



cover  
story

**NOTE:**

Sunday's concert also features Prokofiev's "Symphony No. 5, op.100," considered his greatest work.

**ALSO:**

The symphony performs a holiday pops concert at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, featuring Hawaiian vocalist Amy Hanaiali'i; \$27-\$79, ticketmaster.com or 800-745-3000

**'MALAMA 'AINA'**

Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra, with guest soloist and composer Jeff Peterson; guest conductor Carl St. Clair

**WHERE:**

Blaisdell Concert Hall

**WHEN:**

4 p.m. Sunday

**COST:**

\$34-\$92

**INFO:**

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# Concerto FOR THE land

By Steven Mark

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*Jeff Peterson channels Hawaiian slack key tradition in his new concerto "Malama 'Aina"*

If you were a Russian back in the mid-1870's and heard Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto – now the most popular work in the repertoire – you would immediately have recognized the numerous Russian folk dances and themes that the composer used throughout the piece.

Local music fans will have a similar experience at the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra concert Sunday, when slack key master Jeff Peterson performs "Malama 'Aina," the first concerto written for slack key guitar and orchestra. From its nature-inspired themes to the familiar vamps and riffs of Hawaiian music, the work resounds with the slack key tradition, which is based on special guitar tunings that Hawaiian paniolo used to create its uniquely rich and melodious style.

Peterson is a formally trained musician with expertise in classical, jazz and pop as well as slack key, earning him a reputation as one of the islands' most versatile and virtuosic musicians. But even he found it daunting to blend orchestral sonorities with slack key guitar to create an authentic classical concerto.

"It was totally out of my realm," said Peterson, 45. "For me, it was like going back



**VIDEO ONLINE**

For video of Jeff Peterson playing slack key guitar, visit [staradvertiser.com/tgif](http://staradvertiser.com/tgif)

to school, studying scores and orchestration books. I spent a whole year researching and writing, so it was a great project for me. It's probably the most energy I've ever put into one composition."

"Malama 'Aina" (to care for and nurture the land) was commissioned by Peter Askim, formerly a bassist for the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra and now a music professor at North Carolina State University, as part of the commemoration of National Park Service's centennial celebration. Given that as inspiration, Peterson dedicated its three movements to the three volcanoes in Hawaii that are part of the Park Service: Haleakala, Kilauea and Mauna Loa.

Peterson grew up on Haleakala, where his father was a paniolo, and has visited the other sites frequently. He wrote the piece with the majestic landscapes and natural beauty of Hawaii in mind, remembering the horseback and hiking trips he took as a youth.

"I wanted to have a lot of this reflected in a very personal and subjective way, thinking of images and scenes as I was writing, so that each movement goes through many different ideas and sections," he said.

PETERSON, who studied music at the University of Southern California and graduated from the University of Hawaii-Manoa, researched composers including Mozart, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Ravel, as well guitar masters Rodrigo de Aranjuez and Heitor Villa-Lobos, "looking at basic ideas for mapping out how to voice

even a single chord," he said. "There are so many instruments involved, and so many colors. I had a wider palette than I'm normally used to."

A further challenge was having to imagine those sounds in his head, "wishing that I had a whole orchestra in my living room so I could say, 'Hey guys, take it from bar 58!'"

Peterson wound up using some classic methods for concerto construction.

Some sections use a "call-and-response" format between guitar and orchestral instruments; in other sections, he would "write for the orchestra as if it were a giant slack-key guitar."

"Usually when you play the guitar, it can be like a mini-orchestra itself, where you have independent base-lines, accompaniment and melodies happening," he said. "So to be able to bring out those sounds, those harmonies and everything, that

was really exciting."

Periodically he would send his music to Askim, a respected composer of contemporary music, for comment. That helped immeasurably, Peterson said.

Askim provided tips such as not having the oboe and flute play in unison because the sounds of the two instruments clash. "It's OK if they're an octave apart, but not exactly the same note," Peterson said.

Peterson said he especially enjoyed writing for flute, which is featured in the concerto's moody second movement, "Kilauaea." He based the theme on an imagined oli to Madame Pele and the swift, misty winds that sweep down Mauna Loa.

"The flute carries these really brilliant lines, which are very challenging," he said. "There are some things that wouldn't work on guitar that I could translate to other in-

struments. Things that I could hear in my mind that I couldn't execute, I could now have performed."

Peterson's cinematic work pays tribute to some of the great slack key masters, with references to the fleet fingers of Ledward Kaapana, the joyful charm of Sonny Chillingworth and the introspective soulfulness of Keola Beamer.

The energetic third movement, "Mauna Loa," was inspired by "Holoholo Ka'a" (Joy Ride), a song by Clarence Kinney, while other riffs come from Auntie Alice Namakelua and Gabby Pahinui's "Hi'ilawe." (As Igor Stravinsky once said, "Good composers borrow. Great composers steal.")

Peterson took those themes and motifs and toyed with them, expanding on and developing them. He would name them after the alphabet: the "A" theme, "B" theme, etc. "I went through

the whole alphabet," he said laughing. "I think it goes off to section TT. The idea is that idea can evolve into other sections."

THE CONCERTO has been performed once, in North Carolina. Peterson is eager to perform it here.

"It was something I always hoped for," he said.

Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra artistic director JoAnn Falletta, an award-winning classical guitarist herself, welcomes the work into the guitar repertoire.

"We are always pleased when we can feature a wonderful piece of music that is a new discovery for our audience, and also has a special relationship to the culture of Hawaii," she said in an email. "Jeff Peterson is a virtuoso of the slack key guitar style, which is one of the most genuine and moving expressions of the Hawaiian spirit."



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