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## HANA OLA: The Life & Work of Michael Cord

(HANA OLA translates as “Work of Life”, or “To Grant Life”)

The world is filled with people who don't aspire to much... if they rise above the concerns for survival, they turn their attention to comfort and consumerism. Rare is the individual who sees potential, understands quality, sets out to accomplish something worthwhile and has the mind and heart it takes to see it through.

Michael Cord was a force of nature and a magnet for creative, intelligent, iconoclastic individuals who saw something of themselves in him. He had an endearing quality that created life-long friendships, taking those who were fortunate enough to collaborate with him to the next level, celebrating life every step of the way.

He left this world at 10:30 pm on May 3rd, after an incredibly magical day of love and support from family and friends who gathered at his Ojai home to send him on his way.

He was cocooned in love, toasty and warm with the embers glowing from what remained of an earlier beautiful fire. A full Scorpio moon lit the room and echoes of Ken Emerson playing sweet steel guitar by his bedside was still hanging in the room. The love of his life, his wife, Maryann Cord lay beside him. He took one last big breath filling his lungs, as if to take a great plunge into the sea, and then he was gone... headed off to the cosmos for his next big adventure.

"Michael will be remembered as the consummate archivist for Hawaiian music. He has preserved what could have been lost for all future generations," Ken Emerson offered. "His importance as a curator of Hawaiian culture should not be underestimated."

Michael Cord was born August 20, 1949 in New York, New York as Michael G.H. Badik and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada. His late father was in the gaming profession and a music enthusiast who devotedly took Michael to see all the great entertainers of the day performing live in the casinos in Las Vegas and his mother studied music at Julliard and remains active as a visual artist.

As a teenager, Michael formed a group called the Calico Blues Band. The group won the Las Vegas Battle of the Bands landing him on the cover of LOOK Magazine in 1967. Michael began his professional music career as Mike Cord, playing the bass and touring with groups throughout the United States eventually finding his way to Hawaii in 1968, where he fell in love with the people, the culture and the music. He was part of many successful groups in Hawaii such as THE SUN & THE MOON and GOLDEN THROAT. Early on Cord decided to produce his own brand of Hawaiian music.

At the time, traditional Hawaiian music was not very popular but Cord sought the acquaintance and council of the few active old timer musicians. In 1976 he started Hana Ola Records, producing the first of many award winning recordings, the self-titled "debut" album of Nohelani Cypriano.

Restless and ambitious, Cord left the Hawaiian Islands in pursuit of other ventures. Fate brought him to Ventura County, California, where, in

1981, he met his wife and record company partner, Maryann Michalski, an Ojai-born, life-long Ventura County resident. In 1991, Hana Ola Records was rejuvenated by the Cords with a wider dream - to bring back to life the classic "lost" recordings of Hawaii. It began with a passionate dedication to preserving, restoring, and releasing those "lost" or previously out of print classic recordings from Hawai'i nei.

"One of our first acquisitions was the '49th State Hawaii Records' label," Michael Cord later recalled. "Our dream was to re-release the music completely restored and remastered. The recordings were originally released on big, thick, scratchy 78-rpm discs that were played on a Victrola. There was lots of noise - hisses and pops - and we wanted the listening experience to be just like it was when these recordings were brand new - only better."

The project was driven by a passion to discover what the music sounded like when it was first recorded, to share the songs, the artists and their history.

"When we first started looking into the history and preservation of the old time Hawaiian music, artists and songs, we were told on more than one occasion, by more than one Hawaiian music industry veteran, that what we were looking for did not exist. They said 'Don't waste your time. It can't be done. All that history is lost. No one wrote it down. Just forget about it.' There was no reference place for us to go and 'look up' the information. We wondered how it was possible that real classic Hawaiian music was disappearing, and along with it, the history. So we started buying up outright or leasing the rights to more old catalogs of Hawaiian musical recordings - most of them unavailable to the public for many decades - in the hopes that we would find a way to make our dream happen."

After much research and countless inquiries, Desoto Brown a historian at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, introduced Cord to Harry B. Soria, Jr. Soria's family has been in Hawaiian radio for three generations, dating back to 1922, with Hawaii's first commercial radio station. Soria, Jr. just commemorated the 36th anniversary of his radio show "Territorial Airwaves", a tribute to, and a celebration of, the music, musicians, and radio pioneers of the pre-statehood territorial days of Hawaii.

Soria soon joined forces with Cord as the producer of his Vintage Hawaiian series. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship, and a collaboration that has lasted some twenty-five years and resulted in over thirty perfect vintage and contemporary Hawaiian anthologies, ranging from hapa haole to more traditional style hula, and eight Na Hoku Hanohano Awards (Hawaii's Grammy's).

"Michael and Maryann Cord were committed to perpetuating Hawaii's recorded musical history for future generations to enjoy and learn from," offered Harry B. Soria, Jr. "Many of today's Hawaiian music artists are regularly performing songs that Cord International restored from lost 78rpm



recordings and brought back to life for new generations to perform and dance to. Michael Cord was the risk taker, who put his money where his mouth was, and released more CD projects of vintage Hawaiian music than any other label in the past few decades. He cut no corners on the quality of the packaging, the restoration of the music, the liner notes, the photographs, and the distribution."

The audio restoration was the next big item that needed to be tackled. Cord teamed with genius audio restorer Bill Lacey of Digital Sound & Picture in White Plains, New York. Incredible care and talent went into the extremely difficult task of restoring and remastering these precious time capsules. Lacey has restored the motion picture soundtracks to "La Dolce Vita", "Hair", and "The Sound of Music" among many others.

"Through the magic of computer audio restoration, he was able to return the sound of our vintage recordings to their pristine original quality," Cord recalled. "The sound is clear and has more presence. It feels like you were in the room when they recorded it. It is truly amazing."

Word spread regarding what Michael Cord was doing. He again received enthusiastic reviews in the Hawaiian press, rave reviews in Rolling Stone Magazine and recognition in the form of nominations and awards from the Hawaiian Academy of Recording Arts.

Soon a kindred soul also interested in preserving Hawaii's rich folk music history got in touch with Michael. The legendary pianist George Winston had long been doing his part to educate audiences around the world about his favorite music - the finger style solo guitar tradition from Hawaii known as ki'ho'alu or slack key guitar, including a few slack key guitar songs in his more than 100 solo concerts each year. He also created Dancing Cat Records, with the goal of recording musicians whose music Winston, too, felt needed to be preserved for future generations.

In 1997, Cord and Winston combined their resources and their passion for the music to produce "The History of Slack Key Guitar", an anthology of the first 20 commercial recordings of Hawaiian slack key guitar, with expanded historical liner notes complete with tuning guidelines for each cut. It has been praised as the definitive collection of slack key firsts. Cord and Winston went on to produce three anthologies together.

"Michael was a wonderful person

and he was such a great curator or music, giving us so many things to hear for study and inspiration, that we would have never been able to hear," George Winston offered, hearing of Cord's passing.

While engaged in the work of promoting the music, Cord experienced a remarkable phenomenon. Part of the original 49th State Hawaii Records catalog contained a series of recordings of Japanese music of Hawaii. A Japanese company had expressed interest in some of what Cord thought were obscure recordings, so he released a single CD of Japanese songs intended only for export. The liner notes were written in Kanji (pictorial characters), and translated into English. A newspaper reviewer in Hawaii came across one of the discs and published a brief, favorable critique. That review set off an unprecedented huge demand for the music. Cord quickly went to work and created Club Nisei, which ultimately spawned an entire new series of Japanese Music of Hawaii. "It just proves that Hawaii is truly the great melting pot of cultures," Cord later noted. "Club Nisei was a wild ride. We couldn't keep the CDs in the stores in Hawaii, where there was a buying frenzy. We ended up producing seven different discs in the Japanese series."

Soon afterward, Cord decided that collaboration with long time friend and radio personality Aloha Joe would be a natural. They would focus on more contemporary Hawaiian music. Aloha Joe recalls, "When I was first starting out in radio over twenty years ago, Cord was one of the few who would actually talk to me and send me promos of his music." Today, Aloha Joe hosts the most listened to Hawaiian radio show worldwide. He has been instrumental in the promotion of music from Hawaii through his website and shows. It was a perfect marriage. The "A Place Called Hawaii" Series was born, and became another huge record selling phenomenon.

"Way back when I started broadcasting, one of the first calls I made was to Michael Cord, as his name and number were on a Hawaiian CD that I bought to play on my newly created radio program," Aloha Joe recalls. "Michael listened to my idea



and asked for my address and several days later, we received a box with seventeen CDs - his entire collection at the time. Michael included a note wishing us good luck and hoping that we'd continue to blast his music worldwide. I feel a great sense of loss, but then I look at the shelf with his 130+ releases and I know that a part of Michael is here, on the air 24/7/365."

Today, Cord International & Hana Ola Records currently controls, owns, or has licenses for a catalog of several thousand Hawaiian song recordings, the oldest dating back to the 1920s.

The Cord International Catalog encompasses the sounds of vintage, contemporary, hapa-haole, traditional hula & chant, and so much more real Hawaiian music. As Cord explained, the discs themselves and the process to get them to the public was extraordinary: "Besides the exhaustive computer audio restoration and digital remastering, a team of passionate historians and researchers put together extensive historical liner notes and search for rare or previously unpublished photographs of the artists. It places the music in the proper context. You get an education in the history of the music, the songs, and the artists. The listening experience is enhanced."

Ultimately, Michael Cord credited Hana Ola Records' success to the solid nature of the sound and the talent - the music and the artists: "People still enjoy listening to the Hawaiian sound. This music is classic and should be preserved and cherished for more than just our lifetime. Back in the day it was 'THE' musical lure of the Islands. The music alone enticed millions. The recordings are a very important part of the musical history of Hawaii and we should treasure them... Our music is real - it's straightforward, simple, and from the heart."

Over the years, the Hawaiian Academy of Recording Arts and its membership has recognized Cord International & Hana Ola Records work with many nominations and multiple Na Hoku Hanohano Awards. Cord has also been recognized with multiple Hawaii Music Awards for among other things, "Compilation of the Year" for three years in a row. As John Berger writes in Hawaiian Music & Musicians: An Encyclopedic History: "Record producer Michael Cord envisioned a much larger series of CD anthologies that would bring as much of the old music back into print as possible with state of the art restoration an extensive annotation as well... The importance of serious work with Cord as a producer and annotator cannot be overstated. His willingness to share the information and his archives with other researchers is another valuable contribution to the overall preservation and perpetuation of Hawaiian music and our knowledge of it."

With a catalog of over 150 different releases, by over 400 artists, and over 2500 tracks, Cord International & Hana Ola Records extensive Catalog of Hawaiian music is often licensed for film, television, commercials, & documentary soundtracks. Numerous songs have appeared in all of the above genres including the blockbuster feature films, Pearl Harbor and Memoirs of a Geisha. In 2011, The Descendants, starring George Clooney, became the first mainstream American movie scored exclusively with Hawaiian music, most of it created by acknowledged masters of the genre, both modern and classical. The filmmakers sought to make a movie with a distinctly Hawaiian flavor, and the music was a crucial component. It serves as an eye-opening introduction to some of Hawaiian music's greatest and most essential artists. The film score and soundtrack featured music from the Cord International & Hana Ola Record Catalog and was #1 on the Billboard World Chart for several weeks.

"Michael Cord was such an important figure for the preservation of Hawaiian heritage... keeping alive music that would otherwise have faded," noted Richard Ford, Executive Music Producer for the film The Descendants offered.

Just a week before his passing, Michael Cord was working with SONY Pictures to arrange for the inclusion of a number of works from the catalog to be featured in the upcoming Cameron

Crowe film Aloha, starring Bradley Cooper, Emma Stone, Rachel McAdams, John Krasinski and Bill Murray. This is certainly not the last of the major projects that will involve the music that Michael Cord devoted his life to - a legacy that will carry on to the delight of music enthusiasts, while introducing the larger public to the music of Hawaii.



## Thoughts from friends

"In his heart, Michael Cord was Hawaiian. It was this aloha that inspired him to record, release and promote traditional Hawaiian music at a time when most others were experimenting with 'new' sounds and songs. He was able to resurrect, remaster and save many of the greatest recordings ever of Hawaiian music, music performed by many of my friends of days gone by. He was my friend, and he is missed." - **Cordell Keith Haugen**, Recording artist/-producer.

"All who have crossed his threshold know the radiance of "Big MC". His soul casts rays of abundance, crème de la crème in good taste, fun, humor, and most of all, love. Michael's generosity includes that of expanding my consciousness through many ways- an animated conversation, a beautifully chosen mango, the history of a rare antique, his last breaths- His passionate routine of stewarding a constant and lavish arrangement of flowers for Maryann comes to heart as I see and smell the Matilija Poppy, Scotch Broom, Lupine, and Cyanosis on the Maricopa. A spectacular bloom this year- the entire mountainside- finally expressing a Michael Cord sized bouquet." **Teal Rowe**, Artist & Astrologer

"Our creative community has lost a giant. Michael Cord was a beautiful spirit who dedicated his life to music and to the culture of Hawaii. He dedicated his life to preserving the rich musical history of the islands. Michael leaves behind a rich cultural legacy that few could compare. He was a warm and generous spirit and a gift to all who knew him." - **Donna Granata**, Founder & Executive Director, Focus on the Masters.

"Michael Cord's contributions to the preservation of 20th century Hawaiian music will be valued by generations yet unborn." - **John Berger**, Honolulu.

"Musicians in Hawaii today owe Michael Cord a great debt of gratitude for all the vintage vinyls he remastered and released on CD over the years" - **Auntie Maria Hickling**, Kauai Community Radio.

