



Slack-key concert – incredible performance



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We were treated to the beautiful, seductive sounds of Doug and Sandy McMaster's slack key and 'ukulele music dating back to the late 1700's last Saturday night. Only a very few people are left carrying on the tradition of old-style slack-key. The McMasters and their following hold the music as a spiritual trust to be passed on. You can see why when you hear it.

Sandy tells the story of the Mexican cowboys who brought guitars to Hawai'i when the king sent for people to help Hawaiians learn about cattle

ranching. Before the Mexican vaqueros arrived, the musical tradition of Hawai'i was chanting combined with percussive instruments made from gourds, bamboo and wood. The Hawaiians obviously had musical genius in them, because when the Mexicans left after teaching them what they knew about cattle ranching, they also left four guitars, which became the basis of what we know today as slack-key guitar music. As the guitars lost their tuning, the Hawaiians created more than 75 different ways of tuning the guitar to make pleasing sounds. Sandy explains the complexity of the music like this: If you took all the keys on a piano and changed them all around so that there were at least 75 different ways of organizing them and then invented new ways to combine them into soothing, beautiful music, you would have an approximation of how this music came to be.

Because the music had been given to them originally as five cowboys sitting around a campfire at night, the Hawaiians needed to find a way of duplicating the sound of several guitars in just one instrument as the original four guitars became separated throughout the islands. They devised a rhythm part by constantly strumming the lower strings with the thumb, and then picking a melody with the rest of the right-hand fingers. Then they added a picking of the left hand on some of the strings while depressing on the frets with the left hand as well. Amazingly, the single guitar sounds as though there are multiple players, complete with chime sounds.

Doug has been playing since he was 6 years old, learning literally at the feet of the masters on Moloka'i and Maui. The McMasters have been on Kaua'i since 1999 playing their concerts in Hanalei since then. For them, the latest concert was No. 1,325 on Kaua'i. It is no wonder that this couple won the people's choice award for Hawaiian music/slack-key, a huge honor since it is voted on worldwide. Doug is the keeper of the music, and Sandy is the keeper of the story. Together, they weave a spell of soothing music and story that tells of nature and the history of the islands as expressed by this old-style music. The music can be either wahine or kane, and

they choose the gentle, sweet, beautiful, mysterious and complex sound of the woman (wahine). This is a must-hear for anyone wanting to capture the essence of Kaua'i in music. A true family outing — complete with cookies at intermission.

The McMasters offer their music in Kapa'a every Saturday at The Children of the Land Center under the Clock tower at Kaua'i Village near Safeway from 5 to 7 p.m., and Friday at 4 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. in Hanalei at the Hanalei Community Center. Admission is \$20, and \$15 for keiki and kapuna. There are a dozen or so wonderful CDs of Doug and Sandy's music to take back with you, to keep the feeling and music alive.