

KATHOLO'ANA

"My Work Is Here"

Patrick Makuakāne reflects on the history of his hālau

By Jenny Des Jarlais

In 1985, Patrick Makuakāne, who had come to California to get a Physical Education degree from San Francisco State, yielded to requests and started a small hula class in a studio on Sanchez Street. Twenty years later, Makuakāne is a kumu hula whose hālau is renowned in the Bay Area and beyond. In a conversation with Jenny Des Jarlais, one of the members of his performing troupe, Makuakāne reflects on his two decades as a teacher of Hawaiian dance.

Q As you drove to your first Nā Lei Hulu class, what was running through your mind?

A I was really, really excited. Here I was in this foreign place, strange and wonderful San Francisco, which seemed so separate from Hawai'i. But a key ingredient that had made my life so wonderful back home—hula—was going to be here as well. I felt grateful. A little apprehensive, too. The fact that I'd been a dancer for Robert Cazimero opened up doors for me, but I still had to prove myself. I was nervous about properly honoring my hula lineage.

Q If you could've looked 20 years into the future, what about the hālau today would've surprised you?

A For one thing, I never would've thought so many students would come through our doors. There've been hundreds and hundreds. And I never expected us to come as far as we have professionally—in the performances we've done and the places we've been, and in the respect we've earned from the hula community, the arts community, and the community at large. Having experienced such acclamation myself with the Brothers Cazimero, I had thought, "Oh, my poor hālau, I'm sorry you're stuck here in



years

California. You're not going to experience a fraction of what I have, but we'll just try our best." And now it's like, "Hey, you frickas are doing a lot more stuff than I did when I was in hula, goddammit!" [He laughs.] Really, I'm thrilled all this has happened, but I never expected it to.

Q Has the hālau been through any rough patches?

A One of the most difficult times was a few years ago when some producers in New York wanted to set us up for a Broadway production. I got really excited about it but they had a vision of what

they wanted, and of course I had my own. Some of it overlapped and some of it didn't, and I recognized that I'd have to give up some things. But the worst part was having to tell my dancers, "I can only take some of you. For the rest of you, I'm so sorry, but I'll be back." Oh, it was horrible. I was trying to figure out how I could teach by video, come back to teach class in person once a month, go back and do the show. No. When reality hit about all I would have to give up, I realized how much I loved what I was doing, and I decided to pass on that show. The best thing about the offer was that someone recognized our potential. That was a great compliment. But it was a big lesson for me—I appreciate

now that my work is here.

Q Have you had any embarrassing hula moments?

A Yes! When I was dancing in Shawna's show in Marin, last year. There I am, dancing "Kāne'ohe," while Shawna's playing. We're smiling at each other and having a fabulous time because we did our 'ūniki together in Kāne'ohe. I'm dancing like Mr. Kāne'ohe, like I just won the title. But something is off. I can almost hear a buzzing from the audience. "OK," I say to myself, "Whatever, ba dum dum pau." As soon as I get offstage, the stage-

(continued on page 2)

“My Work Is Here”

(continued from page 1)

hand says, “You have a big hole in your pants!” I was wearing black pants with white underwear, and the hole was right in the middle of my crotch. You could only see it when I did an ‘uehe. When I did ‘uehes it was like a headlight! And I had a lot of ‘uehes in that dance—side to side ‘uehes, big open ‘uehes. Later Shawna comes over and says, “That Patrick, as long as I’ve known him, he’s always tried to take the attention away from me!” At the end of the show, when we did our final bow, I came out with my pants over my shoulder, carrying a needle and thread. I heard underwear jokes after that for days. Somebody I didn’t know even stopped me on Market Street and said, “Patrick, two words for you: black underwear!”

Q In class, you tend to compliment or criticize the overall group, rather than singling people out. Why?

A Making people feel bad is really hard for me. You wouldn’t think it by the little outbursts I have in Sunday class. But I remember feeling really bad when I got personally scolded at hula. So perhaps to my students’ detriment, I stay away from individual criticisms. What I try to do instead is be as motivating as possible. I try to teach with a persona that’s other than ordinary, and I like to use humor. Robert Cazimero [kumu hula of Nā Kamalei]

did that, and I saw that it was an effective tool. I know when I’m teaching I wear my emotions on my sleeve. But I’m open to learning more about myself and how I can be a better teacher—the way I instruct right now is not a closed book.

Q If your students banded together and forced you to take a few months off, what would you do with your time?

A Hmm. Probably travel, because I have hula every other day and on the weekends, so normally I can’t really travel. But it’s funny, I think about hula incessantly, so I don’t know how long I could stay away. I’ve gone to Europe a few times and just loved it, partly because I compare its old cultures to Hawaiian culture. On the one hand, I see how these old cultures have physical evidence of

having thrived for thousands of years, and it makes me wish we had that, too. Oh my god, they have a basilica! I want a basilica! But on the other hand, it makes me appreciate our culture all the more. Hawaiians don’t have those kinds of things because the culture was so organic—everything came from nature and returned to it, and that’s very special.

Q As a teacher, is there any one thing you want to be sure to pass on?

A Two things, really. One is for my dancers to really enjoy themselves and have fun. I had so much fun in hula, myself. Yeah, we worked hard and sometimes were yelled at and criticized and given mean evil glances that destroyed us. But for the most part I just had a good time being with my hula brothers and hula

sisters. The second thing is related to that—I want my dancers to have a strong feeling of community, to care about one another. Every time I start a new class, I tell everyone, “Look around this room. Some of these people are going to become friends with you for life.” Hula becomes about so much more than just the dancing. ♪



Patrick Makuakane at his ‘anihi ceremony

1985

The hālau launches, with fourteen students, in a small studio on Sanchez Street. Not even a hālau yet, just a dance class.

1986

In our first hula competition, at Onipa’a in San Jose, we don’t even place! • The six-woman performance troupe is now called Nā Lei Hulu O Ka’ahumanu. • Rehearsals move to Star of the Sea.

1987



Patrick Makuakane and Scott Galateria at a Kapalakiko Hawaiian Band fundraiser

I was with Nā Lei Hulu from 1986 to about 1990, and now I live in Wailea, where my daughter dances and recently won the Pacific Island Princess Pageant for the island of Maui. My experiences with the hālau all started in 1986 with a workshop that Kawehi Lucas invited me to. I was excited because I had heard so many wonderful things about Patrick Makuakāne. I remember having a dream the night before the workshop in which Taddy and I arrived late. Patrick greeted us with his charming smile and said, "OK! You two will do a thousand 'uehe for arriving late." I remember sharing my story with my hula sisters on the way to the workshop. We were all in fear of arriving late! We learned "Aloha Kauai" that day, which is the only song I can get up and dance without thinking of the motions. My favorite memory, though, is of the time we stayed in Los Gatos at the convent for retired nuns!

— *Kehaulani Munos*



Kumu Patrick portrays Dandy Joane in 1989

I have many memories of when Kumu first came to town and started teaching hula on Sanchez Street. I have seen so many wonderful and talented dancers come and go through our doors. Some of them, like Makani da Silva, whose mom was once my roommate, I've known since birth. My favorite memory of all the shows was the opening number of the first Hula Show. Makani was dressed in red and dancing "Kalua." That song has always been one of my favorites, and I've seen a lot of people dance it. But in that moment, Makani became that song, she became Kalua. She embodied everything that song has always meant to me. And I have to say, that was the first time that I saw her as a grown woman. The tears welled up in my eyes as I sat there, mesmerized by her performance, realizing how much she put herself into that dance and how much she had grown as a hula dancer.



Richard K. Tavares



Makani da Silva

— *Richard K. Tavares*



1988

In our first Las Vegas Hula Competition, Ka Lā Hula Ho'okūkū, we win first place in every category. • The first "hālau baby," Rachel Kealao-kapuamelia Smith, is born; she is kicked out of rehearsal for crying too much. What a kumu!

1989

Taddy Bukowski [above left] wins the Las Vegas solo competition, Miss Ka Lā Hula Ho'okūkū. • Shawna Ngum moves to San Francisco—hula sister to the rescue! • Our first Christmas show at Mercy High School: *A Hawaiian Christmas Evening*.

1990

Our first appearance at the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival celebrates the Hawaiian monarchy; Shawna plays Ka'iulani.

I was in hālau from 1988 to 1996 (too long ago to remember with much accuracy). I am back home on Maui now and work at the county of Maui as the first deputy corporation counsel. I am married to Rodney Villarosa, and we have a five-year-old daughter, Kahuluhiwhiwa, who started dancing hula last year. The hālau was my family while I was living in the Bay Area. So it is not surprising that my memories of hālau are those that one would have of a typical family—love,



laughter, tears, growing pains, and even some tough times. At the risk of sounding clichéd, I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for Nā Lei Hulu. The hālau supported me socially, emotionally, and through homesickness while I was going to school on the mainland. If I had to pick one word that best describes what I gained, it would be strength—strength to be who I am and strength to stand up for what I believe in.

— Traci Villarosa

I started dancing with Nā Kamalei [Robert Cazimero's hālau] as a high school student way back in 1983. I was a good dancer but very raw. I left in 1984 to attend college on the mainland and didn't really dance hula that much until Patrick invited me to join him in San Francisco. The few years I danced with Nā Lei Hulu, from 1989 to 1992, were not only tons of fun but tremendously helpful in developing my skills as a hula dancer. Patrick was an incredible mentor who whipped me into shape, and I returned home with the confidence to be a member of Hālau Nā Kamalei. Even Robert was amazed at how much I had improved, and he gave me the opportunity to dance at the Royal. In 1983, I was an overwhelmed kid hiding in the back row. Now, more than twenty years later, I'm dancing in the front row with the same pride and self-confidence that I'm sure Patrick felt when he was in the front row for Nā Kamalei. His influence on me as a hula dancer was invaluable, and I will always be grateful to him.

— Nalu Won



— Pamela Schulting



— Joycelyn Torres

A crowded dressing room. Many dancers, many costumes. Black and white. Big and small. Tall and short. Complete opposites. Many identical costumes, just different sizes. A quick change between numbers, preparing for Roberta Flack's "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face." Hair up. Check. White puas pinned. Check. Finally, the black velvet dress. Last one on the rack. Must be mine. Hmm . . . it doesn't look like my hanger. Or my dress. It must be. It's the last one on the rack. @#\$%! This dress looks like a holoku on me! @&*#! Everyone's in the wings ready to go. Where's my dress??? Thump, thump, bang, boom! The door bursts open and hits the wall. There's my dress! On Edna. And her dress on me. I'll never forget the look on her face. Fortunately, we both made it onstage in time!

— Jo-Anne Hongo

1991

Our performance at the Ethnic Dance Festival honors Pele. • We sweep the competition at Las Vegas, winning every category, *wahine*, *kane*, and solo *kane* divisions.

1992

At the Ethnic Dance Festival our number honors the Hawai'i Calls radio program. • Kumu dances at the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City. • In our last Las Vegas Hula Competition, Joycelyn Torres wins Miss Ka Lā Hula Ho'okūkū.

1993

Our performance at Mercy High School, *Lōkahi*, commemorates the centennial of the overthrow of the Hawaiian government; this show is a precursor to *The Natives Are Restless*.



Food is really important in the Hawaiian culture, and it is a huge part of our hālau. We have food backstage at most every show, and the Zane 'ohana, the King 'ohana, Auntie Joan, and others spend days before a show toiling in the kitchen to make us good food. We all take time to eat together and talk story backstage. We also have the "snack table" in the back of the practice room where people leave snacks they have brought to share. On breaks, the first thing we usually do is rush to the back of the room to "grind." One Sunday afternoon, we were learning a difficult dance, and Kumu gave us a five-minute break. After a few minutes watching us eating and laughing, he yelled, "Hey . . . Hey! Little piggies. . . I said take a break . . . not eat!" It was so funny! We work hard, but we LOVE to eat and have fun.

— Heather Barrett



Nā Lei Hulu now consists of several classes, from beginning to intermediate and performing. Although they are looked at as separate entities, they are all connected in some way. We are hula brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, nephews and nieces. We all have our own families and separate lives, but when someone is in need of help, the "extended family" members are always there to help or do whatever they can. When I think of the meaning of Nā Lei Hulu | Ka Wēkiu (the many feathered garlands gathered at the summit and held in high esteem), it comes down to one word: family.

— Richard K. Tavares



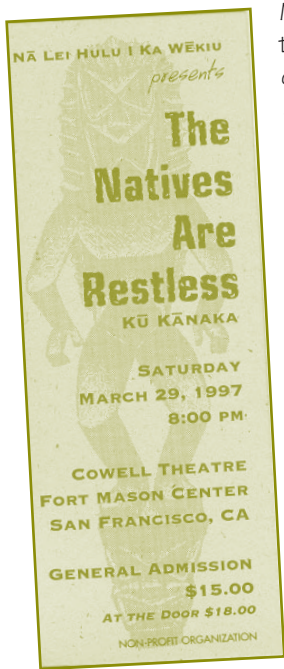
1994



1995

Hōkūle'a visits San Francisco [above], and Nā Lei Hulu performs at the Presidio to welcome it. • In the E Hula Mau Competition at Irvine, California, hālau men capture the overall title. • *Ka Po'e Hula*, our first major production, is held at the Cowell Theater.





I was not dancing the year of the first *Natives Are Restless*, but I came to watch the concert and support the hālau. The concert started with the entire group doing the kahiko section with Dovalyn as Manono. It was awesome. Then the concert progressed to the missionary segment. There was so much to take in (chalk, rape, and orgy scene)! The first half of the concert ends with the most powerful, yet basic, element—a piece of cloth and statistics about the Hawaiian people. Many in the audience were moved to tears. I remember being proud to be a part of Nā Lei Hulu and to have a kumu who could so magnificently tell a not-often-told story.

— Janet K. Auwae-McCoy



I've always loved the song "Ka'ena," and dancing to the beautiful singing of my kumu's kumu has made it more meaningful. Plus, Kumu's suggestion got "Ka'ena" on the Cazimeros' album in the first place. In 1997, we traveled for the first time to New Orleans, where we performed our well-received hula mua piece "The Seduction of the Mata Hari" for many thousands of Halloween celebrants. The next day we did a hula show at the House of Blues that showed a variety of hula styles and dances for an absolutely packed house. I remember being so excited about being there, and thinking that it was so cool that all these people enjoyed the hula mua so much that they would now be open to this beautiful, entirely Hawaiian, dance for "Ka'ena." Even though they didn't know what the lyrics were saying, they were clapping and cheering and even screaming. And then, in the second half of the dance, the crowd got even louder and the audience actually started to cry. I thought, "Wow, these people really appreciate Ka'ena!" I was so proud of this dance, the song, the singer's voice, and my hula sisters, that I put myself into it. Only later did I realize that Pamela, in the front row, was sobbing—it was she the audience was reacting to!

— Laura Iwamoto

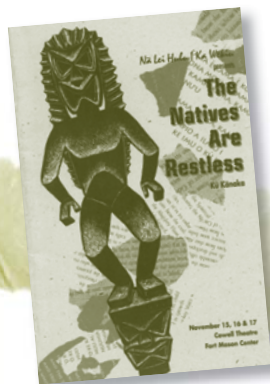


I went surfing yesterday with members of my "hula family." Among all the salty waves once again, I found myself talking to myself. What was the most important moment I had had in hālau? Did it come from the audience? The learning? As the waves tossed me like laundry, the answer became clear: it was the day I met Patrick. In that moment, a new world of possibility was opened to me, a world that manifested in unconditional love. I found that love in my hula brothers and sisters and my kumu. Through hālau I have also found trust, honor, humor, integrity, and infinitely more.

— Pamela Schulting

1996

The *Natives Are Restless*—Kū Kānaka premieres at the Cowell Theater, for what is thought to be the first and last time.



1997

Nā Lei Hulu performs at Halloween in New Orleans, at a party called Circus Eroticus [above right], before eight thousand costumed revelers. At the House of Blues, Pamela makes the audience cry. • The hālau performs at the big Saturday party for the San Francisco Gay Pride weekend.

Kumu presented his idea for the opening of *The Natives Are Restless: Ke Akua* on a sleepy afternoon just before a performance of *The World According to Hula*. We had all picnicked, and most of us had heavy eyelids and were enjoying the sun when we heard him speaking of his vision. He wanted to open with us women dancing topless with tattoos scattered on our bodies just as our ancestors had done, as women did before the missionaries came and nudity became synonymous with being a savage, in a culture where nudity was not looked down upon and the body was celebrated. He wanted to question the audience as to whether they had bought in to the idea that nudity was a bad thing, or were they going to be able to watch a love song being danced and see it for how beautiful it really was. To push the envelope further, he wanted the audience to explore within themselves why they might feel uncomfortable in the face of nudity. To some of us, the idea was distressing. To others, the idea was natural, and those were on board immediately.

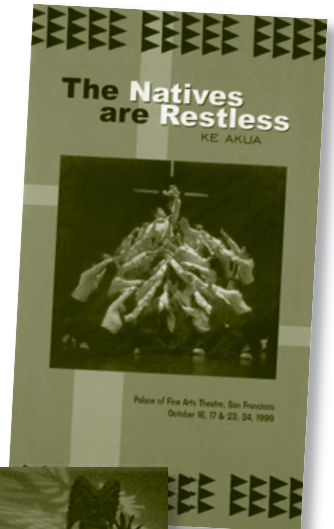
I was one of the people that were hooked from the beginning. I was in love with the concept he was trying to portray, so there was no way I was not going to do it. I have a profound trust in my kumu and knew he would never cast us in any unfavorable light. I could already see us dancing, with the lights slowly rising throughout the song.

However, being hooked did not mean that I did not have my own obstacles. What about my father watching the show? What about my mother? My brother? Oh, they would deal with it, they would get it. But what about my body? I was overweight and I knew it. How could I get onstage in this costume I had to offer? Further, what if the audience believed what the missionaries have told us, that we should be ashamed of who we are? Then I stopped and realized, if I was having all of these thoughts in my head, every other woman in our group was too. At this point, I let go and knew it would be OK.

All of this came to fruition just before the opening of the show. I looked around as we all tattooed each other. I witnessed such intimate trust. We had never been nude in the dressing room before, and we had certainly never touched each other while nude. And here we were dressing each other's skin with paint! Here was the acceptance I was looking for. I looked around and all I saw was life and it was stunning. I saw beautiful mothers, young women big and small, and people who had life tattooed on them by surgeon's knives, and it inspired me so deeply. We had all made it; every one of us women had decided to do it. We questioned, trusted, let

go, and accepted. We were now completely natural with it, and after we chanted together in a circle holding hands, we went out to question the audience as to whether they saw savages or the incredibly brave and beautiful women I saw in the dressing room that night.

— Makani da Silva

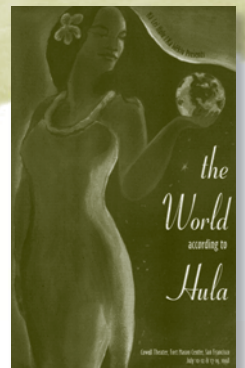


1998

The World According to Hula opens at the Cowell Theater. • Nā Lei Hulu performs at Halloween in New Orleans, at Le Bal Grotesque [above].

1999

The Natives Are Restless—Ke Akua, with several new numbers including the topless opening, opens at the Palace of Fine Arts, the thousand-seat venue that becomes Nā Lei Hulu's performance home. • We receive our first "Izzie," or Isadora Duncan Dance Award for *The World According to Hula*. • Nā Lei Hulu performs its signature piece, "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," on the grand marble staircase at San Francisco's City Hall at a fundraiser for the Human Rights Campaign. • The first hālau couple gets married: Janette Neves and Duane Rivera tie the knot in Bernal Heights.



I remember that day in 1999 pretty clearly. I was in the Thursday night class, and as we were all changing at the end of class, Kumu walked over to us and pointed at Cia, Alicia, David, and me. He asked us to stay until the next class was over. As Kumu walked away the four of us stood there in silence looking at each other—we didn't know what to think. For the next hour the four of us sat there contemplating what he needed to talk to us about. We first thought we were in trouble and kept trying to think of something that we might have done wrong.

When the time came, we walked to Kumu's house; there were others we hadn't met before—Derrick, Panci, Joey, Rick, and Glory. We all sat on Kumu's living room floor, and he explained to us that he wanted to invite us into the performing group. We didn't know what to say or how to feel. This day was the beginning of a whole new adventure.

— Nicole Arguello

On our trip to Hawai'i in 2000, going back to the land of my formative years, to the North Shore, was a melancholy event. Like a prisoner yearning to be free, I wanted so badly to come out and shout and let everyone know this is where I grew up! But I had a plan to keep it a secret at first. I had envisioned this fantasy: I would be like a famous Hollywood star coming back home and being recognized. To my astonishment, no one knew me! And I didn't know a soul.



Reality hit me. I'd been gone too long! It had been almost twenty years since I'd been back to this place. The shave ice stand, the supermarket where I used to hang, my high school building, the pristine beaches, and my memories all remained the same. But in the end they were the only ones with my shadow there to greet me.

— Benjamin Pancipanci



2000

Legends: *Mo'olelo* opens at the Palace of Fine Arts. Bring on the dancing pigs! • Kumu Patrick is awarded the prestigious Irvine Fellowship in Dance, allowing him to travel monthly to Hawai'i to participate in an 'ūniki class led by Auntie Mae Klein. • *The Natives Are Restless* is performed for the first time in the islands, at the Hawai'i Theatre. It is called "a magnificent and inspiring experience" by the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*. • Our first Christmas Hat Party [below].



After we had performed the "Kamapua'a and Pua" number in our show at the Hawai'i Theatre in 2001, Rocky and Natalie Jensen took us to the *kohe* cave [above] on the island of Hawai'i. *Kohe* means "vagina" in Hawaiian, and inside the cave is a rock formation that bears an uncanny resemblance to the female anatomy. About eight of us from the hālau hiked into the dark cave. It was well worth the walk because the sight of the *ma'i* (genitals) of *Kapo'ulā'kīna'u's* (Pele's older sister) was extraordinary! For me, it made the *mo'olelo*, the legend, come alive. I left my *lei po'o*, or head garland, from our last show as an offering. We chanted "Ku'u Aloha E" to *Kapo*. It gave me chicken skin to be in the presence of Pele's sister in all her splendor!

— Debbie Tong



2001

The Hula Show, a reprise of many of our favorite numbers, opens at the Palace of Fine Arts. • Rick and Laurie Smith, two of the earliest members of the hālau, celebrate their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.



If we could only have had a camera backstage. It was my first show, *The Hula Show 2002*. About an hour before the show started I was introduced to a heavily starched fabric called pellon, which the men would be wearing around their waists during the kahiko segment of the performance. What would normally take an average hālau member ten minutes to put on took me a good half hour, getting the material on the rope, putting it on, measuring so that one side was just as poofy as the other side; wires were somehow involved, and then there was the whole “pua” thing. It was awkward dancing with it on for the first time, but the group looked great in it. And it seemed to hide my love handles.

We men walked out to do our first number, “Manu Ō’ō,” and in what seemed like a flash, it was over and we were back onstage shifting our thoughts to the next dance. In the shadows of the wings in front of me I saw my older hula brother, Sean, reach for the cord of his pellon and drop it off. I was a bit disoriented and flustered. So I dropped my pellon, too. From there everything moved in slow motion; the cord unraveled, the pua broke apart, the wires busted loose. As my pellon started to fall from my hip, I glanced over to see a look of terror on my hula brothers’ faces. By the time the pellon was descending my thigh, I knew Sean and I had made a minor blunder. As it crossed my patella, I realized that what had taken me over a half hour to construct would need to be reconstructed in ninety seconds. In a “booooooff” of dust, the pellon hit the floor. I threw my hands up in submission. The game was over, I was done. This was how I had repaid my kumu and fellow hula siblings.

In seconds, Sean and I were set upon by our hula brothers, who started to work on repairing the damage. Two of them found our cords in the dark and managed to wrap them back around us. While the wires were being twisted back on, others were helping to center the material. In a flurry the pellon was back on. It was literally an instant before we took our step back out onstage, of course set with regal and poised expressions.

— Jason Laskey

2002

In *The Hula Show—Stories of the Lehua*, Krishna hula makes its debut!
 • Nā Lei Hulu wins a Goldie from the San Francisco Bay Guardian; the award recognizes outstanding local talent in the arts.

You probably missed something that happened onstage at *The Hula Show 2003* at the Palace of Fine Arts. Certainly you saw all the hālau women, wearing colorful dresses, gathered toward the back of the stage and chanting “Maika’i Ka ‘Oiwī O Ka’ala.” And you saw Kumu Shawna seated in front of us, keeping the beat with her ipu. And Kumu Patrick dancing solo, lit by the spotlights, his ti leaf skirt twirling with his powerful movements.

What you couldn’t see was Kumu’s face every time he spun and briefly faced us. For each of those moments we were alone with him—in a room of a thousand people. He’d give us a conspiratorial grin, or make a sassy expression that left us stifling giggles, or show us with his whole face how enamored he was of hula’s beautiful motions.

Being able to chant for him as he danced was a poignant reversal of our usual roles—it gave us the rare chance to support him the way he so often does us. Even then, ever the kumu, he managed to give something special back to us with those quick, shared looks.

— Jenny Des Jarlais



After our last show at the Lincoln Center in New York, I asked the stage director if it would be OK if I left my leis from the performance in the bushes, as it was our custom to give back to the land. She thought it was a nice custom and said she didn’t think it would be a problem. I started to walk along a stone wall up to the bushes and then saw police officers nearby. I didn’t want them to think I was planting a bomb in the bushes, so I walked back down, showed them my bag of kupe’e (wrist and ankle leis), and told them that I was going to put these under the bushes. They laughed. One officer said, “It’s OK. We don’t think you’re a hula terrorist.”



— Debbie Tong

2003

The Hula Show 2003 features our first-ever Samoan piece, “Taupo Princess.” [above] • We open the twenty-fifth anniversary of the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival. • Nā Lei Hulu performs with Keali’i Reichel at Villa Montalvo in Saratoga. • The performing troupe, as well as the intermediate classes, dance at Stern Grove with Amy Hanaiali’i Gilliom and Willie K. • *American Aloha*, a documentary about hula on the mainland, premieres on PBS. • Kumu goes through his ‘ūniki in Hawai’i.



Everyone's Hula Auntie

"Auntie Bobbie" Mendes Tacderan, in conversation with Jenny Des Jarlais



All the students in Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu know Barbara Mendes, who watches every class from her seat in the back of the Daniel Webster cafeteria. She takes our checks at the beginning of each month, and keeps the wayward

students in check. Jenny Des Jarlais sat down with the woman who seems to know everything about us, so that we could know a little more about her.

Q What brought you to Nā Lei Hulu?

A I danced some hula as a girl on Lānaʻi, but it wasn't until I was in my 30s and living in the Bay Area that I started up again. My class became involved in competition, but I can't enjoy my dance knowing that I'm being judged. So one day in 1990 I came to check out a new Nā Lei Hulu class. From the moment Kumu Patrick started talking, I felt comfortable.

Q What was it like growing up on Lānaʻi?

A It's a small island, but I was very happy growing up there. It was a simple, idyllic life, with a dry goods store, a soda fountain, a town square, and everyone waving hello to each other as they passed by. My parents moved there from Lahaina, Maui—they ran away to escape the disapproval of my grandparents. My mother's Japanese and my father's

Spanish (though his stepfather was pure Hawaiian). Growing up, I remember learning Japanese New Year's traditions and food from my mom, going to both the Catholic church and Buddhist temple, and hitching rides to Maui with my half-Hawaiian uncles on their fishing boats.

Q Why did you leave?

A When you live on a small island like that, you leave if you want higher education. I went to Honolulu and studied and worked for about 13 years before moving to San Francisco.

Q How did you get your role—collecting tuition from all the students?

A Kumu used to do it himself—he'd just open up his gym bag and everyone would throw in their cash or checks. But one day he started a new class, and there were so many people I just grabbed a notepad and pen and started taking names down. It snowballed from there.

Q What do you do outside of hālau?

A You mean my job? I'm an Operations Coordinator for the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. It can be stressful. Going to hula is such a relief—I can rejuvenate and regroup, and connect with all the folks there who are so kind and genuine. I have some other interests, too, like Japanese tea ceremony and Japanese folk dancing. I haven't been active with those recently, but I could still make you a nice cup of tea!

Q Do you have a favorite dance?

A "Ku'u Home o Kahalu'u", which was written in San Francisco and talks about remembering home in Hawai'i. I feel different when I dance that number. I feel energized, I feel my motions, I feel the song. When Kumu teaches certain things to the newer classes, I've been known to say, "What? He's teaching you this number? Do you realize how long I waited and waited?" [She laughs.]

Q You'll be retiring in the next few years. Any plans to move back to Hawai'i?

A I can't leave Kumu Patrick! My life would be so empty without him and the hālau. When I lost my husband in 1997, there was Kumu at my house that very night. As I grieved, I poured myself into hula and became totally consumed. Hula helped me heal and now I've found more balance again. That's what's so reassuring about hālau: it's always there when you need it, and it's still there when you don't.

Q Do you have any advice to give members of the hālau?

A Listen to your kumu. Hang on his every word. You may not grasp it all right now, but later on it'll gel and make sense. Also, anytime he makes a correction to the group, always assume it's you he's talking to. And never forget that Kumu sees everything. If I'm fooling around in the back of the class, he sees that, too. I know; he's caught me. 🌺

2004

The hālau performs at Lincoln Center in New York City [right]. • *Songs of Old Hawai'i*, honoring the legacy of Maiki Aiu Lake, opens at the Cowell Theater. • More than one hundred students from Nā Lei Hulu and Kumu Shawna's Nā Pua O Ka La'akea go on their *huaka'i* (journey) to O'ahu.



2005

Nā Lei Hulu holds its first 'ūniki, or traditional ritual graduation ceremony, in August. • In October, the hālau celebrates its twentieth anniversary with an extravaganza at the Palace of Fine Arts.

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There is a moment that repeats with each show we do—whether it's a good run or not. You're standing behind the curtain at the last show, listening to Kumu thank everyone for attending, thank the crew, thank our *akua* (god). It's a melancholy feeling of saying good-bye to a show, whether it's for a month, a year, or forever. Feelings of accomplishment, of happiness, of sadness, of disappointment, of relief are all present at once.

— Punini Ezera

Mahalo

to everyone who has given us support over the past 20 years!



Kaholo'ana Staff

Editor: Constance Hale
Designer: Linda Zane
Writer: Jenny Des Jarlais
Copy Editor: Mike Mollett
Photographers: Lin Cariffe
Punini Ezera
Julie Mau
Frank Palakiko
Linda Zane
Ad Design: Edna Cabcabin Moran

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