

## LINER NOTES

### [Keola Beamer](#)

#### **Ka Hikina O Ka Hau (The Coming of the Snow)**

#### **KEOLA'S NOTES:**

Over the years many people have asked me to try and explain the Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar. "What is it?" they ask.

I have spent a large part of my life in search of a decisive answer to this question, without any real success. In fact, I often feel that attempts to define our art form merely place limitations upon it. In truth, music transcends words. Music simply goes where it wants to go despite how we choose to describe it. There is a sentiment in our native language...*mai po'i 'ino i ka pulelehua 'o ke aloha*. It means, do not attempt to trap the butterfly (of love) with your hands.

Musicians borne on the wings of *Kī Hō'alu* understand this on a deeply personal level. We have known the feeling of being transported within a living art form capable of expressive and profound beauty.

*Ka Hikina O Ka Hau (The Coming of the Snow)* is not a Slack Key recording, it was never intended to be. It poses rather, a simple question. Can the palette, coloration and tonality of *Kī Hō'alu* add an indefinable something to the interpretation of songs written by truly great composers?

The answer is a wonderful surprise.

#### ***Poli'ahu (The Mauna Kea Snow Goddess)***

I grew up on the gentle slopes of Mauna Kea (The White Mountain) on the Island of Hawai'i. Our family had some 300 acres of Hawaiian Homestead Land where we raised cattle, pigs and horses. This is where *Kī Hō'alu* (the Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar) was born.

Rising 13,796 feet above sea level, Mauna Kea dominates the landscape. It is said that the Hawaiian Snow Goddess – *Poli'ahu*, dwells along the summit of the mountain amidst the cold, cold snow.

Keoki (George Winston) was particularly interested in a musical idea that would embrace the guitar and piano, enfolding them both in a kind of tonal winter. Some of the voicings in this arrangement were inspired by the great soundtrack composer Dominic Frontiere.

George's approach sometimes leads him to deconstruct the piano. In this interpretation, he played a lot inside the piano, plucking the strings, and also muting the strings with one hand and playing the keys with the other hand. Like *Poli'ahu* herself, the part is aloof, serene and somehow strangely beautiful.

On the drive to the recording studio that day, I remembered that in the winter we'd put on our warm flannel shirts and ride our horses down through the open fields. At a stoplight, I gazed through the grey mist of a San Francisco morning, towards the ocean, towards the snow covered flanks of Mauna Kea. I imagined *Poli'ahu* in her beauty and splendor, looking down upon us from her White Mountain.

### ***Little Drummer Boy/Winter Aloha***

For most of this record, I worked solo from Daniel's arrangements, usually overdubbing with several guitars, so it was a real pleasure to play "live" with my friend, George (Keoki) Winston. *Little Drummer Boy* is, of course, a treasured part of the classic American/Christmas repertoire. I remember singing it with fellow members of the Kamehameha Schools Concert Glee Club, where the drum like arrangement consisted entirely of vocal parts. This was a source of great amusement because several of us tenors had to sing something like "puddley-pum-puddley-pum" for what seemed like an eternity. This is why I never continued choral work. I valued my sanity too much.

Keoki and I tried to give the piece a real Hawaiian-kine Christmas feel, without a lot of polish or detail. Our philosophy here was to play from the heart and have a little fun along the way.

### **DANIEL'S NOTES:**

It was the summer of '92 when Keola first asked me to arrange Satie's first *Gymnopédie* for multiple guitars in non-standard tunings. I must confess I didn't think it was a very good idea. There were already many arrangements available in standard tuning, and I shared Chet Atkins' feeling that the guitar was in danger of becoming a sort of "bastard" instrument, as he put it, tuned differently for every piece, effectively eliminating the possibility of improvisation. Then of course it becomes very difficult to perform the pieces, because the constant re-tuning on stage almost guarantees out-of-tune guitars. I agreed to try, however, because Keola's mother, Nona, had just helped me out of a very difficult situation in Mexico, and Keola and Moana were very kindly putting me up at their home. I was glad to have some way of showing my appreciation. I first came to Hawai'i on a one-way ticket in 1984 with \$20 in my pocket, drawn by the curiosity inspired in me by an early Beamer Brothers' LP. I don't really know why, but I was intrigued by the name "Slack Key." I knew nothing about Keola. I had the strange idea he might be a bus driver. I looked in the phone book – no "K"s. Picked one of the many Beamers at random and called. Turned out to be his mother. She came down to meet me and hung a beautiful lei around my neck whose heavenly fragrance nearly knocked me out, penetrated my soul and generally made me feel like I was on the right track. I felt like Robert Louis Stevenson. We became great friends and spent a lot of time together. Several years were to pass before I met Keola however.

Working with him seemed like the fulfillment of a sort of destiny. I recorded several of his arrangements on my own cassette of Hawaiian music (now fortunately unavailable). Playing Hawaiian music taught me everything that was lacking in my playing of other music, notably the supreme importance of taking your time and removing tension. Complexity can easily blind to basic values which are common to all types of music, and give one the illusion of playing much better than is actually the case. This is not possible in Hawaiian music. It is a great joy to me to

think that maybe I was able to give some small thing back for all that I learned. I am deeply rooted in the European culture that produced me, and I believe that our collaboration represents a genuine Hawaiian-European cultural exchange.

I discovered Satie (1866-1925) at the age of 19. I bought the sheet music to all his pieces, even though I couldn't read music and didn't have an instrument. I just loved them, and was absolutely determined that I was going to learn to play them. I've since played them on the guitar, the piano, the accordion, guitar with flute, violin, oboe, harmonica, cello, and the amazing thing is that I've never gotten tired of them. The guitar versions were O.K. but they all involved leaving out harmony notes and placing the melody in the middle of chords instead of above the accompaniment, so they were all slightly unsatisfying.

The first hurdle was finding the right key. Obviously, you first try to go for the original key. The (acoustic) guitar is in fact an anomalous instrument. Although a piece may be technically possible in several keys, in reality there is almost always one key that serves the music to such an extent that playing it in any other key becomes a vain and pointless exercise. In the original key the melody was either way too high or way too low on the neck so it was out of the question. I opted for the key of G in a C tuning (in fact I'd always felt that piece was bitonal because it seems to start in G but is in fact in D). From there on everything fell into place, and something remarkable happened to me: I fell in love with the quality of sound and resonance that the tuning gave to the music. All the reservations I had had about the standard tuning arrangements disappeared completely. It was all there, every note, shining and resonating. I couldn't wait to show it to Keola. In fact I also made an arrangement for one guitar in the same tuning.

The Hawaiians played the nose flute because they believed the air that passed through the nose had a more spiritual quality. Right or wrong, that is a very subtle and sensitive observation. It started to become clear to me that Slack Key arose from the same sort of subtle musical intuition, that it wasn't enough just to play notes, you also had to find the most suitable acoustic environment for those notes. Medieval Christians built high churches where the combined voices of the congregation rose and acquired their maximum resonance and beauty before being reflected back to inspire the singers with awe. Julian Bream, the great English guitarist, used to record his records in cathedrals. I began to see the guitar itself as a tiny cathedral where six voices rise and seek their maximum expression before irradiating the world with their fragile beauty. Chopin is supposed to have said that nothing is more beautiful than a guitar, except perhaps two. He probably never heard three, and certainly not Slack Key.

Keola was pleased with the arrangements and asked me to do the other two *Gymnopédies* (supposedly inspired by ancient vase paintings of gymnastic exercises, means "naked child" in Greek). I set about it with great enthusiasm as I had understood the possibilities. When you've adapted music to the guitar ten thousand times why not for once try adapting the guitar to the music? Keola added some arpeggios to at least one of the arrangements.

From there on in everything was easy, it was just a question of finding the right music. I limited myself strictly to pieces which would gain in musicality from the Slack Key treatment. I arranged far more pieces than are actually on this recording. There are basically three categories of tunes: ones I'd loved for years but never been able to play to my satisfaction on one guitar;

requests from Keola; pieces I sought out when the Winter theme became a definite project. After the *Gymnopédies* I started on the *Gnossiennes* (from “Knossos” an ancient palace in Crete where the minotaur was supposed to have lived) and arranged five of the six. In each piece I tried to find the tuning and the key that gave the greatest resonance and expressivity to the music.

Keola’s favourite Robert Frost poem, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, was the inspiration for a choral piece by Randall Thompson (1899–1984) that he asked me to do because he sang it with the Kamehameha School Concert Glee Club. I arranged all the voices, but Keola dropped some of them as un-guitaristic and added some arpeggios, intro and transitions of his own - a joint effort.

*Pavane for a Sleeping Beauty (Pavane de la Belle au Bois Dormant)* is from the Mother Goose Suite for piano, four hands, by Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). He is one of my favourite composers. I play the arrangement for one guitar in A minor by Jerrold Hyman, my first guitar teacher, which was recorded by Christopher Parkening. No repeat is indicated, but it is so beautiful and so short that it would be hard to justify playing it if you didn’t repeat. As usual, Keola’s tasteful choice of guitar types adds enormously to the musicality of the arrangement.

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) wrote *Lullaby of the Cat* for contralto and three clarinets. I used to play it on the piano in a version somewhat simplified from that played by Soulima, the composer’s son. I like the way it gives the impression of a cat, maybe not dancing, more like slinking along.

*Chiquilín de Bachín* is a waltz by Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992), the late, great Argentinian tango composer and bandoneón player. It is a sad song about a little boy who has to make a living selling roses at the tables in a bar in Argentina. My greatest love is Argentinian folk music. This is dedicated to my wife, the painter Laura Gudiño, who is also from that country.

*Milonga* by Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) is a piano piece in F, also based on a well known Argentinian folk rhythm. The composer apparently disowned it in his later years. I’ll take it any day! Several people, including myself, have arranged it for one guitar in dropped D tuning. It’s another one I play both on the piano, guitar and accordion. It is dedicated to the memory of my late father-in-law, Dr. Eduardo Gudiño.

I found a little booklet called *Sing Spanish America* in a basement in Eugene, Oregon in the late eighties. Len Williams, father of the famous classical guitarist, John Williams, published the whole collection in versions for two guitars without crediting the original arranger in any way. Unfortunately I can’t remember his name. Mr. Williams just put the piano left hand on one guitar and the right hand on the other. He neither added nor changed anything. I tried to make the pieces a little more guitaristic. *Tutu Marambá* is a Brazilian lullaby. *Cantar Montañés* (Mountain Song) is a Spanish folk song I mostly like because of the words: yo fui a la mar por naranjas, cosa que la mar no tiene (I went to the sea for oranges, something the sea does not have).

*Spinning Song (Op. 14)* by Albert Ellmenreich (1816-1905) was one of many nineteenth century piano pieces which imitated various machines. The composer seems to have mainly been an actor. Keola asked me to do it because his mother used to play it on the piano when he was a

child. I played it myself. The tunings allowed me to use the original key and to put in every note, which would have been impossible in standard tuning.

When I used to play at the Turtle Bay Hilton on O'ahu a beautiful Indian lady named Romola Morse and her husband, Dick, sometimes used to come and hear me play. I became quite friendly with her and even went to her home in Kaimuki for tea. She once asked me if I could play *Song of India* from the opera *Sadko* by Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908). I had to reply that I could not come up with a satisfactory way to play it on one guitar. I thought of her when making this arrangement. Keola sent her a copy, but I don't know if she ever heard it. She was quite ill at the time.

I first heard it as a teenager from the playing of the Austrian violinist Fritz Kreisler. It was recorded in 1930 in Paris on a 78 rpm record as a steel guitar piece (recently re-released as *Paris, plages d'Hawaii—Guitares hawaïennes*, 1930). The words speak of the nostalgia of one who is far from home. Like *Bali Ha'i* or *Stranger in Paradise* (both of which Keola recorded on his album *Moe'uhane Kīkā—Tales from the Dream Guitar*) the melody seems to express a longing for an ideal, timeless world of beauty, love and perfection, a sort of Shangri La. To me Hawai'i was, and remains just that, an invulnerable sanctuary in the heart far more than a place on the map.

Romola worked with the U.N. in the furthering of world peace. She gave me my only taste of infinity, an autographed copy of *The Upanishads* and a perfect cup of tea. This is all I could give her in return. It is dedicated to her and the kind of world she worked for. Gentle and romantic, it is certainly out of step with the times but, looking closely at the times, I ask myself why anyone would want to be in step with them.

*Venetian Boat Song* by Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) is one of a series of very romantic piano pieces I struggled to play for years. Francisco Tárrega, the Catalan composer, made a very nice standard tuning arrangement of it in E minor in the nineteenth century. The two guitars allowed it to be played in the original key and with a greater sense of movement, simulating the gentle rocking of a gondola on the canals of Venice and a gentle mandolin playing the melody.

*The Nightingale (El Rossinyol)* is an anonymous Renaissance duet from the Iberian peninsula. I had recorded it myself in standard tuning.

Elizabethan song words are so full of self pity and death wishes that they are unbearable or laughable to most modern audiences: “come heavy sleep, the image of true death, and close up these my weary, weeping eyes, whose spring of tears doth stop my vital breath” etc. *If My Complaints Could Passions Move* and *Come Heavy Sleep* by John Dowland (1563-1626), the great Irish born lutenist and composer, are two of the most sophisticated and beautiful melodies of the era, almost amazingly “modern” in their conception, and stand well alone, without their words. I sing and play them myself.

## **HAWAIIAN MUSIC**

What we call “Hawaiian” music grew from contacts between native Hawaiians and visitors: missionaries, Portuguese immigrants, Mexican cowboys, 20's and 30's jazz etc. The pre-contact

Hawaiians played mostly percussion instruments. I would like to offer a new definition: Hawaiian music is any music that Hawaiians like enough to want to play and make their own. The world has moved on and influences move in all directions. All this music came to Hawai'i with me from Mexico in just the same way as the guitar first came with the Mexican "paniolo" cowboys back in the 1800s. Because of the inconvenience of re-tuning, many of the pieces might be impractical for live performance, but recording is an art in itself, and there is no more sense in limiting yourself to what you can easily reproduce live than there would be in criticizing Star Wars because they couldn't do it on stage.

It has been one of the greatest privileges of my life to have been able to participate in a project with someone so totally dedicated to music as George Winston, and with Keola Beamer, one of those rare examples of a musician who, whilst constantly refining and developing his art, succeeds in remaining true both to his tradition and to his own inner musical voice.

*Daniel O'Donoghue is a mainly self-taught linguist and musician who currently lives in Ireland. He studied the guitar periodically with Carlos Lyra, Jerrold Hyman, Vincenzo Macaluso and the sadly missed, incomparable Ted Greene.*

## THE SONGS

Keola Beamer plays all the guitars on all the songs except where noted.  
All the tunings are notated from the lowest pitched string to the highest.  
All songs are arranged by Daniel O'Donoghue except:

*Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening* arranged by Keola Beamer and Daniel O'Donoghue;  
*Poli'ahu (The Mauna Kea Snow Goddess)* composed and arranged by Keola Beamer;  
*Little Drummer Boy/Winter Aloha* arranged by Keola Beamer and George Winston;  
*Gymnopedie no. 2, Gymnopedie no. 3, Milonga* and *Spinning Song* arranged by Daniel O'Donoghue and Keola Beamer.

### 1. **Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening** (Randall Thompson) 3:36

On seven guitars: two steel string guitars - one in the G minor Tuning, D-G-D-G-Bb-D, and one in the C minor Tuning, C-G-C-G-C-Eb; three nylon string guitars - two in the G minor Tuning, D-G-D-G-Bb-D, and one in the tuning D-Bb-D-Bb-D-G; two electric guitars in the tuning C-F-C-F-C-F. Played in the key of G minor, and all guitars are capoed up a half step, with the song sounding in the key of A flat minor.

Arranged by Keola Beamer and Daniel O'Donoghue

### 2. **Poli'ahu [The Mauna Kea Snow Goddess]** (Keola Beamer) 6:48

Keola on nylon string guitar in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E. Played in the key of C minor.

George Winston on muted and plucked piano.

Composed and arranged by Keola Beamer

3. **The Little Drummer Boy/Winter Aloha** (Harry Simeone, Katherine Davis & Henry Onorati/ George Winston) 4:01

Keola on nylon string guitar in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E. Played in the key of C Major.

George Winston on 8 string steel string guitar in Samoan C Mauna Loa Tuning, G-C-F-G-C-G-A-E. Played in the key of C Major.

Arranged by Keola Beamer and George Winston

4. **Gymnopédie no. 1** (Erik Satie) 3:26

On three guitars: nylon string, steel string, and electric guitar, all in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E. Played in the key of G Major.

Daniel O'Donoghue's arrangement of this for one guitar is available for download at

5. **Gnossienne no. 3** (Erik Satie) 2:57

On two guitars: nylon string guitar and steel string guitar, both in the tuning D-A-C-E-A-E. Played in the key of A minor.

6. **Gymnopédie no. 2** (Erik Satie) 2:53

On four guitars: nylon string guitar in Leonard's F Wahine Tuning, C-F-C-G-C-E; steel string guitar in Leonard's F Wahine Tuning, C-F-C-G-C-E; and two electric guitars - one in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E, and one in a G minor based tuning, C-G-D-G-Bb-D. Played in the key of G Major.

Arranged by Daniel O'Donoghue and Keola Beamer

7. **Gnossienne no. 4** (Erik Satie) 2:31

On two nylon string guitars in D minor Tuning, D-A-D-F-A-D. Played starting in the key of F minor, with the tonal center shifting to E flat minor, D minor, G minor and A Major.

8. **Gymnopédie no. 3** (Erik Satie) 2:42

On four guitars: nylon string guitar in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E; two electric guitars - one in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E, and one in G minor Tuning, D-G-D-G-Bb-D; and steel string guitar in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E. Played in the key of D minor.

Arranged by Daniel O'Donoghue and Keola Beamer

9. **Pavane For A Sleeping Beauty [Pavane de la Belle au Bois Dormant]** (Maurice Ravel) 2:46

*On three guitars: electric guitar in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E; and two nylon string guitars – one in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E, and one in Mainland Open C Tuning, C-G-C-G-B-E. Played in the key of C minor.*

10. **Lullaby Of The Cat** (Igor Stravinsky) 3:09

On two guitars: nylon string guitar in D minor Tuning, D-A-D-F-A-D, and steel string guitar in Dropped D Tuning, D-A-D-G-B-E. Played in the key of E minor.

11. **Chiquilín de Bachín** (Astor Piazzolla) 3:05

On three nylon string guitars: one in the tuning C-F-D-G-B-E, and two in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E. Played in the key of C Major.

12. **Milonga** (Alberto Ginastera) 2:01

On two nylon string guitars in G minor Tuning, D-Bb-G-D-G-D. Played in the keys of G minor and G Major.

Arranged by Daniel O'Donoghue and Keola Beamer

13. **Tutu Marambá** (traditional Brazilian) 2:32

On two nylon string guitars in tuning C-F-C-G-C-E. Played in the keys of F Major and F minor.

14. **Cantar Montañés** (traditional Spanish) 2:30

On two nylon string guitars in G minor Tuning, D-G-D-G-Bb-D. Played in the key of G minor, and the guitars are capoed up a half step, sounding in the key of A flat minor.

15. **Spinning Song** (Albert Ellmenreich) 2:09

On two nylon string guitars - one in Leonard's F Wahine Tuning, C-F-C-G-C-E, and one in the tuning C-F-C-G-A-D. Played in the key of F, and the guitars are capoed up a half step, sounding in the key of F# Major.

Arranged by Daniel O'Donoghue and Keola Beamer

16. **Song of India** (Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov) 3:46

On three steel string guitars in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E. Played in the key of G Major.

17. **Venetian Boat Song** (Felix Mendelssohn) 3:40

On two nylon string guitars in a G minor based tuning, C-G-D-G-Bb-D. Played in the key of G minor.

**18. The Nightingale [El Rossinyol]** (Anonymous) 1:59

On two nylon string guitars in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E. Played in the keys of C minor and C Major, and the guitars are capoed up one half step, sounding in the keys of C# Major and C# minor.

**19. If My Complaints Could Passions Move** (John Dowland) 2:17

On three nylon string guitars in Keola's C Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E. Played in the key of E minor, and all guitars are capoed up a half step, sounding in the key of F minor.

**20. Come Heavy Sleep** (John Dowland) 2:26

On three nylon string guitars in Keola's C Wahine Tuning, C-G-D-G-B-E. Played in the key of C Major.

Total Time: 1:02:12

Produced by Keola Beamer, Daniel O'Donoghue, and George Winston

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Keola Beamer's double ported guitars are custom made of Hawaiian Koa wood by Steve Grimes of Grimes Guitars, P.O. BOX 537 Kula, Maui, Hawaii 96790 tel (808) 878-2076.

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

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