 1937 review, *Variety* opined that "Autry is given the ... advantage of good pop tunes [to sing]," offering "The One Rose" as an example of a song that was "cleverly handled." In the film, Autry serenades Allen with an abbreviated version of the tune in a Mexican cantina setting, finding himself accompanied in the ninth bar by the cantina's *orquesta!*

*Stay tuned for Part II in the next issue. Discographical information was taken in part from Tony Russell's Country*

*Music Records: A Discography, 1921-1942 and T. Malcom Rockwell's Hawaiian & Hawaiian Guitar Records: 1891-1960.* ■

*CLOSING NOTES Cont. from Page 14*

cast on WCFL. What is amazing is that she is did talking steel guitar à la Pete Drake and "skip bar" volume gutting à la Speedy West years before it was commonly heard being done by these steel players. Again, she was the innovator. Then there are two acoustic tunes of the Kohala Girls recorded circa 1934. The first one features a female falsetto singer, and the second is an instrumental rag-type tune with Lettie on lead Tricone National. Then there are two untitled tunes of her with an unknown orchestra that largely features her with an accordionist. Lastly, there is some stuff with Paul Whiteman circa 1937 right after the Grand Letar was built, but it is something of a disappointment. Apparently, during his stint at the famous Drake Hotel downtown, Lettie's role was largely relegated to playing little twinkle and sparkle sounding riffs behind the radio announcer while he was introducing the Whiteman orchestra tune selec-

tions. So she was not actually playing with Whiteman. To boot, the tunes start for a few bars and then stop before the rest of the song is heard.

I had John Norris burn a copy of these selections and he is going to deliver them via the Peterson Tuners website in streaming audio format. As soon as that is completed we will link to the steel guitar forum so that everyone will know about it and be able to hear it. More on this in the next issue.

### **Marjorie J. Scott**

We were sorry to hear about the passing of longtime HSGA staffer and HSGA Quarterly editor, Marjorie Scott. Here is an excerpt from the obituary we received: "Marjorie J. Scott, 81, passed away on Sunday, July 11 in Phoenix, Arizona from complications of colon cancer.

"She was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota on April 12, 1929 to Helen and Arnold Schwarz. She left college in her junior year and did creative work in advertising and public relations for most of the rest of her life.

"In the early 1950s she traveled the larger cities of the U. S. with a reel-to-reel recorder taping radio advertising for the Gillette Safety Razor Company to verify their commercials' content.

"She was married to Robert M. Beal and lived in Frankfurt, Germany and San Mateo County, California until they divorced in 1974. She relocated to Phoenix and worked for a company conducting real estate investment seminars and traveled extensively throughout the country for several years.

"She moved to Honolulu, Hawai'i in the mid-1980s and was employed in advertising and later by HSGA. She was fascinated with everything Hawaiian and was instrumental in founding the Hawaiian Music Hall of Fame where she was a past president and enthusiastic supporter until 2004. She then returned to the Phoenix area, working as an administrator for trade associations until March of 2009." ■