

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FW 8714

ORIGINAL HAWAIIAN STEEL GUITAR
with TONY KU, accompanied by Tomomi Sugiura



Tony Ku on the acoustic steel guitar and Tomomi Sugiura on the Spanish guitar

M
1629.7
H4
K95
O69
1979

MUSIC LP

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

SIDE 1

1. FAIR HAWAII (2:38)
2. PA'AU'AU WALTZ (2:31)
3. PUPU O EWA (2:34)
4. KUU IPO (2:33)
5. AKAHI HOI
AINA HAU (2:21)
MOANI KE ALA
6. KE KALI NEI AU (2:08)

SIDE 2

1. BEAUTIFUL KAHANA (1:51)
2. KAMEHAMEHA WALTZ (2:11)
3. MANU'O'O (2:13)
4. ALOHA NO AU I KO MAKA
WAI O MINEHAHA (2:01)
5. NA MOKU EHA
HE ALOHA NO O HONOLULU (2:24)
6. WAILANA (2:18)
7. ALOHA OE (1:57)

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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Notes

Steel guitar playing is an attempt to alter the intrinsic tones of the regular Spanish guitar and to give its notes sustained vibrato or to create that "eerie" sound. This effect is achieved by fretting with a "steel bar" on a regular acoustic Spanish guitar held flat across the lap. The first use of the technique is generally attributed to a Hawaiian student, Joseph Kekuku, who used a comb or a pocket-knife in an effort to get such an effect in the 1890's.

A full account of the invention of steel guitar playing appears in the Bernice P. Bishop Museum (Honolulu) Bulletin 29 pp. 10-11. The contents of the Bulletin 29 are a full record of the survey of ancient Hawaiian music conducted in 1923-24

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by Miss Helen H. Roberts under the auspices of The Hawaiian Folklore Commission represented by John R. Galt, Chairman ; Enda J. Hill, Secretary ; Mrs. Emma Ahuena Taylor, Hawaiian Member. The following is quoted from a section under the title of STEEL GUITAR in the Bulletin.

STEEL GUITAR

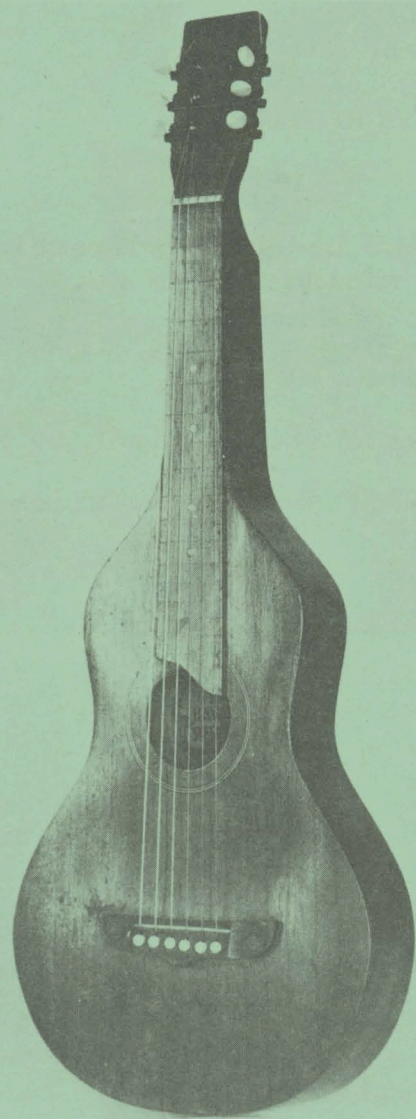
During the years 1893 to 1895, Joseph Kekuku, a young Hawaiian man from Laie, Koolauloa, Oahu, was attending the Kamehameha School for Boys, in Honolulu. The guitar was a popular instrument among the students who were constantly strumming it. Like school boys all over the world, probably, they were not unfamiliar with the possibilities of the comb as a musical instrument, and one day as he was playing the guitar the idea occurred to young Kekuku to try the effect of a comb placed on the strings. It is not known just what suggested the thought to him. He was delighted with the result and played with his new toy for a time before it occurred to him to try the back of his pocket knife. This second inspiration was even more satisfactory and thereafter the knife was always used when he played the guitar. However, he wanted a more convenient piece of metal, so he appealed to John Padigan, in the school shop, to fashion for him a piece of steel suited to his needs.

By this time his singular and beautiful playing had become the talk of the boys, who were all emulating him, and one of them, Tilton, who went to his home on Maui during a vacation, performed on his guitar with the aid of his knife for the benefit of his family. His sister-in-law, now Mrs. Clement Parker of Honolulu, from whom this account was obtained through the kindness of Mrs. Webb, asked him where he learned to play in such a curious manner and he told her that Joseph Kekuku at school had been the first to think of it and had taught the others how to do it. She later met Joseph Kekuku, who verified the statement.

According to Mrs. Webb, the fashion spread very rapidly after a concert which she attended and at which, if her memory serves her correctly, Kekuku himself played. The audience was delighted and, as she expressed it, "it took the house," as it has since taken the musical world. This invention of the Hawaiian schoolboy is the most significant contribution by Hawaii to music, the introduction of an entirely new technique for the playing of stringed instruments, at least as far as the western world is concerned, although the Japanese employ a similar technique with one of their stringed instruments, and some African tribes north and south of the Congo do the same with the musical bow, using a shell or knife blade.

Joseph Kekuku, after experiments, practiced this style of playing and in 1904 toured the United States as a member of the revue "Bird of Paradise". His playing of this new instrument created a national furor and then made Hawaiian music world-famous. In 1919 he went to Europe for a tour of eight years duration and during the time he played in many countries with the "Bird of Paradise" show. He died in Dover, New Jersey in 1932, the year after the "electric" steel guitar was invented.

This album illustrates the style of steel guitar playing which was common in the early stages of this century, that is the age of Joseph Kekuku. To recreate the oldest style of steel guitar playing, a regular Spanish guitar is used with an attachable nut for the purpose of raising the strings so that the pressure of the steel slide would not fret the strings. All the tunes are selected from traditional melodies of the Islands. The arrangements are simple and all the tunes are played to a Spanish guitar accompaniment. The instruments are unamplified.



Performers

TONY KU plays the acoustic steel guitar solos. He was born in Shanghai, China, educated in Japan and graduated from Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo. Isami Uchizaki is his Japanese name. He is an ethnomusicologist and at present a college professor in Tokyo. He has an extensive collection of acoustic steel guitars made of Hawaiian koa wood. The instrument shown on the cover of this album is one of his collections. In all tunes, TOMOMI SUGIURA accompanies the acoustic steel guitar with the Spanish guitar and plays some solos in WAILANA and AICHA NO AU I KO MAKI. Obbligato fiddling is done by YOSHIMASA TADOKORO in BEAUTIFUL KAHANA.

CREDIT

Recorded by Yasuyuki Tanaka under the direction of Shuzo Asai at Asahi Broadcasting Corporation Studio No.1, Osaka, Japan on September 17, 1979.

Notes by Isami Uchizaki.

Cover photo of the acoustic steel guitar by Kiichiro Nakagawa.

Photo of Tony Ku and Tomomi Sugiura by Eiichi Morita.