

The Strange Case of "Hula Love"

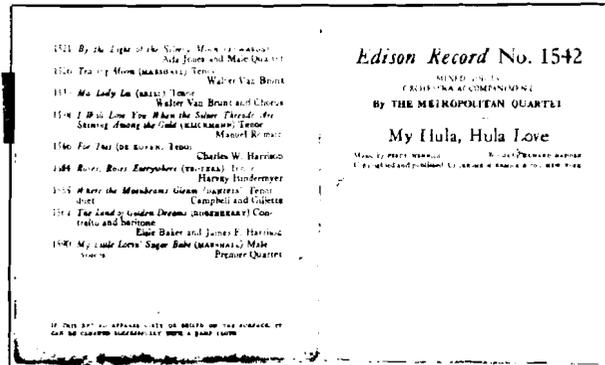
by Tim Brooks

One of the interesting aspects of collecting 78s as well as 45s is occasionally coming across an old recording of a song which you thought was written in the rock era. In the case about to be described, a collector's curiosity about such a "revival" led to the righting of a 20-year wrong. Or did it?

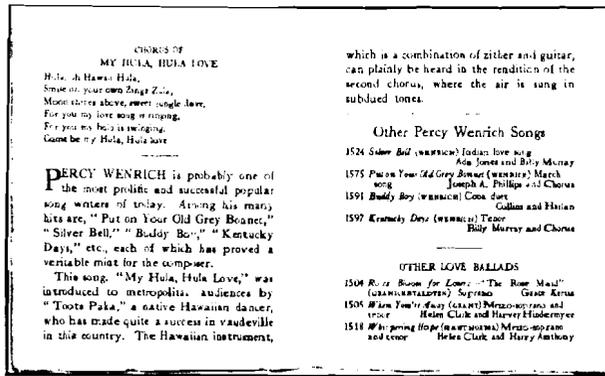
Revivals of old songs — sometimes very old songs — are not uncommon in the music business. Nor, unfortunately, is good old-fashioned plagiarism, sometimes obvious and sometimes quite subtle. One of the most famous cases of perfectly legal song appropriation was Elvis Presley's 1956 million seller "Love Me Tender", copyrighted by Presley himself with no indication that the melody was lifted directly from an 1861 composition called "Aura Lee". However, seldom has a song been resurrected after such a long period of obscurity and in such a drastically altered style as in the following case.

The story began one winter's evening as I was playing through a newly acquired box of 78s. One of them, a 1911 Victor record, sounded oddly familiar. But from where? The title was "My Hula Hula Love", and a little detective work turned up the source of the familiarity. It was the same song, note for note and word for word, as the 1957 rock 'n' roll hit "Hula Love" by Buddy Knox. So much for the roots of rock!

So far only a curiosity. But not everything matched. The writers listed on the label of the 1911 Victor were Percy Wenrich and Edward Madden, two of the top songsmiths of that day (they wrote "Silver Bell" and "Moonlight Bay" among others). It was published by Remick Music, an old-line publisher which is still in existence today. But the label of Knox's 1957 record gave author credits to "Knox", and named Kahl Music as the publisher. In addition, the 1911 tune was licensed by ASCAP (which Wenrich and Madden helped to found),



When Edison began issuing unbreakable, celluloid cylinders in 1912, he enclosed a little brochure with each one — the 1912 equivalent of today's liner notes! These notes came with Edison's cylinder of "Hula Love".



while the 1957 hit was controlled by the newer BMI licensing society. I began to get curious.

Letters to ASCAP and BMI revealed that neither knew of the other's song, although both were interested. It also turned out that the 1957 "Hula Love" was actually copyrighted by four people, Buddy Knox, Jimmy Bowen, Dan Lanier and Dave Aldred. The latter three formed Knox's backup group, the Rhythm Orchids. "Hula Love" was a major hit for them, reaching as high as #12 on Billboard's charts during 1957, which suggests a sale in the neighborhood of half a million copies or more. The song received heavy radio exposure, was recorded by other artists, and was featured in the Warner Brothers motion picture *Jamboree*, in which Knox appeared. Eight years later Knox's "Hula Love" was recorded again by country star Hank Snow, and it became a major hit on the country charts in 1965-66.

All of which meant a lot of money for "composer" Knox and his friends.

The original Madden-Wenrich song was only a moderate hit in its day, although it was recorded on at least four other labels besides Victor (see listing). Part of this widespread recording activity was probably due to the fact that Wenrich had just produced several enormous hits, including "Put On Your Old Grey Bonnet" (1909) and "Silver Bell" (1910). Columbia's version of his new "Hula" number was by none other than his wife, vaudeville performer Dolly Connolly, in her first recording. The female on the versions on Victor and its subsidiary label Zonophone was Ada Jones, one of the most popular female recording artists of the day, while the Edison was by a rather sober-sounding group called the Metropolitan Quartet.

Though not as big as Wenrich's previous hits, "My

"Hula Hula Love" did stay in the record company catalogs for 15 years or more. Perhaps this was due to the song's popularity among touring troupes of Hawaiian musicians during the Hawaiian music craze in the 1910s. The Edison publicity flyer for its 1912 cylinder recording of the number said that the song "was introduced to metropolitan audiences by Toots Paka, a native Hawaiian dancer, who has made quite a success in vaudeville in this country." A Hawaiian guitar version by Pale K. Lua and David Kaili of the Irene West Hawaiian Troupe was issued by Victor in 1916. At the time Victor called it one of their "fascinating guitar numbers."

All of these recorded versions went out of print by the end of the 1920s. The song did not disappear entirely, though; I have an ASCAP directory of the songs played on radio during 1937 which shows that it was heard on radio several dozen times even in that year. It surfaced again in 1948, when the legendary bluesman Leadbelly recorded it in one of his last sessions. He treated it as an authentic folk song, and called it simply "Hawaiian Song".

By the 1950s it was completely forgotten. How did four young rock musicians — Knox was only 24 at the time — turn up such an antique? Possibly through "Kahl Music". Phil Kahl, in addition to being boys' manager, was a music business veteran.

However they dug up "My Hula Hula Love", no one seems to have noticed the coincidence during "Hula Love"'s enormous popularity or for many years thereafter. Not, in fact, until ASCAP passed my letter along to Remick Music, which showed an immediate interest. Little wonder. They, and the heirs of Wenrich and Madden, stood entitled to all composer royalties from the 1957 and 1965 hits.

Ironically, Remick is now owned by Warner Brothers, the company that made the 1957 movie that featured the song. Warners presumably paid for the rights to use their own song in 1957!

While Remick at first showed great interest in learning that their song had been appropriated by someone else, they subsequently became very closed-mouthed about the whole affair, at least to me. When I inquired several months later about what had happened, they would only say curtly that the matter had been settled out of court and "we do not feel we should authorize any

further publicity in this."

It's interesting to see how a commercial pseudo-Hawaiian pop tune of so long ago wandered through so many musical genres — from blues (Leadbelly) to rock (Knox) to country (Snow). Not to mention that strait-laced rendition on Edison cylinders by the Metropolitan Quartet, which sounds like it was made in church!

Percy Wenrich and Edward Madden did not live to see their song became a hit among the rock generation. Both men died in 1952. But next time you're in a record store, and see an LP of 1950s hits including "Hula Love", note the composer credits. Perhaps at last Wenrich and Madden will receive credit for a clever little song that appealed to record buyers of both the 1910s and the 1950s, "My Hula Hula Love".

Recordings of "My Hula Hula Love"

Cylinder recordings:	Released
Edison 10515 (2 minute wax cylinder) — Metropolitan Quarter	Sept. 1911
Edison Amberol 742 (4 minutes wax cylinder) — Metropolitan Quartet	Aug. 1911
Edison Blue Amberol 1542 (4 minutes celluloid cylinder) — Metropolitan Quarter	Nov. 1912
Indestructible 1505 (2 minute celluloid) — Peerless Quartet	Fall 1911
78 RPM recordings:	
Victor 16910 — Ada Jones and Billy Murray	Sept. 1911
Columbia A1028 — Dolly Connolly	Sept. 1911
Zonophone 5791 — Ada Jones and Walter Van Brunt	Oct. 1911
Victor 17863 — Pale K. Lua & David K. Kaili, of the Irene West Royal Hawaiians	Mar. 1916
LP (selection #45, "Hawaiian Song"):	
Folkways FP 2941D, "Leadbelly's Last Sessions," Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter) (Recorded Oct. 1948)	1953
45 RPM recordings (as "Hula Love"):	
Roulette R-4018 — Buddy Knox with the Rhythm Orchids	1957
RCA Victor 47-9012 — Hank Snow (produced by Chet Atkins)	1965

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