

Ken Emerson

# SACRED

SLACK & STEEL

*guitar*



# Ken Emerson SACRED SLACK & STEEL GUITAR

Many of the classic American spirituals came out of the 'Deep South.' I have always wanted to record an album of old spiritual songs and feature the distinct sounds of my vintage National Resophonic guitars. I have also desired to blend the Hawaiian slide and slack key styles back with musical genres that are in many ways offshoots and heavily influenced by the Hawaiian slide guitar, mainly Country steel guitar, Bluegrass Dobro and Blues bottleneck slide music, particularly acoustic Delta Blues. This project is a cohesion of these styles which all partially owe their beginnings to the early Hawaiian musicians who first developed the art of slide guitar in the late 1800's. The slack key guitar is a natural, welcome addition to this type of music to bring it full circle.

This all-instrumental album was partially designed for folks to sing along with, jam with their ukuleles or spoons or what have you, and make a joyous noise!

*Aloha Nui Loa,  
K.E.,  
Kauai, Hawaii 2014*



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**Guitar tunings and chord charts for this recording available at  
[www.cordinternational.com](http://www.cordinternational.com)**

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1. **Radio Intro** – Robert Armstrong
2. **Jesus On The Mainline.** Origin not known, it's not believed to be an old traditional song but most likely written in the 1920's country blues style. First known recording by Mississippi Fred McDowell in the early 1950's by Alan Lomax.
3. **Down By The Riverside.** An old traditional Gospel song, published in "Plantation Melodies," 1918. The song was first recorded by the Fisk University Quartette in 1920.
4. **In The Sweet By and By.** First published in 1868 by J.P. Webster and S. Bennett, this hymn was immensely popular in the 19th century and has become a gospel standard. Another hymn played in the New Orleans jazz tradition and in the American Country and Bluegrass styles.
5. **Ezekiel's Wheels.** An original tune played in the style of country bluesman Bukka White, one of Ken's major influences. Here in an uptempo delta bottleneck style played on a 1930 National Style O resonator guitar, the circular picking patterns suggest the Prophet Ezekiel's vision of a "wheel within a wheel" (Ezekiel 1:16).
6. **Joshua Fit The Battle At Jericho.** A well known African American spiritual, the song is believed to have been composed by slaves in the first half of the 19th century. The lyrics allude to the biblical story of the Battle of Jericho, in which Joshua led the Israelites against Canaan. (Joshua 6:15-21). However, like those of many other spirituals, the words may be alluding to eventual escape from slavery. Critic Robert Cummings wrote, "The jaunty, spirited theme would not sound out of place in a ragtime or jazz musical from the early 20th century." Here, Ken puts a decidedly 1920's klezmer jazz vibe on the 1928 National Tricone steel guitar à la Sol Ho'opi'i.
7. **Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.** An historic African American spiritual written by Wallis Wallis, a Choctaw freedman in Choctaw County, Oklahoma Territory before 1862. He was inspired by the Red River, which reminded him of the Jordan River and of the Prophet Elijah being taken to Heaven by a chariot (2 Kings 2:11). The earliest recording was by the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1909.
8. **Just A Closer Walk With Thee.** A traditional Gospel song performed most frequently in the hymn and dirge sections of New Orleans jazz funerals. Author is unknown. It dates back to Southern African American churches, possibly prior to the Civil War.
9. **Give Me That Old Time Religion.** This is a traditional Gospel song dating from 1873. It may have had English folk origins but has been kept alive in the work songs of African Americans. The song has had a huge influence on the confluence of black spiritual and white Gospel song traditions now known as Southern Gospel.

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10. **I'll Fly Away.** 1929. Albert Brumley has been described as the “pre-eminent gospel songwriter of the 20th century.” He came up with the song while picking cotton on his father’s farm in Rock Island, Oklahoma in the 1920’s. Humming part of “The Prisoners Song,” he later worked out the song, paraphrasing one line to read “like a bird from prison bars has flown,” using prison as an analogy for earthly life.
11. **End Of My Journey.** Ken learned this song from “Kid” Thomas Valentine, during a courtyard party in the French Quarter while on a trip to New Orleans to perform at the 1983 Jazz Heritage Festival. Originally a traditional, created in 1933 by Lucie Campbell, titled “He’ll Understand And Say Well Done,” it was retitled “End Of My Journey” and recorded by the Soul Stirrers featuring a young Sam Cooke.
12. **Go Tell It On The Mountain.** This song is an African American spiritual, compiled by John Wesley Work, Jr., dating back to possibly before 1865. It has been considered a Christmas carol because the original lyrics celebrate the nativity of Jesus.
13. **This Little Light Of Mine.** Originally a gospel children’s song written by teacher and composer Harry Dixon Loes in 1920. Entering the folk tradition being collected by John Lomax in 1939, it is often thought of as an African American spiritual, however it does not appear in any collection of jubilee or plantation songs of the 19th century.
14. **When The Saints Go Marching In.** Often referred to as “The Saints,” this is an American gospel hymn. The precise origins of the song are not known. Though originally a Christian hymn, it is often played by jazz bands. Louis Armstrong was one of the first to make it a nationally known pop tune in the 1930’s. It is nicknamed “The Monster” by some traditional jazz musicians, as it is a frequent request. The musicians at Preservation Hall in New Orleans got so tired of playing the song that in the 1960’s, a sign announcing the band’s fee schedule ran \$1 for standard requests, \$2 for unusual requests, and \$5 for “The Saints.” By 2014, the price had gone up to \$20.
15. **Amazing Grace.** One of the most recognizable Christian hymns in the world. First published in 1779 in text by English poet and clergyman John Newton, the melody “New Britain” was first published in 1829 in Cincinnati by Charles Spilman and Benjamin Shaw. “New Britain” was wedded to Newton’s text in 1835 by composer William Walker to form the hymn familiar today. Played bottleneck style on 1930 National Style O model.

*Thanks and mahalo to Almighty Akua, the Emerson Ohana, the Campbell Brothers, Foxtail Sound, Hana Ola Records, National Resophonic Guitars and Taylor Guitars. Special thanks to Robert Armstrong, Tony Kaimalino, Harry B. Soria and John Berger. Dedicated to Reverend Dennis Kamakahi and Arthur Schramm.*

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Born into a musical family, Grammy recognized recording artist Ken Lopaka Emerson began playing guitar at age ten and was exposed to a wide assortment of jazz, swing, country, Celtic and Hawaiian music through his father's extensive record collection. Growing up in Ewa Beach, Hawaii in the '60s, Ken and his brother Phil were fascinated with the sound of vintage acoustic steel and slack key guitar. Ken began sliding a harmonica on the neck of his guitar to duplicate the sound. Later, the brothers would learn first-hand by seeking out and playing with Hawaiian artists such as Gabby Pahinui, Sol K. Bright, Alice Namakelua, David Keli'i and Alvin K. Isaacs. Those mentors, along with a passion for rare 78 rpm Hawaiian recordings, have shaped Ken's style, which combines the earliest forms of traditional steel guitar, 1920's Hawaiian Blues, '30s jazz and the swing era of the '40s. He also plays a style he calls "slack/steel," which incorporates traditional slack key guitar techniques with the unique characteristics of steel guitar.



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Produced by Michael Cord and Ken Emerson

**Recorded in Kaua'i, Hawaii at:**

Ka'io Music Studio, Kalihiwai

Treble in Paradise Studio, Princeville

Engineer: Ken Emerson

Foxtail Sound Studio, Dixon, CA [www.foxtailsound.com](http://www.foxtailsound.com)

Engineer: Steve O'Neill

Mastering: Lee Herschberg, LH Mastering, Camarillo, CA

Photo of Ken Emerson: Sara Wall, Kaua'i, HI

Legal Affairs: Bill Meyer

Production Assistant: Elaine Hoffman

Art Direction: Maryann Cord

Layout: Amy Lyn Pace

Director of Internet Communications: Aloha Joe

**All musical arrangements and instruments played by Ken Emerson.** Instruments used:

1928 National tricone steel guitar, 1930 National

Style 'O' guitar, 1940's Kay double bass, 1930

Martin Style 2 uke, 2001 Taylor 414ce guitar.



Visit our website at

[www.cordinternational.com](http://www.cordinternational.com)

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