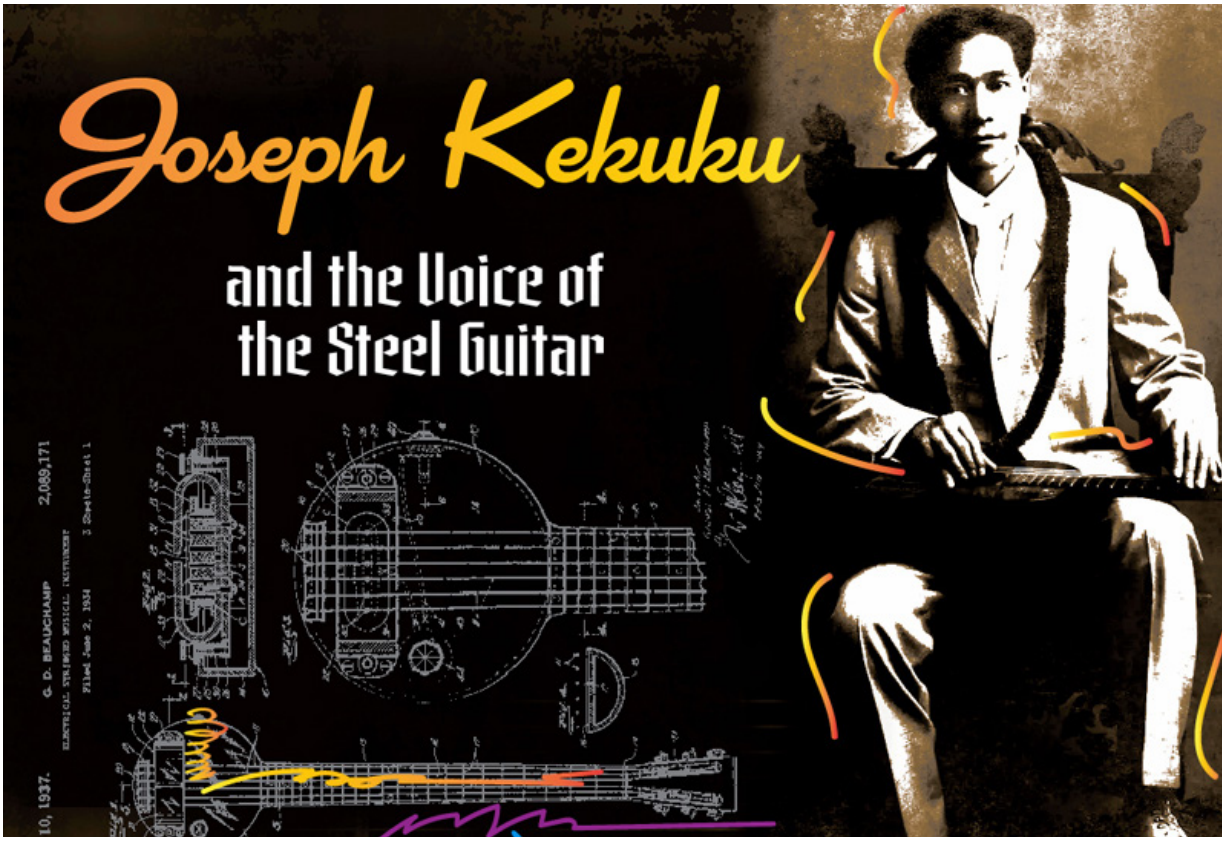
Honolulu Theatre for Youth

PERFORMANCE GUIDE

JOSEPH KEKUKU
AND THE VOICE OF THE STEEL GUITAR

BY MOSES GOODS
IN COLLABORATION WITH
KEALAKAI CENTER FOR PACIFIC STRINGS



ALOHA FROM HTY ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, ERIC JOHNSON



Dear Educator,

As a theatre dedicated to serving Hawai'i's keiki we have several productions in our 70th Season that highlight Hawaiian culture, stories and performance. From native birds to Hawaiian music, we are celebrating voices that are unique to our islands like this one based on the true story of Hawaiian boy whose invention influenced music and musicians from around the globe.

We hope this guide provides pathways to integrate the performance into your curriculum prior to or following the show! If you would like more information on the company or our work, look us up at htyweb.org.

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PRODUCTION CREDITS

Created by
Moses Goods
in collaboration with Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings

Directed by
Eric Johnson

Musical and Historical Dramaturgy by
Kilin Reece

Set and Lighting Design by
Chesley Cannon

Costume Design by
Mattea Mazzella

Projection Design by
Adam Larsen

Prop Design by
Eric West

Sound Design by
Jarren Amian

Music by
Mālie Lyman and Kilin Reece

Original Oli by
Marques Hanalei Marzan

Performed by
Mālie Lyman and Joshua Tavares

Development and Additional Dramaturgy by
Kilin Reece, Kealoha Wong, Joshua Tavares

Technical Direction
Eric West

Stage Manager
Sarah Danvers

Performance Guide and National Core Arts Standards by
Reiko Ho and Daniel A. Kelin, II
with photos and information from resources provided by Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings

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ABOUT OUR SHOW

SYNOPSIS

Meet Joseph Kekuku.
In 1889, Joseph, a student at Kamehameha Schools, fabricated a steel bar in the school's machine shop, slid it across the strings of his guitar, and changed the sound and shape of the instrument forever. The grandson of a royal chanter, Joseph Kekuku went on to play his steel guitar for royalty in Hawai'i and across Europe and for audiences throughout the continental United States. He inspired musicians around the world with the new "Hawaiian Sound," and his influence continues today.

ABOUT PLAYWRIGHT, MOSES GOODS

Moses Goods is one of Hawai'i's most prominent theatre artists and an Artistic Associate at Honolulu Theatre for Youth. Originally from the island of Maui and now based in Honolulu, he has traveled nationally and internationally, performing his original work to a wide range of audiences. His body of work ranges from full length plays to theatrical storytelling pieces most of which are strongly rooted in Native Hawaiian culture.

ABOUT COLLABORATOR, KEALAKAI CENTER FOR PACIFIC STRINGS

Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings was established in 2019 with the mission of researching, restoring, and celebrating, the pivotal role that Hawaiian and Pacific music and musicians have played in the evolution of contemporary stringed instrument designs and their related musical styles, a legacy of global influence that endures today.

For more information, check out their website: https://www.kcpstrings.com.

ABOUT JOSEPH KEKUKU

Joseph Kekuku‘upenakana‘iapuniokamehameha Apuakehau, Jr., better known as Joseph Kekuku, was born in Lā‘ie on the island of O‘ahu in 1874. In 1885, as a young boy of eleven years old, Joseph made the accidental discovery of making a new sound by brushing against the strings of his guitar with a railroad bolt.



Joseph Kekuku
Hawaiian musician and inventor of the Hawaiian Steel Guitar.
Photo courtesy of Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings

In an article from in 1932, C.S. DeLano, publisher of the “Hawaiian Music In Los Angeles” whose “Hawaiian Love Song” was the first original composition to be written for the Hawaiian Steel Guitar said:

Joseph told me that he was walking along a road in Honolulu forty-two years ago, holding an old Spanish guitar, when he saw a rusty bolt on the ground. As he picked it up, the bolt accidentally vibrated one of the strings and produced a new tone that was rather pleasing. After practicing for a time with the metal bolt, Joe experimented with the back of a pocket-knife, then with the back of a steel comb, and still later on with a highly-polished steel [bar] very similar to the sort that is used today.



Joseph in Kamehameha School’s machine shop.
Courtesy of Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings

At the age of 15, Joseph and his cousin Sam Nainoa became boarding students at Kamehameha School for Boys. Young Joseph made his first ***kila***, steel bar, in the school’s machine shop. He continued to refine his technique and modified his guitar, raising the strings, to create a new sound and method of playing that would become known throughout the world.

Joseph became an accomplished musician and in 1904, at the age of 30, he left the islands and began touring the Continent with his group, “Kekuku’s Hawaiian Quintet.” They toured from coast to coast and, in 1919, left for an 8-year tour of Europe, sharing Joseph’s Hawaiian Steel Guitar music and method with international audiences, including royalty.

Joseph returned to the United States in October 1926. He continued to perform and opened a music school in Chicago where he taught his Hawaiian Steel Guitar. He eventually settled in New Jersey where he passed away at the age of 58 on January 16, 1932.

He never returned to Hawai‘i.

His “Bird of Paradise” show inspired two films in 1932 and 1951. The influence of his music can be heard in musical genres around the world and his legacy has inspired countless musicians in Hawai‘i.

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WHAT IS A STEEL GUITAR?

Kīkā Kila o Hawai'i
(Hawaiian Steel Guitar)

A steel guitar is any guitar played while moving a steel bar or similar hard object against plucked strings. The bar itself is called a "steel" - a "kila" in Hawaiian- and is the source of the name "steel guitar" or kīkā kila. The instrument differs from a conventional guitar in that it is played without using frets; conceptually, it is somewhat akin to playing a guitar with one finger (the steel bar). Known for its portamento capabilities, gliding smoothly over every pitch between notes, the instrument can produce a sinuous crying sound and deep vibrato emulating the human singing voice. Typically, the strings are plucked (not strummed) by the fingers of the dominant hand, while the steel tone bar is pressed lightly against the strings and moved by the opposite hand.

Joseph Kekuku played his guitar by laying it across his lap, horizontally, and this method became popular throughout Hawai'i and characterized the "Hawaiian-style" of playing the steel guitar.

Additional resources from Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings:
https://www.pacific-strings.org
https://www.kcpstrings.com/forest-to-frets



*Statue of **Joseph Kekuku** playing his guitar on his lap, unveiled in 2015 at the Polynesian Cultural Center in his hometown of Lā'ie on the island of O'ahu.*

DID YOU KNOW?



Antique Edison Standard Phonograph with cylindars, from circa 1900.

Before MP3s, CDs, cassettes and vinyl records, people listened to ... cylinders played on phonographs. First made of tinfoil, then wax and plastic, cylinder recordings, commonly the size and shape of a soda can, were the first commercially produced sound recordings in the decades around the turn of the 20th century.

Listen to this rare recording from 1909 from the USCB Cylinder Audio Archive of Joseph Kekuku playing a duet with John K. Pa'aluhi.

http://www.library.ucsb.edu/OBJID/Cylinder16727

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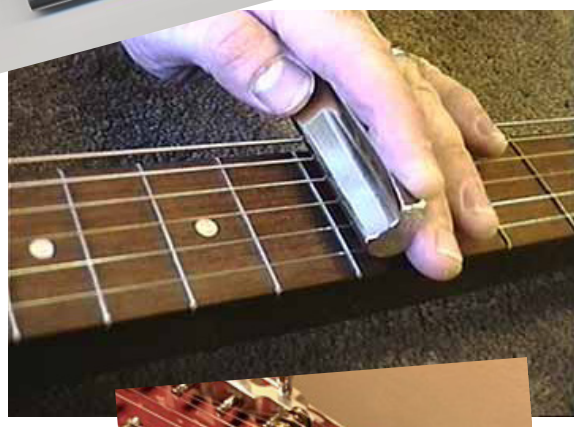
HAWAIIAN TERMS

Ōlelo Hawai'i	English Translation
Kīkā	Guitar
Kila	Steel
Kaula	String
Kani	Sound
Pa'ani	Play

EXAMPLES OF KILA (STEEL BARS)



A kila or "steel" is a smooth hard object which is pressed against strings to play steel guitar and is the reason we call it playing "steel guitar." The device can either be a solid bar which is held in the hand, or a tubular object worn around the player's finger.



Different types of kila are used to create different sounds. The solid bar is typically used when the instrument is played on the player's lap, across the knees, or otherwise supported in a horizontal position. This method of playing that began with Joseph Kekuku is historically called the "Hawaiian-style." It is also used in many genres of music and commonly associated with American Country music.



The tubular model is typically used in blues and rock music when the player holds the guitar in the traditional position, flat against the body.

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RELATED BOOKS FOR THE CLASSROOM ABOUT REAL LIFE GUITAR HEROS



- *Libba: The Magnificent Musical Life of Elizabeth Cotten* by Laura Veirs, illustrated by Tatyana Fazlalizadhe (Chronicle Books, 2018)

- *Guitar Genius: How Les Paul Engineered the Solid-Body Electric Guitar and Rocked the World* by Kim Tomsic, illustrated by Brett Helquist (Chronicle Books, 2019)

- *Gizmos, Gadgets, and Guitars: The Story of Leo Fender* by Michael Mahin, illustrated by Steven Salerno (Henry Holt and Company, 2021)

- *Little Rosetta and the Talking Guitar: The Musical Story of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the Woman Who Invented Rock and Roll* written and illustrated by Charnelle Pinkney Barlow (Doubleday, 2023)

VIDEOS

- **PBS** documentary: *The History of the Hawaiian Steel Guitar* | PBS HAWAIʻI CLASSICS (1989)
https://youtu.be/iy9XLM9XIXg?si=NIZM4Ios1j-NphPj

- *AMERICAN EPIC | Joseph Kekuku | PBS*
https://youtu.be/ek0ppdJFH30?si=KXPPDvY4rjlfmIBw

- *PBS Hawaiʻi - HIKI NŌ Episode 715 | Ka Waihona o ka Naauao | Steel Guitar*
https://youtu.be/gcBchNgXVzU?si=meksNENr-YHDYcJq

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POST SHOW DISCUSSION

DO YOU REMEMBER HOW JOSEPH DISCOVERED HIS NEW METHOD OF PLAYING THE GUITAR?

HAVE YOU EVER MADE AN ACCIDENTAL DISCOVERY THAT COULD LEAD TO AN INVENTION OR INNOVATION?

IS THERE A PART OF JOSEPH'S STORY THAT IS INSPIRING TO YOU? WHAT PART OR PARTS?

WHAT DOES "LEGACY" MEAN?
WHAT IS THE LEGACY THAT JOSEPH LEFT US?
HOW HAS THIS LEGACY INFLUENCED THE WORLD?

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF OUR PERFORMANCE? AND WHY?

CREATE YOUR OWN FOUND SOUND

In our play, Joseph makes an accidental discovery with an everyday object and creates a new sound and style of playing the guitar.

Lesson Objective

To foster creativity, creative collaboration, and exploration of environment using found objects to invent a new sound like the character in our play.

STEP 1

This activity may be done individually or in small groups of 2-3. Divide the class if making groups, then go outside (or use the classroom if outside is not possible) to begin exploring.

STEP 2

Prompt students to find an object that could be an instrument. Each student or group should collect an object.

Here are some suggestions
-Plants
-Rocks or other natural objects
-Man-made objects

STEP 3

Explore the object to create a "found" sound.

Allow time for students to explore, discuss, and play with their object.
Sample prompts:
- What does it sound like when you tap it on different surfaces or other objects.
- Can you blow into it or across it?
- Use your imagination: What are all the possible sounds it could make?

STEP 4

Share and Perform

Have the students or groups share their found sounds with the class.

STEP 5

Discuss.

Discuss the different sounds and ideas. How did the different sounds make you feel? Did any sound like instruments you already know?

STEP 6

Bonus

If time, have a jam session with all the students improvising on their "found sound" objects.

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WRITING JOURNAL

Think about the significance of imagining something new like Joseph's steel bar. What are some ideas you have for new inventions.

Lesson Objective

To generate discussion about the play, reinforce the story being told, and allow students to respond and connect to the story using their imagination.

STEP 1

Discuss the idea of an invention.

• What is an invention?

• Do you know of any other accidental discoveries that led to important inventions or innovations?

• Is there an invention you wish existed?

STEP 2

Journal for 10-15 minutes.

Write about your idea for an invention. Why does the world need this invention? How will it change the world?

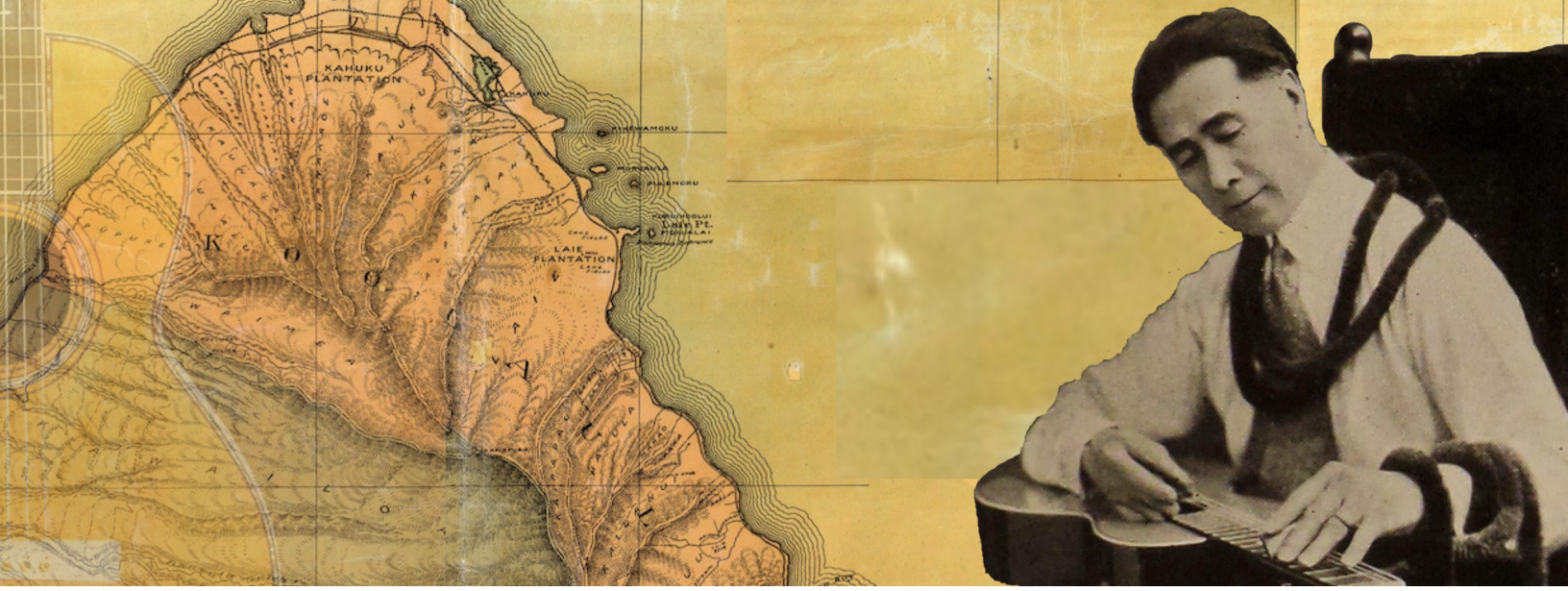
STEP 3

Share

Have the students share their ideas with the class.



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ABOUT HTY

Honolulu Theatre for Youth (HTY) is a theatre of place, deeply rooted in the cultures and people of the Pacific and dedicated to serving young people, families and educators across the Hawaiian Islands. Founded in 1955, HTY is one of the oldest professional TYA companies in the country and is recognized for its long history of innovative drama education programming and the creation of original theatrical works that celebrate the diverse cultures of Hawai‘i.

OUR COMPANY

Becky Dunning
Managing Director

Stu Hirayama
School Reservations

Brad DeCaires
Box Office

Fay Ann Chun
Grants Manager

Jian Gu
Accounting

Eric Johnson
Artistic Director

Reiko Ho
Artistic Associate/Marketing

Moses Goods
Artistic Associate/Actor

Annie Cusick Wood
Artistic Associate

Artistic Team
Jarren Amian
Chesley Cannon
Sarah Danvers
Serina Dunham
Alysia Kepa‘a
Iris Kim
Lokomaika‘i Lipscomb
Mattea Mazzella
Kaonohiokalaealohilohinei Muller
Hermenigildo Tesoro Jr.
Eric West
Emily Wright

Daniel A. Kelin, II
Director of Drama Education

Tamara Smith
Drama Ed. Administrator

Clara Whippy
Teaching Artist

Ana Narrajos
Teaching Artist

Chloe Tower
Teaching Artist

Jill Jackson
Teaching Artist

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