

## Learning about Hawaiian music...



Many folks who are drawn to the ukulele may not be familiar with Hawaiian music. Perhaps they've heard "Tiny Bubbles" or "Aloha Oe," but that may be the limit of their Hawaiian listening. Yet the ukulele's heritage is island-based and so many wonderful songs utilizing ukuleles are Hawaiian that it's a real loss when ukulele players aren't familiar with at least some of the sounds of Hawaii.

We tend to "like" the music we know best, so my goal in this short article is to get you listening to Hawaiian music more often so you can find songs and artists that you find yourself enjoying! Keep in mind that this is just a "bare bones" introduction to get you started—there are many sounds and styles of Hawaiian music, so if you don't like the first ones you listen to, try others!

### ***Some Hawaiian music background:***

Hawaiian music reflects the many cultures of the immigrants to Hawaii as well as the native population. You'll hear cowboy sounds from Mexican paniolos, Asian influences, Hawaiian chants, Western-style melodies/harmonies and Jamaican/reggae sounds. There's even Hawaiian "rap/hip hop"—not my favorite, certainly, but you'll hear it!

You may be most familiar with tunes featuring a blend of English lyrics and perhaps some Hawaiian words in the "hapa haole" tunes; a lot of these became popular on the mainland during the 1930s. Think of "Sweet Leilani," "Little Grass Shack" and "Lovely Hula Hands." Popular performers of this style included Harry Owens and his Royal Hawaiian Hotel Orchestra, Johnny Noble's Hawaiians and Alfred Apaka. "Hawaii Calls," a radio program which began in 1935, helped popularize music from Hawaii on the mainland; the show was broadcast from the Moana Hotel "on the beach at Waikiki." The show continued for decades. You can listen online to an archived "Hawaii Calls" show by going to: <http://www.hularecords.com/radio/> (the shows change each Saturday). For more archived sound clips of this vintage of Hawaiian music and memories, visit: <http://www.territorialairwaves.com>

"Old-style" Hawaiian songs (mele) are those adapted from stories, chants or events and feature Western-style harmonies with Hawaiian language lyrics. Many are allegorical, referencing Hawaiian mythology, love stories, battles and even something as modern and prosaic as the electricity finally coming to a tiny Hana-area village. You'll

find a wealth of these in the “He Mele Aloha” book; the songs in the book have ukulele chords and translations but no melodies (for those, see the MIDI section later on in this article). “He Mele Aloha” can be purchased at Amazon.com for \$24.95. This is the book to have with you for Hawaiian-style kanikapila (jamming). The book also contains some classic hapa haole tunes as well as contemporary Hawaiian music.

Contemporary Hawaiian music includes ki ho’alu (slack key guitar, sometimes with vocal accompaniment, sometimes not), lovely instrumentals, heartfelt (and some just plain old fun) vocals, “pop” music, the aforementioned rap and Jawaiian. Many people have heard of “that big guy who plays ukulele,”—aka Israel Kamakawiwo’ole, or just plain IZ through what’s perhaps his most well-known song, a medley of “Over the Rainbow” and “What a Wonderful World.” IZ played ukulele and sang like an angel. A large man, IZ lived the spirit of aloha with love for all people and the a’ina (land) and died much too young. His CD, “Facing Future” might be the best introduction to IZ, though my personal favorite CD would be hard to choose since each has wonderful songs.

Hawaiian music and culture has enjoyed a renaissance in the past decade and we’re lucky to have a wealth of contemporary Hawaiian performers who are a delight to listen to and learn from. I’ll go out on a limb here and specifically recommend these: Bryan Tolentino (<http://www.myspace.com/bryantolentino>), Dennis Pavao, The Brothers Cazimero, Makaha Sons, Kapena, Amy Hanaiali’i Gilliom, John Keawe, Ka’au Crater Boys, Keola Beamer, Keali’i Reichel, Eddie Kamae, Sons of Hawaii and Robi Kahakalau.

A great way to introduce yourself to contemporary Hawaiian music might be an anthology CD featuring a variety of artists. For this purpose, I particularly like, “Hawaii, Music from the Islands of Aloha,” produced by the Hawaiian Visitors’ and Convention Bureau and available at almost any Hawaiian music store.

Oh, and if you’re listening carefully to Hawaiian songs, you’ll hear the same phrase repeatedly—even if you don’t know a word of Hawaiian you’ll begin to recognize it in song after song. The phrase is, “Ha’ina mai ka puana.” Sometimes the words are drawn out, sometimes they’re sung quickly, but you’ll hear them near the end of the song, typically to start the final verse. It’s been explained to me as meaning, “..And so the story is told,” or, “Tell the summary or refrain,” or “Let the story be told,” or even, “This concludes my song.” Regardless, when you hear this phrase, you’ll know the song is coming to a close.

Also, it’s not unusual to hear old-style Hawaiian songs sung such that each verse is repeated twice, one after another before moving on to the chorus or next verse. I like that feature because it gives me one time through to learn to play and/or sing it and the next time through I’ve had a bit of practice!

**Online Hawaiian radio:** “Tune” your computer to an online Hawaiian streaming radio program and you can listen to Hawaiian music all day long (a fast Internet connection will work best). Many of the stations show you the name of the song as it’s playing so you can jot it down and find lyrics/chords for it later. Try listening while you have your ukulele in your lap and play around to find the key and the chord progression and strum along—it’s not as hard as it sounds. There are many (you can do a search at [www.live365.com](http://www.live365.com), but my favorite stations include these:

- <http://www.HawaiianRainbow.com>
- <http://www.mountainapplecompany.com/radio>
- <http://hawaiian101.com>
- <http://am940hawaii.com/>
- <http://www.kpoa.com/index.php?intro=1> (*This one is really contemporary with a lot of Hawaiian/reggae which some folks don’t care for. But, hey, it’s live from Maui and it’s always great to hear the weather and news from there!*)
- <http://www.kkcr.org/> (*This one’s a public radio station broadcasting from Kaua’i so you get a variety of programming, but weekdays until 11 am, Hawaii time, are Hawaiian music.*)

**Local Hawaiian programming:**

- <http://kzfr.org>  
9 to 11 am, Saturday. Streaming online or live at 90.1 FM  
This is emceed by Kupuna Don, who plays with us at Ukuleles of Paradise.
- <http://kvmr.org/player/>  
10 am to noon, Sunday. Streaming online or live at 89.5 FM

**Learn a bit of Hawaiian language and culture:** The site listed here offers a unique online opportunity: It’s programming from Hawaii with the purpose of teaching more about Hawaiian culture and language. You can watch the 24 video lessons (increasing “difficulty” as well as download a transcript of each lesson.

- [http://ksdl.ksbe.edu/hawaiian\\_resources/kulaiwi](http://ksdl.ksbe.edu/hawaiian_resources/kulaiwi)

**MIDI files of Hawaiian songs:** You can listen to MIDI files at site listed below for the many Hawaiian songs in the “He Mele Aloha” book (aka “the blue book”) used at almost all the Hawaiian kanikapila sessions I’ve attended. While not very “pretty” to listen to, there’s a huge volume of songs to listen to and hear the melody. Click on the book’s title in the white box in the center. Other resources abound at this site, too:

- [http://www.mondoymusic.com/MM\\_Mele/](http://www.mondoymusic.com/MM_Mele/)

**Finding, listening and buying Hawaiian CDs:** If you’re looking for the songs as they sound played and sung with real instruments/voices, I’d head to a Hawaiian music CD seller that offers sound clips. Search through there and listen to bits of songs to your heart’s content (you can do the same thing at the iTunes store). While they’re not the complete songs, they may give you enough that you can get started--or at least you’ll know what CDs you may want to purchase!

- <http://mele.com/> (*This is my favorite Hawaiian music seller*)
- <http://www.hularecords.com>
- <http://www.cordinternational.com/> (specializes in “lost” Hawaiian vintage classics)
- <http://www.amazon.com> (*Doesn’t have the breadth of Mele.com in the Hawaiian genre but does have a lot of song snippets*).
- <http://store.mountainapplecompany.com/>
- <http://www.hawaiianmusicstore.com/>