

# KAHOLO'ANA

## 25 YEARS & KICKING (or at least kaholoing)



An august group of kumu hula and dance specialists reflect on a quarter century of hula in the Bay Area—and beyond.

– Edited by Constance Hale

**A**t this juncture we find ourselves considering not just this era of our hula community but this era of hula. How has the tradition of hula deepened, and how has it evolved? And what does it mean that much of recent innovation—in choreography and in scholarship—has taken place on the mainland? To answer such questions, we imagined a “kumu summit,” in which those with special insight might shed light, share thoughts, and pick each other’s brains—all in the presence of an iPad set to Record. So we gathered on Potrero Hill in June: three Bay Area teachers, a leading ethnomusicologist, a dance ethnographer, and a journalist who covers Hawaiian culture.

**Patrick Makuakāne:** Welcome everyone. Kumu hula, scholars, interlocutors. Friends,

Romans, countrymen. Mahalo for coming. The idea here was to invite kumu hula, all contemporaries but from different lineages, and to ask Amy to give us a scholarly perspective and Lily to link our efforts to those of other ethnic artists. Connie, the editor of our newsletter, will guide the conversation.

**Connie Hale:** Thank you, Kumu Patrick. I’d like to start the conversation by asking each of you about your first memory of hula.

**Mark Ho’omalulu:** We all have the same hula beginnings. You, me, all of us in the world. You did this as an infant. [He slaps his hands together.] “Pattycake, pattycake, baker’s man.” That might not seem very Hawaiian, but a game like that is hula. Hula entertains, amuses, inspires—and it teaches motor skills.

**Patrick Makuakāne:** My first memory of hula was at the Kamehameha Schools Explorations, which I attended in fifth grade. Being with other Hawaiian kids and doing Hawaiian activities was exciting. But the one class I hated was hula. The instructor was this big, flaming *māhū* [gay man]. I was thinking, “Oh, my god, I don’t want to grow up to be like that.” [Laughter.] Only later, at Saint Louis High School, did hula help me articulate pride in being Hawaiian—about our history, our *’ohana* [family] and chiefs, our relationship to nature. Nothing in my life has made me feel so connected.

**Michael Yamashita:** I had an aunty who did some entertaining. Every time Aunty comes over, sooner or later, somebody’s going to start playing music, and she’s going to start dancing. She would take us younger kids and show us basic movements, real simple hula.

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# KUMU Unplugged

— Edited by  
Jenny Des Jarlais

We invited Nā Lei Hulu students to indulge their curiosity by sending Kumu Patrick Makuakāne some questions, no-holds-barred. Here are their queries and his answers.

**Q: If you could take a dip in a hot-tub time machine and go back twenty-five years, what would you do to alter the course of the hālau and your life, if anything?**

**A:** I don't think I'd change anything. It's been a strange and wonderful ride. You change one small thing, and who knows what will happen. What if I'd shaved my moustache earlier? What would that have done to the hālau? [Laughs.]

There are definitely some dances that I'd like to choreograph; it pains me to see such immature work. You feel beholden to what you have created and taught others, especially if it has had a life for several years. You think to yourself—can I change these dances or accept that they're a part of me and acquiesce?

Answer: Hell, yes, change away! So I just change them now!

Or let them fade away to the land of never-returning hula, though some of them still creep around the corner from time to time to torture me.

Q:

When do you think you'll retire from teaching?

A:

Never. [Laughs.] They're gonna be pushing me into hālau in a wheelchair.

**Q: What's the hardest thing about being a kumu hula?**

**A:** Maintaining boundaries. In the early years, I'd at times party hardy with some of the dancers. Switching hats from fellow carouser to teacher can be a bit tricky. I have an intimate relationship with many of my students, and I like that, because we're a community. Yet the overriding relationship has to be that of kumu to *haumana*, teacher to student. As loving as I like to be with my students, in the end, I'm not a friend. If I didn't keep that boundary, it would be easy to get completely absorbed in the hālau. I wouldn't have another life. I'm not complaining; that would be a good life. [Laughs.] But it's important to me to have outside interests. And in hālau I need to be the kumu. I know the line's gotten blurred when someone calls me Patrick in hula. It's like nails on a chalkboard: *errrrrrr!* Only because I never call my own kumu by their first names—Robert and Mae. Can you imagine? Hey Mae! Maesie, how you doing? There's a certain protocol that I like to keep established as part of our tradition.

**Q: What lessons have you learned from your own kumu hula that you hope to pass on?**

**A:** From Auntie Mae [Klein], I've really come to recognize the importance of tradition. She reminded me how to take care of these dances, these treasures and gems, and teach them unvarnished—exactly the way they were taught to me. And my students need to keep those dances unchanged as well. I want to pass on that strong tie to the past.

From Robert [Cazimero], there are so many things. One is his wonderful sense of humor. It balanced the hard work that we did and really helped us learn. Traditionally, I don't think

hula class was a fun affair. I don't think the kumu hula of old were cracking you up in the middle of rehearsal. [Laughs.] But I really appreciated how Robert's humor carried us through the tough times. I don't think I was very funny growing up—my own sense of humor started being cultivated during hula with Robert. If I use humor in my teaching now, that's in large part because of him.

**Q: In many other hālau, some students go on to become kumu hula themselves. This hasn't happened yet with any of your students. Do you think it will? Do you want it to?**

**A:** I can't pick a date for it, but I do think that it will happen. Keep in mind that even though I've been teaching classes for a long time, I just went through the traditional *'ūniki* [formal training] process and became a kumu hula in 2003. I want to have the *'ūniki* traditions and protocols as a part of our hula life for a long time before I hand that *kīhei* [garment worn by a kumu hula] over to somebody else. I want to make sure that he or she really deserves it. And I can see that there will be people deserving of it. So, I don't see it happening in the very near future, but I do see it happening.

**Q: If you could change one thing about our hālau with a snap of your fingers, what would it be?**

**A:** I'd give us a wooden floor to rehearse on. Snap! The other night I was walking around on the chilly concrete floor during class and I said to everyone, "I feel like I'm in the Arctic! My feet are so cold!" We rehearse in the cafeteria at Daniel Webster Elementary, and it's the worst floor in the world for any kind of dancer. When you're trying to execute a foot movement that's supposed to create a thud or a noise, you get nothing! It's like trying to slap a pillow. But of course I'm happy to be able to rehearse at Daniel Webster—everyone at the school is gracious and accommodating. They're an extension of our hula community. Still . . . any millionaires out there? [Laughs.]

**Q: Who does the costuming for your shows, and how does it get done?**

**A:** I used to do it myself, but sometimes I was unsure of my choices, and sometimes I wouldn't pay attention to whether a costume was even functional. I just went for it—the fabric was on sale, the colors were great.

I realized I needed help and turned to Laurie Smith, one of our original dancers. She moved to Yosemite years ago, and the associate designer baton was passed to Malia King, who has a background in fashion. We talk about all the pieces in the upcoming show and what costumes will work, in form and function. We think ahead, too: *Will we be able to use this dress in the future?* And we try to create a color line for the show: *We're wearing black and white for this piece. What's coming before that, what's coming after that?* Malia and I are ardent *Project Runway* fans. We use the lingo: "Edit! We need to edit!" [Laughs.] We have six seamstresses, including head seamstress Auntie Jeannine Wang. The fittings drive me crazy. The process happens during the last month before the show, and it interrupts rehearsal time, which makes it nerve-racking. But it has to be done.

**Q: American writer Toni Morrison once said, "The best art is political, and you ought to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time." Do you agree or disagree? How has hula been an act of artistic, cultural, and political expression for you?**

**A:** Making political art is like walking a tightrope. How do you make it political but at the same time something that people find beautiful and accessible? A great example is "*Salva Mea*," from *The Natives Are Restless*, which we'll be performing again this October. It's about the Christian missionaries and their impact on the Hawaiian culture. I've heard people describe it as provocative, disturbing, and beautiful.

There are some intense moments in the piece that make you stop and think about what the missionaries did. But, at the same time, there's beauty in the execution of the dance and the idea behind it. I love for us to weave political elements into our art form, but it doesn't always happen. I'm not going to wear people out by pounding on their heads with a hula hammer.

**Q: You've said that even though your dad was Hawaiian, it was your *haole* (white) mom who raised you to know and love your culture. How did she do this?**

**A:** I became interested in the culture on my own; I was the first one in my family who headed in that direction. My mother never said to me, "You should be a proud, strong Hawaiian man" or pushed me toward anything. But she supported everything that I did, especially when it came to hula. She came to every single performance that I did. Every single one. She was the only mom in the whole hālau who did that.

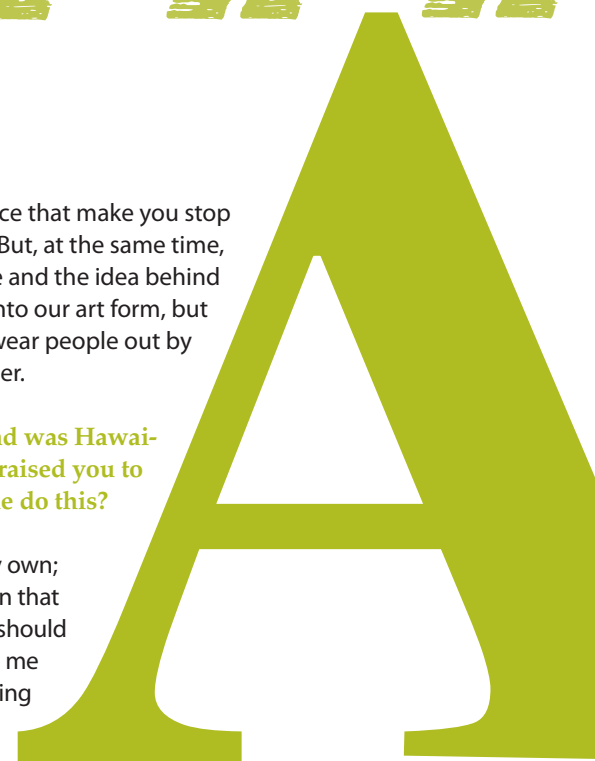
Once, my mother came to see me compete at my very first hula competition, at Kapi'olani Park. Afterward I went out with my friends in Pearl City. I came home after midnight, and she was waiting up for me. I'd been out partying with my friends, I'd just recently gotten my license, and I'm like, uh-oh, this is terrible. But that's not why she waited up. She just wanted to talk to me about the hula competition and how magical it was, and how great we looked and how much she loved my dancing. We stood there talking about it for an hour. It was great to come home to. My mom was just so proud of me. My father was also very proud, but in the early years, he didn't say a lot. Nowadays, he can't stop talking about it!

**Q: Do you ever think about wanting to have a child? Not only to create a family and pass on your culture (which you already do with your students) but to pass on your genes and your Hawaiian blood?**

**A:** There was a time, yes, I did think about it. But I don't think I could do it. I mean, wow! I'm constantly struck by the work that parents do to raise children. It's so selfless. And you have to be on 24-7. You don't have a minute off. I'm just too selfish. I enjoy moving about in my world without those kinds of constraints. I love kids; I love being around them and playing with them. But then I like sending them back to their parents. [Laughs.] It does make me sad to think that the line of my genealogy, from my father, ends with me. But thank goodness I have many cousins and they have many children, so there are all those other branches of the family tree. And I do pass on hula to my students, so that helps alleviate some of the sadness.

**Q: What's one of your guilty pleasures?**

**A:** Häagen-Dazs rum raisin ice cream. I love rum raisin. I indulged in it today. I like to eat five or six spoonfuls as I'm watching TV. Okay, maybe seven. Yes, from the carton! [Laughs.] When I come home the next day for more spoonfuls, it'll be gone! Ice cream doesn't last long in this household. But I'm glad that Buck, my partner, will eat the other half, because otherwise I will. I do try to watch what I eat. But that ice cream is just like crack. 🍷



# 25 YEARS & KICKING

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## Mark Keali'i Ho'omalua Kumu hula and founder, Academy of Hawaiian Arts

Mark Ho'omalua founded the Academy of Hawaiian Arts in 2003 in Oakland, where he has long taught the essence of Hawaiian history and customs through the choreography of hula and *mele* (chants in the Hawaiian language). Along with his fresh approach to hula, Ho'omalua envisions a structured environment where, paradoxically, Hawaiian arts, music, and language can find new forms of expression. His work has been featured in the PBS documentary *American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawai'i*, in the Walt Disney movie *Lilo & Stitch*, and on several original CDs, including *Call It What You Like* and *Po'okela Chants*. On the latter 1999 recording, his melodic chant style and mesmerizing rhythms transcend the boundaries between traditional and popular Hawaiian music. "If you don't progress," Ho'omalua says, "you will lose the future."

We didn't know what we were doing. We were just following her. I remember thinking, "This is fun." But you never saw boys dancing. Maybe at May Day, but that was a token thing. When we had parties, I enjoyed it; I got to spend time with Auntie. But I realized: you can do that in the family, but, outside, no can.

**Connie Hale:** Amy, I imagine you didn't have that issue?

**Amy Stillman:** My issue was hula as beauty school. When I was five, Mom took me to Lucy Lee on Kapahulu. Upstairs on the second floor. I just hated her yelling at us. "Do this, do that!" [Laughter.] You know, that

kind of loud, brassy aunty? And all the other girls in the class had mothers and sisters and cousins who taught them how to do the makeup. My mother didn't realize she was supposed to do that for me.

**Mark Ho'omalua:** I feel sorry for you guys! I saw some girls, and I said, "Ooh." [Laughter.]

**Lily Kharrazi:** When I was a child, my family—immigrants from Iran—moved from the Bronx to Santa Barbara. When I was about ten, my YMCA club was asked to help out at a cancer fund-raiser. I had long black hair, so I had a choice: I could either be an Indian and sit in front of a tepee, or I could wear a lei and a grass skirt.



## Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman Ethnomusicologist

Amy Stillman is an associate professor of music and American culture at the University of Michigan, and the director of the Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies program. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Hawai'i in Mānoa and earned another master's and a PhD at Harvard University. She has published articles in numerous scholarly journals as well as a book, *Sacred Hula: The Historical Hula Āla'apapa* (Bishop Museum Press, 1998). She has also curated two collections of Hawaiian chants and written the lyrics for the Grammy Award-winning CD *Ikena*, which she coproduced with Daniel Ho. In the album's liner notes, she writes, "Hawaiian poetry offers many elegant ways to express feelings of affection for Hawai'i that have remained important to us even as we make our way through life thousands of miles away from our birthland."

**Connie Hale:** Was there one moment you thought, "I'm going to teach"?

**Amy Stillman:** When I was a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i, I saw many gifted people who could teach, choreograph, and perform. I thought, "The world doesn't need another third-rate kumu hula." But there was nobody around with my geekiness, my ability to stick with it, so I made academics my niche. When I got to Michigan, I attended weekend hit-and-run hula seminars.

When I saw the level of what was being taught, I began to think, "Those who have the *'ike* [knowledge] also have the *kuleana* [responsibility] to share it." So I started teaching in 2006.

**Mark Ho'omalua:** My idea of hula as a young, ambitious person was: you wanna be somebody, you wanna do something, you set the goal and go. I was a Germaine's dancer. I worked at Sea Life Park; I worked at the Hale Koa; I worked at Paradise Cove—just go li'this and go li'that and have a good time and make money. Cruise-control hula. When I came here, I realized I knew absolutely nothing except a set of dances. I was a twelve-number-repertoire hula dancer. The last thirty years has been a process of finding my place. Darrell [Lupenui] and Thaddeus [Wilson] instilled this thought: "Do your best, and do your own." I've gone back and started again. I just keep doing, hoping I hit something somewhere sometime. I am in the perfect mind-set now to go back to hula class, because I could actually focus on something other than looking for girls. [Laughter.]

**Connie Hale:** How might we think about *place* and its relation to hula? We use the Hawaiian language in chants, we dance to *mele āina*, songs praising specific Hawaiian places, and yet we are far from those places. How do you deal with this? And has *this place*, the mainland, played a role in your work?

**Michael Yamashita:** If I was still in Hawai'i, I don't think I could teach. There are so many people I respect, and I would never consider myself even *near* their level of expertise. I could never be a peer. I would always want to be their student. Being away from Hawai'i gives me the space to operate. But being away from Hawai'i is also a handicap. It's like being in exile: here we are, divorced from place, and yet it's so important to be connected to Hawai'i.

**Patrick Makuakāne:** When I'm at hula, I'm at home. I'm not in San Francisco. I'm with those chants, those songs. But I have a lot of students who aren't at home. I think they should inherently know things, and then I remind myself, "Oh, my god, I've got to begin from scratch." It's a huge task to bring people up to speed. It takes years and years of commitment and discipline. And talking.

**Mark Ho'omalua:** The songs we dance are *not* foreign. We talk about great battles. We talk about paddling. We talk about fishing. This is a boy's life: Getting to be a hunter. Going to the mountain. Going surfing. Building shacks and making what you need. We can imagine that. I tell my students, "Hula allows us to mentally play in other places."

**Amy Stillman:** I believe there's a reason why I am in Michigan, although I have to think hard in February to remember what it is. [Laughter.] I accept that no matter where I am, I'm still Hawaiian. I can put myself in Hawai'i when I sit down at my computer and

start thinking Hawaiian music, start thinking hula. There's Hawai'i the physical place, but there's also Hawai'i the state of mind.

**Patrick Makuakāne:** In the eighties, California had the reputation of being the ugly stepsister or the mangy mutt of hula. Despite our hard work to elevate hula here, there's still a perception that we're not on a par with groups from Hawai'i. Yet fifteen years ago somebody said to me, "It must be so nice that you're teaching hula in San Francisco without anybody looking over

## Lily Kharrazi Dance ethnologist

Lily Kharrazi is a UCLA-trained dance ethnologist and a former director, for nine seasons, of the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival. She currently works with the Alliance for California Traditional Arts, where she manages a grants program for folk and traditional arts organizations. She is also a contributor to *In Dance*, where her column, "Global Moves," highlights culturally specific dance in the Bay Area. "Much of the innovation emanating from mainland communities is solidly steeped in honoring traditions yet pushes against boundaries," Kharrazi says about hula. "Many traditional arts communities encounter this invigorating challenge." Kharrazi has served as a consultant for the Ford Foundation, the National Education Association, the Creative Work Fund, and the Center for Cultural Innovation. From 2003 to 2009 she served on the board of directors for the San Francisco World Music Festival.

your shoulder." That's right. There's great freedom in that. And here I have plugged in and gotten funding. My hula brethren back home are still holding car washes. Here we're supported by the city, by the state, by wonderful organizations like ACTA [Alliance for California Traditional Arts]. At home so many people are going for one little pot.

**Amy Stillman:** Anybody outside of Hawai'i has an experience that contributes as much as anybody inside of Hawai'i. People in Hawai'i resist that. I see jealousy and fear. They don't want to be shown up; they don't want to share in authority. They want to believe that being on that soil grants them expertise. That's unfortunate, because it denies those outside the possibility of bringing their experiences in. But Hawai'i people have become a bit

more accepting of the work that is going on up here, especially in California, but other places, too—Arizona, Washington, Utah. East Coast is still suspect. The Midwest is off the map. [Laughter.]

**Connie Hale:** Lily, I imagine that many ethnic dance groups face this challenge. The tradition came out of one place, and yet here are people doing it elsewhere. How does ethnic dance stay vibrant outside of its culture?



**Lily Kharrazi:** Diaspora can create renewed interest. You can find pockets in the new place that are *more* traditional than back home. I often see this trajectory: A group plays the outsider, maintaining tradition. Then they are flattered by interest, and proliferate. (It's also an economic thing: your classes are your bread and butter.) But at some point people step back and say, "Wait a minute. It's dissipating. It's losing its essence."

**Mark Ho'omalua:** If I was back in Hawai'i, I would be doing the same thing I did when I lived back there. Why go and teach myself the hula when I can run around the mountain? When I can paddle across the channel?

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# 25 YEARS & KICKING

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**Connie Hale:** So being away gives you more focus and discipline.

**Michael Yamashita:** When you are home, you're just there. But when you're not home, you're constantly thinking of how to get there or what you need to do to be there.

comes out of the great success of Hawaiian-language-immersion education: We now have a generation that has been educated entirely in Hawaiian. They are bringing this Hawaiian mind-set into their *haku mele* [composition] and their choreography. The historian in me sees us in a period of emergence.

step of saying, "Everybody's doing hula competitions, but there must be something else. There must be another platform to take a vision to a different scale and bring it to life."

**Michael Yamashita:** We have to expand hula in a justified way—within the rules or the conventions that we're given, within tradition—but we've got to make it relevant. We can't be just focused on the nineteenth century.

**Amy Stillman:** Or the twentieth. Or 1977.

**Patrick Makuakāne:** We get caught up in the idea of *tradition*. But hula was never this static thing. People were presenting their *lives* in dance. So the "tradition" must have changed from the fifteenth century to the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries. And when women picked up the mantle in the

early 1900s, Lokalia folks, they were doing hula *pageants*! They were innovating! About the traditional stuff they were told, "Don't touch." So they said, "All right, I won't touch that, but I'm going to do a pageant. I'm going to have a princess for every island, each with a different number." We're not the first people trying to be relevant to our times.

**Mark Ho'omalulu:** Tradition is just the consensus of one era.

**Lily Kharrazi:** I have a question. There is something that seems to be inherent in hula—a unison among the performers in the company. What does it take to develop that particular physicality?

**Patrick Makuakāne:** Hula is about the power of community, the shared power of aloha. There's something about harnessing movement by a group of people all doing the same thing, moving together and then just vibing off of that energy. It's accompanied by percussive instruments and chanting and singing, which increases the

vibration. Sacredness and spirituality develop. I sound like a hippie. [Laughter.]

**Mark Ho'omalulu:** It's a drug. You go to hula class because you need a fix. For me, when the dancers are on and I'm on, we all crank together. The whole room vibrates. By the time it's finished, I'm so juiced up. You come back again and keep trying it just to get a fix.

**Michael Yamashita:** Sometimes I'm just happy that, wow, they actually have the choreography down. Now if we can get these ten different versions of it into one . . . So after that, I'm like, "Just forget the choreography. Follow me. If you're behind me or ahead of me, then you're not doing it right." And then they have that insight, "Wow, we all did it together at the same time." They feel it.

**Amy Stillman:** Out of this physical activity comes *communitas*. Hula is about animating. Part of bringing a mele to life is garnering this energy we're talking about, setting molecules moving. When you see a compelling performance, you feel it in your bones. That's the drug.

**Connie Hale:** But are you also creating something outside of the performance? Are kumu encouraging a way of relating to each other? You're taking in everyone around you, dancing in harmony, feeling each other in a different way. How do you foster that?

**Mark Ho'omalulu:** Respect and fear and intimidation. [Laughter.]

**Patrick Makuakāne:** That feeling fosters itself. You cannot dance by yourself. This is not a singular dance act. You need to move together as a group. So you're watching that person three lines ahead of you, feeling that person three lines behind you.

**Michael Yamashita:** It's also sometimes cultural: When somebody new comes,

## Patrick Makuakāne Director/kumu hula, Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu

Patrick Makuakāne first studied hula under Kumu John Keola Lake, then danced with Kumu Robert Cazimero's Nā Kamalei for nine years. He founded Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu in 1985 and has earned a reputation as a creative force in the hula world, known for choreography that is innovative yet preserves the traditions and fundamentals of hula. Since 2000 he has been a student of Kumu Mae Kamāmalu Klein, graduating in her 'ūniki class of 2003. "It's comforting to have a hula anchor," he says, "when you're ready to jump off that edge." Makuakāne has received numerous honors, including a lifetime achievement award from the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival in 2006.



everybody greets them and take them under their wing and helps them with their basics. It's the way we are. Many students are just grateful to have a place in their lives where they can experience this. They also have a hunger to express things that hula allows them to express.

**Amy Stillman:** When it works, hula fosters tolerance. And kumu are visionary. That sets them apart from the rank and file. Kumu have the gift for imagining something into being, and the ability to bring it to pass. That inspires people around them, and not only the students—families and friends come to support the person gifted enough to bring this culture to life.

**Mark Ho'omalulu:** That was beautiful. When I say I use fear, and heavy discipline, it's based on the principles of performance.

From the get-go, the whole thing is how to build up endurance. You've got to be high impact. It's nonstop. You gotta push. I want them to be ready. I feel really bad. It's not very . . . aloha-y. [Laughter.]

**Amy Stillman:** But—but it's a vision. And those who execute it recognize that they're part of making that vision come alive.

**Lily Kharrazi:** There's no question, in looking at all of your hālau, that there's much discipline. I can bet that people who make that first cut leave in tears. They know that they've earned a certain level of artistry and recognition.

**Mark Ho'omalulu:** They are seriously disturbed people. [Laughter.] But without them to instruct and inspire, we would be nothing. ♡

## Constance Hale Journalist

Connie Hale is a writer and editor who grew up in Waialua, on the North Shore of O'ahu, but left the islands to get a bachelor's degree in English literature at Princeton and a master's degree in journalism at the University of California at Berkeley. She has covered Hawaiian history, culture, and politics for much of her career as a journalist, for publications such as the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *National Geographic Adventure*, *Smithsonian*, and *Honolulu*. She has studied with Patrick Makuakāne since 1997 and edits this newsletter for Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu.



## Michael Yamashita Kumu hula, Kaiāulu

Honolulu-born Michael Yamashita grew up in Kailua and Kāne'ohe and graduated from 'Iolani School in 1984 and Santa Clara University in 1988. His first hula teacher was his aunty, but after meeting O'Brian Eselu and Thaddeus Wilson as an adolescent, he joined Nā Wai'Ehā O Puna. Other hula influences included Frank Palani Kahala and Kau'i Zuttermeister. In 1989, he started Kaiāulu, a hālau based in San Francisco, with Nathan Dudoit. (*Kaiāulu* is the name of the wind in Wai'anae, the hālau's spiritual home.) "We teach nothing unless it has been passed down to us or thoroughly researched," he says. But, he adds, "Hula has evolved over the last two hundred years, and thus there are many 'eras' that can be considered 'traditional.'" Yamashita is also general manager of the *Bay Area Reporter*, the oldest and largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender newspaper media company in San Francisco and the nation.

**Amy Stillman:** I want to remind us that the term "kumu" has many meanings. A kumu can be a source, a foundation. It could be a military wife in Hawai'i who took classes, moves to Missouri, is asked to teach hula—that person can become a source for people there.

**Patrick Makuakāne:** That's stretching it.

**Amy Stillman:** In the lowercase sense. This person *is* a source for those people. I fear that the definition of kumu has become so rigid that it excludes many productive possibilities. So many people use "kumu hula" as a bludgeon.

**Connie Hale:** Building on Amy's point about the formalizing of kumu and hālau, let's reflect on the last twenty-five years of hula. Has there been another shift since the Hawaiian Cultural Renaissance? Are we in a new period?

**Amy Stillman:** Everything that's happened, up to now, is an organic outgrowth of the Renaissance. The change I see on the horizon

**Patrick Makuakāne:** In the last ten years all these people have this *'ike* [knowledge] and *'ōlelo* [language] and are applying them not only to hula but to other disciplines—to genealogy, crafts, even *'awa* [kava] ceremonies.

**Amy Stillman:** Now our creativity is coming from a more Hawaiian perspective, because the thinking is Hawaiian. The graduates who are out there now, that's their life. They have lived it. They're not born again. They were born, period.

**Lily Kharrazi:** At the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival, I've seen mainland hula groups go from a smattering of loose entities across the Bay Area—some commercial, some stunningly traditional—to many more hālau with a focus on traditional learning, paying homage to source material, to the language. The bar has been raised.

**Amy Stillman:** All of you are part of an important vanguard. It's significant that it started off here. You've taken the

# Dancing out of the Deep Darkness:

**Nā Lei Hulu interprets a sacred text** – By Constance Hale

It has been likened to *Beowulf*, Hesiod's *Theogony*, and the book of Genesis.

It was shrouded in secrecy for two centuries, held close by the family that "owned" it.

It contains 1,102 lines of poetry, which were memorized by successive teams of chanters (always at least two so that its information would not be lost) until it was finally committed to print in 1889.

It is called *The Kumulipo*, "beginning in the deep darkness."

It has been translated by numerous scholars and experts, including Queen Lili'uokalani, all of whom offer different interpretations of its allusions, symbols, metaphors, and even sounds, which themselves create a tapestry of hidden meanings.

And now this sacred text, this esoteric poem, is serving as the inspiration for a suite of dances that will open *25 Years of Hula*, the October 2010 show presented by Nā Lei Hulu | Ka Wēkiu. Choreographed by Kumu Hula Patrick Makuakāne, the dance "Kumulipo" was commissioned by the San Francisco Arts Commission.

"*The Kumulipo* celebrates origins, and here we are celebrating *our* origins," Makuakāne said when asked why he picked this sacred Hawaiian text for a show commemorating the twenty-fifth year of the hālau he founded in San Francisco in 1985.

Makuakāne's "Kumulipo" is a work in progress. The translation he is relying on is also a work in progress, the result of thirty years of study by Lucia Tarallo Jensen. Jensen's scholarly research inspired earlier Nā Lei Hulu works, including *Daughters of Haumea* and *Māui: Turning Back the Sky*.

Scholars consider *The Kumulipo* the most authentic of the Hawaiian genealogical chants—prayer chants tracing one family's divine origin through great rulers, heroes, and primary gods back to the first spark of life in the universe. It links Ka-'I-'i-mamao, Kalākaua's great-great-great-grandfather, and his offspring to all things, great and small—on the earth, in the sea, in the heavens, in the world of the spirits, and in the world of living men.

In addition to its magical and religious meanings, *The Kumulipo* carries political ones: when it was first published in Hawaiian by Kalākaua in 1889, it was part of a campaign to establish the king's legitimate right to the throne.

Since then, many scholars, translators, and historians have interpreted it. To sense the complexity of this task, we don't have to look further than the first lines: *O ke au i kahuli wela ka honua / O ke au i kahuli lole ka lani*. Lili'uokalani translated these lines as "At the time that turned the heat of the earth / At the time when the heavens turned and changed." A subsequent translator, Pokini Robinson, rendered the lines as "The time of the birth of the taboo chief / The time when the heavenly one pushed his way out." (These interpretations, among others, are laid out in Martha Beckwith's landmark 1951 book, *The Kumulipo: A Hawaiian Creation Chant*.)

Into this sea of divergent translations wades Tarallo Jensen, whose purpose, she says, is more to *create* than to *regurgitate*. Her translation of the chant's lines signals her new direction: "Heated by the sun, / It was time for earth to produce."

Jensen sees *The Kumulipo* as an ode to nature that expresses harmony and teaches responsibility to each person who shares in nature's bounty. She considers only the first eleven of Kalākaua's sixteen sections, believing that the last were tacked on later to legitimize the ruling dynasty. Whereas earlier scholars saw in the chant a movement from *pō* (the world of darkness, night, spirits) to *ao* (the world of light, day, man), she sees an expression of the Hawaiian worldview, in which every part (of the whole) contains a female principle and a male principle.

In Makuakāne's "Kumulipo," something deeper is at work in the matching of poetry and performance. As Jensen boldly takes Hawai'i's ur-text and radically reimagines it, Makuakāne boldly takes Hawai'i's ur-art form and radically reimagines *it*. This dance allows him, he says, to intentionally extend the parameters of choreography—and embrace new challenges. First, he must find rhythms and cadences for a chant that is an *oli* (a vocal chant) and not a *mele* (a chant meant to be accompanied by dance). "*The Kumulipo* is not parsed out in dance-friendly stanzas," he says, and certain sections will be delivered without movement.

In addition, he must merge the first eleven sections of the chant (718 lines of poetry) into a dozen different dances, which depict the birthing of sea plants and animals, the creation of mountainous islands, the rich flora and fauna that cover the land, and, finally, the mating of man and woman.

"We are celebrating the beautiful poetry of *The Kumulipo* and the beautiful poetry of our hālau," Makuakāne muses about this new dance. "It is our creation story, too: we have created a new genre of hula here in San Francisco that is a part of the evolving story of Hawai'i." ♡

## KAHOLO'ANA STAFF

Editor: Constance Hale  
 Designers: Chris Uesugi Lauer  
 Linda Zane  
 Deputy Editor: Jenny Des Jarlais  
 Copy Editor: Mike Mollett  
 Photographers: Nā Lei Hulu haumana

# Hō'ike Nui



"As the curtain opened, I imagined what we looked like to the audience. I remembered other performances I'd watched and knew it was our turn for that dramatic staging. I felt the power of the lighting, the choreography, the costumes, and the history and traditions of hula."

—Melanie Walas

It was the funniest thing: at one point when I was dancing onstage, I looked out into the first few rows and saw a friend, asleep. I could've used a nap right about then, too.

—Julia Fennell



"My favorite moments of the Hō'ike Nui were at the end of each performance—when the audience stood, the house lights came back up, and everyone sang together, creating such a lovely sense of connectedness. We could finally see the happy faces of the audience members, and I couldn't help but imagine that their lives had been transformed in some small way that day."

—Julie Mushet

# Hō'ike Nui



During the Hō'ike Nui, I felt the full magnitude of what hula has given me: a community of wonderful people, a teacher who helps me grow as a person, the opportunity to experience the joy of performance, and a way to transcend the ordinariness of everyday life.

—Ellen Opie



When we danced 'Pua 'Āhihi' during the final show, I was very aware of every motion and the movement and timing of those dancing near me. Feeling so connected to everyone on stage reminded me of how much we've grown as a class in our years of dancing together.

—Kai Moran



In spite of the stress of learning new dances, rehearsing in small groups, and making and buying costumes and all the accoutrements—flowers, ferns, *malo* [loincloths]—people still put aside their other commitments and participate. Sometimes there's grumbling; occasionally there are tears. But there are also spontaneous acts of kindness and generosity: people helping each other with leis, costumes, and makeup, or sharing food and encouragement.

—Steve Kmucha

The moment right before the curtains opened was intense. We stood on stage silently, and I could hear my heartbeat. That made me aware of all the sounds that followed: the music, our feet on the stage, our breathing while chanting, the swish of our *pā'ū* (skirts), and that silent space right after each piece ended.

—Julia Fennell



My most emotional moment? Dancing to 'Nā Pua Lei 'Ilima.' I lived on O'ahu for years, and my love for the island grew in layers: as an adolescent in awe of the Ko'olau, as a young adult comforted by 'ilima lei sent from home, and as a grieving daughter struggling to see my dad's smiling face in the waves of the Pacific. The dance wove together my love for my family and gratitude for all Hawai'i has given me. Seeing the other dancers' faces around me, I knew mine was one story of many.

—Karen Gehrman



Patrick Makuakāne & Nā Lei Hulu | Ka Wēkiu present

# 25 Years of Hula

*A special anniversary performance*

Palace of Fine Arts Theatre  
San Francisco

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**SUN Oct 17, 3pm**

**FRI Oct 22, 8pm**

**SAT Oct 23, 8pm**

**SUN Oct 24, 3pm**

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A non-profit organization

**Opening Night Champagne Reception - SAT Oct 16**

VIP seats for 8pm show, followed by reception \$85

**Gala Benefit - SAT Oct 23, 5:30pm**

Lū'au party and VIP seats for 8pm show \$150

Reserved table of 10 \$1500

**Hula for Families - SUN Oct 24, 12pm**

A one-hour show designed especially for children and families

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*Nā Lei Hulu*  
I KA WĒKIU

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*Seating is limited, so act fast!*

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Reserved table for 10 \$1,500

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# 25 reasons to give to NĀ LEI HULU

- 1 You'll help fund our new *keiki* (children's) hula classes.
- 2 What other hālau dances to Genoa Keawe and Roberta Flack?
- 3 Local boy Obama would applaud you.
- 4 Supporting us must be at least as satisfying as a few Starbucks lattes. And you'll spend, what, \$25 on those?
- 5 Donating blood involves a needle. Donating to Nā Lei Hulu doesn't.
- 6 Without the hālau, what would its 346 students do for fun?
- 7 It's either this or you buy more of those calorie-packed Mele Mac fund-raiser chocolates.
- 8 Giving induces pleasure. Giving a lot must induce ecstasy.
- 9 You love that we bring over musicians from Hawai'i for live performances.
- 10 You wouldn't want us to send over the Samoan mafia to "gently encourage" a donation, would you?
- 11 All those costumes don't grow on trees.
- 12 Donating is an insta-tax break. Tada!
- 13 Our marketing strategy calls for a Nā Lei Hulu blimp on performance days.
- 14 We'll help bring out your inner hula dancer.
- 15 Give more than a grand, and you'll be invited to a special meet-and-mingle reception with the dance company.
- 16 You'll become a lifelong member in an exclusive club of donors . . . until we ask you to renew your membership next year.
- 17 You'll find out first about creative, delightful projects like Hit & Run Hula. (Check it out at [hitandrnhula.com](http://hitandrnhula.com).)
- 18 Give enough, and you might get a hug from Kumu Patrick.
- 19 We're like cultural emissaries, bringing hula to faraway places such as New York, Tokyo, and Pleasanton.
- 20 You'll help fund Hawaiian language classes so students can uncover deeper meaning in the lyrics they dance to.
- 21 Writing a check, you won't even break a sweat. The dancers are doing the hard work.
- 22 Pennies probably annoy you. Maybe \$20s, too.
- 23 It's easier to support Nā Lei Hulu than it is to travel to Hawai'i.
- 24 Arts, arts, arts.
- 25 In 25 more years, you'll get to see the list of 50 reasons to give!

Are you convinced? [give@naleighulu.org](mailto:give@naleighulu.org).