



George Kuo



George Kuo - 1994

George Kuo is known as one of Hawaii's premiere Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar artists playing in the traditional *nahenahe* (sweet, soothing) style, bridging today's generation with the older generations. George was born on November 17, 1955, but his beautiful slack key guitar style dates back a generation or two earlier. "I feel a lot of appreciation for the old style of slack key and the lifestyle of my grandparents, granduncles, grandaunts and all the older players. There's a special aloha for them that I try to convey in my style of slack key."

"My feeling is in the playing from the 1940s," he continues. "I like to play a nice relaxed, easy style. Not too much fancy stuff, keep it within the melody. It's more delivering a message than playing runs."

George first took up *ki ho'alu* in high school. He learned from friends such as Antone Gabriel, who played in the style of his granduncle, Albert Kawelo, slack key legend Ray Kane's teacher in the early 1930s. "When I heard Antone," George says, "I said to myself 'that's how I want to play the old style.'" George's family was very supportive of his music. "My granduncle and aunt really encouraged me."

For a young person attracted to oldstyle *ki ho'alu*, the 1970s were heaven in Hawai'i. A revival of traditional culture was in full bloom. Many *kupuna* (elders) performed and shared their *mana'o* (knowledge) publicly - often for the first time. George learned from legendary slack key figures such as Ray Kane, Aunty Alice Namakelua, Tommy Solomon, Sonny Chillingworth, Atta Isaacs, Gabby Pahinui, Uncle Fred Punahoa, and Papa Kauhi. "That was a real rare opportunity to be with those old masters," he says. "The expressions and the feelings that they get when they play, you can see it on their faces. They smile 'cause they feel the vibration, the *ona* (feeling of well-being). It goes throughout their body and moves their spirit. To me that's what the enjoyment is about

right there. If I ever run into an old timer who tells me he plays slack key, I always encourage him because once they go, *pau* (the end), you can't hear that anymore." Through high school and college, George continued playing the clubs (with Tino Jacob, Ray Kane, Sonny Chillingworth and others), and studying with the masters. He acquired a large repertoire of standards and originals, to which he continues to add today. In 1979 he won a slack key guitar contest at the Waikiki Shell, which brought him to the attention of a wider audience and launched his performing career. In 1980 he released his first album, NAHENAHE, on the Hula label. He also formed the group Kipapa Rush Band with a number of friends, including Wayne Reis, a nephew of Atta Isaacs. In 1985 they recorded HARDLY WORKING for the Kahanu label. "We had a real nice traditional feeling with a little of today's music." In addition to slack key, the group featured steel guitar, reflecting the revival of interest in this Hawaiian innovation.

In 1986 Eddie Kamae asked George to join his group THE SONS OF HAWAII. George considers this a great honor and feels a special kinship with the other members. He also enjoys Eddie's style as a band leader. "He's not one to tell anybody what to do in the group," George says, "he just says, 'let's go and play and have fun', and we go. It's not a rehearsed thing. We communicate it through playing."

This closely matches George's approach on ALOHA NO NA KUPUNA. "There's no overdubbing on the album," he says. "Most of the arrangements were done in the studio, or a day or two before. I like spontaneity." A lot of George's ideas come from playing with others or by himself after work. "I play a lot outside on my porch late at night," he says. "I enjoy the sound of the guitar in the night." Still, recording solo was something he never expected to do. "It's a different experience," he says, "but once you get into it, it comes out real nice."

George performed and recorded with Dennis & David Kamakahi & Martin Pahinui as the HUI ALOHA group in 2000. George currently performs in Honolulu, Hawaii with Martin Pahinui and Aaron Mahi at the Waikiki Beach Marriott Hotel and regularly on tours in the United States and Japan. Highlights of George's performing career are playing on the Garrison Keillor Prairie Home Companion Show with Chet Atkins and Johnny Gimble in 1993, and performing at the Hollywood Bowl with the Honolulu Symphony in 1997.

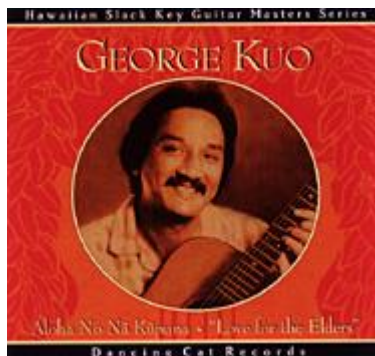
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RECORDINGS ON DANCING CAT RECORDS



[ALOHA NO NA KUPUNA](#) (Love for the Elders) 1996
Instrumental Album of the Year – Na Hoku Hanohano Awards



[HUI ALOHA](#)



[HAWAIIAN TOUCH](#) 1995 Instrumental Album of the Year
– Na Hoku Hanohano Awards