

LINER NOTES

Keola Beamer

KOLONAHE FROM THE GENTLE WIND

One of the most innovative and influential slack key guitarists of the modern era, Keolamaikalani Breckenridge Desha Beamer was born February 18, 1951 in Honolulu. He grew up in Kamuela on the Big Island of Hawai'i, an experience he lovingly recounted in the language of slack key on his 1997 album [MAUNA KEA – WHITE MOUNTAIN JOURNAL](#) (Dancing Cat 38011). Keola recognized early in life that words have limitations. "That's why I turned to music," he says. "I longed for a better way to convey what was in my heart."

Keola's *'ohana* (family) was well equipped to nurture his musical interests. One of Hawai'i's best known musical clans, the Beamers trace their roots back to the 15th century. Ancient ancestors include Big Island Queen Ahiakumai Ki'eki'e and Ho'olulu, one of the *kapu* (sacred) twins born of Kame'eiamoku, favored wife of Kamehameha Nui. More recent family members include composer and hula exponent Helen Desha Beamer (Keola's great-grandmother), composer Pono Beamer (his grandfather), master teacher Louise Leiomälama Beamer (his grandmother), falsetto singer and pianist Mahi Beamer (his cousin), and chanter and teacher Winona Beamer (his mother). Keola cites his family as his primary musical influence and consciously seeks to maintain its legacy.

Hawaiian society has always placed a high value on sound, which has led to a strong commitment to preserving traditional musical forms and an equally powerful interest in the music of other cultures. Reflecting this duality, Keola has crafted his style with elements of the ancient and the modern, the indigenous and the introduced. On the one hand, he actively champions Hawaiian forms that predate contact with Europeans. As illustrated by the pieces **The Beauty of Mauna Kea** and **Pele Trilogy**, he loves the chant form and plays traditional instruments such as *'ohe hano ihu* (bamboo nose flute) and *'ili'ili* (lava stone castanets). Says Keola, "For me, as for most Hawaiians, hula and chant connect the generations."

On the other hand, Keola was one of the first slack key masters to experiment with electronic effects, multi-track recording, complex chord progressions, even innovative guitar construction. Keola attributes the controversy this sometimes causes to healthy aesthetic and generational differences. "I remember at fifteen sitting at the feet of Auntie Alice Nämakelua and hearing her call Gabby Pahinui a radical," relates Keola. "Now he's considered traditional. For me, that's the beauty of slack key. Who wants to be in an art form with no room for expression left in it?"

In the 1960s, Keola studied at the Kamehameha Schools in Honolulu, a hotbed of the emerging "Hawaiian Renaissance." He also gained valuable experience performing with his mother, who remains his favorite collaborator. Their most recent project, a CD of stories and slack key entitled **THE GOLDEN LEHUA TREE** (Starscape Music 96112), brings Hawaiian folklore to children and adults around the world.

In 1973, Keola released his groundbreaking solo album, **HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY GUITAR IN THE REAL OLD STYLE** (Music of Polynesia 22000), and published the first slack key instruction book. In the 1970s, Keola and his brother, Kapono, also formed The Beamer

Brothers, bringing slack key to the rock generation. Their mix of Hawaiiana and pop produced many Island standards, including Keola's best known original, Honolulu City Lights. Through the 1980s, Keola continued his solo exploration of new musical territory while gaining inspiration from traditional music.

Keola's first album on Dancing Cat, WOODEN BOAT (Dancing Cat 38024), was released in 1994. Each of his Dancing Cat albums (KOLONAHE is his fourth) focuses on a different aspect of his art and is characterized by keen intelligence, instrumental virtuosity and deep sensitivity to nature. "I'm pretty much a nature person," Keola says. "Wherever we go, my wife and I always pause and listen to the environment; the wind blowing through the hala leaves, the water, the birds. I get a lot of inspiration from those moments." One such moment inspired KOLONAHE - FROM THE GENTLE WIND, which centers on images of *ka makani* (the wind). Several songs in this recording make direct references to wind, an important image in Hawaiian music, while others incorporate subtle musical allusions to it.

In Hawai'i, the creative impulse usually stems from a pleasurable experience. The concept for KOLONAHE came to Keola one afternoon on Maui. "I was out in a distant valley sitting under some hau trees enjoying the space, the quiet, when all of a sudden, the most beautiful, refreshing breeze came through. It caressed everything in its path: the trees, the grass, the stones. It changed the whole complexion of that day. At a time like that, how can you feel anything other than peace in your heart? Music is like that too. You can't see the *kolonahe*, but you can feel its presence. It brings something beautiful into our lives."

THE SONGS:

1. *Ku'u Lei Awapuhi* (vocal)

Keola: vocals & 2 steel string guitars in F Wahine Tuning (C-F-C-G-C-E, from the lowest pitched string to the highest), played in the key of Bb

John Imholz: mandocello

Paul Binkley: mandola

Dana Rath: mandolin

John Imholz, Paul Binkley and Dana Rath appear courtesy of d'Note Records.

Back in the Territorial Era, chanter and composer Emily Taylor put words to this traditional melody, which Keola performed as an instrumental on [MOE'UHANE KIKA - "TALES FROM THE DREAM GUITAR"](#) (Dancing Cat 38006). The lyrics compare a lover to a ginger lei, moist with *ua noe* (misty rain). In the *hui* (chorus), the singer asks, "Where are you?" In most performances a second voice answers "I am here." In this lovely and delicate arrangement, a shimmering trio of mandolins (played by three members of the Modern Mandolin Quartet) respond with a beautiful sound evoking *kolonahe* (the gentle wind).

Keola plays in an F Wahine tuning, often called "Leonard's F" because it was recorded first by the great and very influential slack key guitarist Leonard Kwan in the early 1960s (see his recording [KE'ALA'S MELE](#) - Dancing Cat 38004). The name "Wahine" refers to

a tuning containing a major 7th note. This is the first time anyone has played a song in the key of Bb in this F tuning.

2. *Shaka Slack Key* (instrumental)

Keola: Hawaiian bass & steel string guitar in G Major "Taro Patch" Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D), played in the keys of G and C

George "Keoki" Winston: 7 string steel string guitar in G Major "Taro Patch" Tuning with a C bass (C-D-G-D-G-B-D), played in the keys of G and C

This original composition first appeared, with bass and drums, on Keola's 1986 album, SWEET MAUI MOON (Paradise Productions 980). Here he adds a new bridge in C and invites longtime friend George "Keoki" Winston to join him on guitar. They play the first chorus in unison, then alternate between unison and harmony with Keola adding bass runs.

3. *Maika'i Ka Makani O Kohala (How Fine the Wind of Kohala)* (vocal)

Keola: vocals & steel string guitar in F Wahine Tuning

This haunting melody, evocative of the famous Inuwai wind of the remote and windy Kohala District of Hawai'i, is attributed to William Sheldon and David Nape. Members of the prestigious Royal Hawaiian Band, they composed this song during the late 19th Century, an era when marches were popular. Like most older Hawaiian songs, **Maika'i Ka Makani O Kohala** has many verses. Keola sings the first and last.

Keola's own soulful arrangement reminds him of his grandfather. "I remember many years ago, sitting on the porch with my grandfather. In the growing afternoon shadows, we'd listen to the sound of the wind and watch as it moved upon the open fields....My grandfather is gone now, but I still remember those days. Sitting by his side and listening to the beautiful, soft sound of the wind."

4. *The Beauty of Mauna Kea* (vocal)

Keola: 'ohe hano ihu (bamboo nose flute), vocals & 2 nylon string guitars in C Wahine "Keola's C" Tuning (C-G-D-C-B-E)

George Winston: piano

Dating back to Keola's first album in the early 1970s, this song eloquently expresses love for the Big Island's famous white capped peak. The *mele* (chanted poetry) that opens the performance was written by Nona Beamer, and can be translated as: "The soft white lei encircles the crest of the mountain, the mountain high above, standing in great majesty, majestic on high, veiled in the clouds."

"I've wanted to do a fresh take on **The Beauty of Mauna Kea** for a long time," Keola says. "It's always been one of my favorites." It's also one of his most requested songs. The C Wahine Tuning is often called "Keola's C" since he has recorded most prominently

in it.

In both arrangements, Keola plays *'ohe hano ihu* (bamboo nose flute). "That beautiful, ethereal sound is like wind off in the distance," he says. Because it's played with breath from the nostrils, the *'ohe hano ihu* forms a very close communion with the few who play it.

5. ***Pele Trilogy*** (vocal)

Keola: 'ili'ili (lava stone castanets), vocals & nylon string guitar in C Wahine Tuning

A medley of three songs about the Big Island, **Pele Trilogy** begins with **Aia LA 'O Pele I Hawai'i**, a traditional *mele inoa* (name chant) for *Hi'iaka*, sister of the volcano goddess, *Pele*. In the segment Keola performs, Pele chews away at Puna, making Paliuli beautiful, and tongues of fire leap at the cliffs ("*uhi'uha mai ana 'ea / ke nome a'ela ia Puna 'ea / ka mea nani ka i Paliuli 'ea / ke pulelo a'ela i na pali 'ea*"). The second piece, *Mahukona*, is a traditional *mele pana* (place song) celebrating its namesake area where Kamehameha the Great grew up. Keola dedicates the song to his uncle, Kihei Brown, whose beautiful *leo ki'eki'e* (falsetto) version inspired him to learn it. Queen Lili'uokalani is credited with the melody of the final piece, **Waipi'o Paka'alana**, based on an ancient chant which describes the temple of Liloa, a legendary 15th Century *ali'i* (member of the ruling class).

"Hawai'i is a very mystical place," says Keola. "As you sit among the 'ohi'a trees and dense fog rolls in, you begin to feel an ancient rhythm in the wind."

At the opening of **Pele Trilogy**, Keola displays his unique method of playing *'ili'ili* and guitar simultaneously. Says Keola, "I hold them in the first three fingers of my right hand and pluck the guitar with my fourth finger." Playing *'ili'ili* is as much an act of reverence as an artistic expression. "Time is the essence of *na pohaku* (stones or rocks)," Keola continues. "They have more history than we can imagine. One hundred years to a human is everything. To the *pohaku*, it is insignificant."

6. ***Maui Waltz*** (instrumental)

Keola: 1 guitar in C Wahine Tuning played in the key of G
San Francisco Nahenahe Strings conducted by Frank Martin. Strings arranged by Keola Beamer with additional arranging by Frank Martin.

With aloha for the place and composer, Keola gives this waltz for the Valley Isle, by the great O'ahu pianist Bob Nelson, a new arrangement for *ki ho'alu*. "I've been a great admirer of Bob's work for a lot of years," Keola says. "It's really well crafted."

7. ***Kauhale O Kamapua'a*** (instrumental)

Keola: 2 electric guitars in C Wahine Tuning, both sounding in the key of A. One guitar is capoed to the ninth fret and plays the melody with key of C fingerings. The other guitar is capoed to the second fret and plays background chords in G fingerings.

George Winston: muted piano

San Francisco Nahenahe Strings conducted by Frank Martin. Strings arranged by George Winston with additional arranging by Frank Martin.

The subject of this traditional Big Island song is Kamapua'a, the mythical pig god and lover of Pele. Says Keola, "I've always loved the way my uncle, Cleighton Keola Beamer, sings it with his 'ukulele. He is a wonderful man. As this is his favorite song, I wanted to do something special for him."

8. *He Wahine Hololio* (vocal)

Keola: 'ohe hano ihu, vocals & 2 nylon string guitars in Open G Minor Tuning (D-G-D-G-Bb-D)

Adapted from two chants honoring Queen Emma, this song describes her love of horseback riding. Keola performs a unique version passed down by his great-grandmother, Helen Desha Beamer. "She did a lot of her writing from an old desk with a little lamp and a drawer," recalls Keola. "After she passed away, the family found in the drawer a folder marked 'For Nona'." These lyrics were then given to Keola's mother. "There were no historical notes about where they came from, but Sweetheart Gramma was the keeper of the culture in the family, so this is the version we do. In this portrayal, I picture Emma on horseback, high on a windy bluff overlooking the sea."

Minor tunings are rarely played in slack key, but here Keola slacks the second string of the often-used G Major Tuning from the B note to a Bb to create a G minor.

9. *Blue Water Dolphin* (instrumental)

Keola: 2 steel string guitars in D7 Tuning (C-A-D-F#-A-D)

This impressionistic portrait evokes images of the sea. The tuning was created to put forth a mood by having certain notes available as open (unfretted) strings with their strong, sustaining tones.

Keola composed **Blue Water Dolphin** when the beauty of the water in West Maui inspired him to buy a boat. "I'd work my gig at night, then go fishing in the day. The coasts of Maui, Lana'i, Kaho'olawe and Moloka'i are very close to each other. In these blue waters, dolphins are abundant. Dolphins like to play. After many delightful encounters, it's as if they become friends."

10. *He Aloha Mele* (vocal)

Keola: vocals & 2 steel string guitars in F Wahine Tuning

Iva Kinimaka's song to a hula dancer celebrates sunsets, gentle breezes and a *hoku* (star) that adds a special twinkle to a pair of pretty brown eyes. "I view it as a song for a child," Keola says.

11. ***Ipo Lei Manu/He'eia*** (vocal)

Keola: vocals & steel string guitar in F Wahine Tuning

These two classics honor King Kalakaua. In **Ipo Lei Manu**, Queen Kapi'olani compares her husband to the 'i'iwi bird, whose delicate feathers were used for highly prized *'ahu'ula* (feather capes). Although composed as a welcome home gift, the final verse describes him as *hele loa* (gone forever). He died on January 20, 1891 in San Francisco, and never heard the song. Based on a traditional chant, **He'eia** describes Kalakaua surfing at the song's namesake location on the leeward side of the Big Island. *Kaona* (hidden meaning) extends the topic into other activities, typical of many Hawaiian songs that use images of water.

"I have tremendous aloha for Monarchy era songs," says Keola. "They have so much soulfulness and nobility. They're over a hundred years old but they speak so strongly to us today." Just before the *ha'ina* (last verse) of **Ipo Lei Manu**, Keola sings a beautiful wordless vocal with a new melody. At the transition to **He'eia**, he quotes from the haunting traditional song, **No Ke 'Ano Ahiahi**.

12. ***Honolulu City Lights*** (vocal)

Keola: vocals & 2 steel string guitars in F Wahine Tuning, played in the key of C

Keola composed **Honolulu City Lights** in the 1970s, when he began traveling frequently by plane, to express how he felt watching the islands at night, like jewels, disappear into the darkness of the sea. In 1978, on the best selling album of the same name, Keola played in Dropped C Wahine Tuning. Here he uses the F Wahine Tuning he has favored since 1990, but plays in the key of C, achieving a different sound. Keola is the first to play in C in this F Tuning.

13. ***Ka Makani Ka'ili Aloha*** (vocal)

Keola: vocals & nylon string guitar in C Wahine Tuning capoed up 2 frets to sound in the key of D

George Winston: piano

Matthew Kane's song of heartbreak and repair speaks of a wind that snatches away a Maui man's wife. The man goes to a *kahuna* (a learned person in traditional Hawaiian society) who gives him a gourd to chant his love into. The *kahuna* seals the gourd and tosses it into the sea, where it drifts until found on the beach at Waikiki by the man's wife. Placing her hands on top of the gourd and removing the seal, she is overcome with love for her husband and the life she left. It must have worked since the final verse says he has stayed long years in a home full of love.

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Mahalo:

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For more information about Keola's music, guitar tablature, performance videos, slack key instruction and other way cool stuff, wax up and surf to Keola's web page at www.kbeamer.com

Keola's beautiful custom guitars out of koa and mango wood are built by: Steve Grimes of Grimes Guitars, PO Box 537, Kula, HI 96790, 808-878-2076.

Keola exclusively uses John Pearse Strings, 1-800-235-3302, www.jpstrings.com

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