

KATHOLO'ANA

Songs for San Francisco

Hawaiian-language master Puakea Nogelmeier creates a poetic tribute to our City by the Bay

- by Constance Hale

What's in a name? To many, *Kapalakiko* just looks and sounds like five awkward syllables. But to some Hawaiians—and to many hula dancers—it expresses a link between two special places. *Kapalakiko*, after all, is the transliteration of *San Francisco* into Hawaiian. More than 150 years ago, native Hawaiians found a way to fit the multifarious Spanish-English sounds into their own simpler phonetic system.

The name *Kapalakiko*, though, is much more than a collision of alphabets. The word reflects a two-century history in which Hawaiians and San Franciscans have engaged in cultural exchanges: islanders who visited the city (King Kalākaua, say, who stayed at the Palace Hotel); San Franciscans who toured the islands (perhaps vacationing in Waikīkī at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel); forty-niners who failed in the

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Hana Hou!

A Honolulu reporter looks at 25 years of San Francisco hula

- by Liza Simon

High on Potrero Hill in San Francisco, Victorian-style homes hang between the watery horizon and the fog-shrouded profile of Mount Diablo. Here, in this city that is an avant-garde spawning ground, is the *hālau* of Patrick Makuakāne, a *kumu* famed for his campy, consciousness-raising hula showcases.

An elderly stranger on the sidewalk smiles broadly and points me to Daniel Webster Elementary School, the modest home of Makuakāne's great hula experiment. Inside, I am embraced by students of Makuakāne's *hālau*, Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu, and then by the master himself, who sighs incredulously that the *hālau* is readying for its twenty-fifth-anniversary performance in a venue expected to sell out its 6,000 seats. From the easygoing pace of rehearsal, I'd never have guessed such a high-stakes spectacle was near. Makuakāne perches on the auditorium stage, laughing and strumming an 'ukulele. Students have piled their shoes neatly at the door just like in Hawai'i, but they sport hooded sweatshirts to fend off the notorious San Francisco chill.

Makuakāne leans his head languidly to the side and demos the sultry gaze he wants the women dancers to assume in the number "Fever"; he's set the old Peggy Lee torch song to hula. In the next number, a traditional Hawaiian *mele* about Mount Ka'ala, his vibrato chant

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Spotlight on:

Kaliko Trapp

Teacher of budding linguists

- by Kazz Regelman

He's an unlikely *kumu 'ōlelo*, a Brit who learned French as a child in formal English schools and became obsessed with aikido after moving to the Bay Area at age twelve. He never attended university or considered himself a great linguist. "I remember crying as a child in English class when the teacher explained apostrophes," he says. "I could not get it."

Born Simon Trapp on the Isle of Wight, he encountered Polynesian culture as a teenager in the Bay Area, and in 1992, when he was twenty-two, he started showing up at Nā Lei Hulu practices, absorbing all he could. After a couple of years, *Kumu* Patrick Makuakāne gave him the name Kaliko, meaning "the leaf bud." "Giving someone a Hawaiian name, it's a tall order," Makuakāne says, explaining his choice, "but I saw in him such potential"

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HUAKA'I 2011

The intermediate class takes a weeklong cultural immersion trip to O'ahu

Visiting the fishpond at He'eia



Jam session with Kūpaoa at Queen's Surf Beach



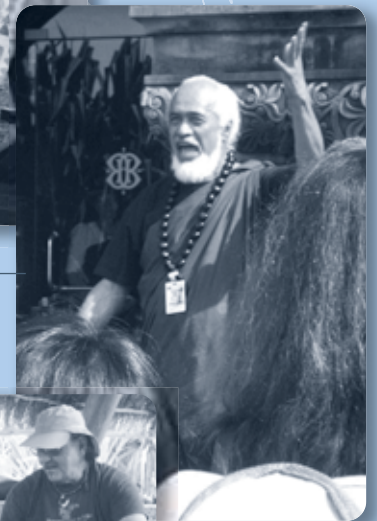
Dalani Tanahy, Mākaha's "Kapa Goddess"



Working in the lo'i (taro patch) in Wai'anae



Being greeted at Bishop Museum



A special offering at the birthing stones in Kūkaniloko



Pat, Sue and Ben tasting some 'ono pa'i'ai (taro)



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Removing invasive seaweed at He'eia fishpond





At Kumu's dad's house
in Waimānalo



The guys at Kualoa
Regional Park

Dancing at
Nu'uānu Pali



Spotlight on:

Kaliko Trapp

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Nona Beamer, daughter of a legendary family and pioneer in the study of Hawaiian culture, saw that potential, too. She honored Trapp with an invitation to study language and culture in the islands, her first such proffer to a non-Hawaiian. After moving to Hawai'i in 1994, Trapp found in Nona Beamer not just the beloved matriarch of Hawaiian culture but also a beloved auntie who made him her son by *hānai*, the Hawaiian tradition of adoption.

Kaliko Beamer-Trapp, as he is now known, has become, like his Beamer *'ohana* (family), a respected keeper of Hawaiian tradition. He champions his adopted language by voicing language-learning tapes, writing educational books, and teaching, both in person and online. He is even a member of the Hawaiian Lexicon Committee, which is responsible for translating modern terms—such as *computer*—into Hawaiian.

Another meaning of *ka liko* is “glistening” or “sparkling,” and Beamer-Trapp indeed sparkled in July 2010 when he visited San Francisco for a month to teach *'ōlelo* to the *hālau*. Lynette Danylchuk, a student in the Monday 8:30 p.m. class, loved the sessions for the energy he brought. His effervescence brought the language alive for her and other *haumana*. “He was like a little kid at Christmas,” she says, “singing ‘[Ku'u] Pete,’ the donkey song, and playing on his 'ukulele.”

Connie Hale, a *haumana* in the Thursday 7 p.m. class, says, “I've taken French, Spanish, and Italian at some of the finest institutions

in the land, and I've never had a teacher like Kaliko. So impish!” She chuckles, remembering how he “jumped up on that little kid desk and pantomimed paddling a canoe. All that to explain the difference between *kai*, ‘ocean,’ and *moana*, ‘open ocean,’ when you are so far out you can no longer see the land.” Hale gained not only an understanding of the difference between those words but, more significantly, a love of the language that Beamer-Trapp imparted.

Beamer-Trapp's goal is not to create a cadre of *'ōlelo* speakers. Instead, he says, his *kuleana* (responsibility) is to help people appreciate the Hawaiian way of thinking. Students who once felt hula songs were a mystery now dance knowingly. “I can pick up words, meanings, and feelings,” Danylchuk says, “as I never did before.”

According to Makuakāne, *ka liko* is also a metaphor for something about to blossom. The prophetic name applies not just to Beamer-Trapp but to the “flowers” of Nā Lei Hulu he has inspired. Their understanding of Hawaiian *oli*, *mele*, and hula blooms in every practice. ♡



Hana Hou!

25 years of San Francisco hula

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creates a mood of majesty. “May I ask you not to dance in isolation?” he implores the group at one point, though the dancers look to be impeccably in unison, all the more amazing since they are a mottled group of ethnicities, ages, and body types, not to mention professions. A banker, an acupuncturist, a fireman, a publishing assistant: We gather after at Makuakāne’s apartment and, over Chinese takeout, talk about the hālau that gave them all a chance to perform at Lincoln Center.



Makuakāne and other like-minded kumu such as the East Bay’s Mark Ho’omalulu have not only shown that hula stands out in a world-class enclave of ethnic dance, they have also both pushed the dance’s envelope of tradition. Makuakāne’s goal is to let hula do what hula does best, which is to be an in-the-flesh record of everyday life. Whether in Potrero Hill or Punalu’u, Hayward or Hanalei, hula enshrines the essence of people and place.

Check, for example, the first-ever Bollywood-style hula, choreographed by Makuakāne. It was born from the moment his hālau was rehearsing in Golden Gate Park and through the bushes came the Krishna dancers, chiming their temple bells, clad in colorful robes—one of those spontaneous multicultural encounters that so define San Francisco. Then there’s the “iron horse” within earshot of Ho’omalulu’s home on the other side of the tracks in Hayward—make that the elevated BART tracks—which provided the inspiration for his award-winning hulas about the old plantation railroads. You could say that these kumu have a keen eye for hula-izing their surroundings.

Makuakāne and Ho’omalulu agree that nurturing hula’s popularity beyond the reefs of Hawai’i has cast them as renegades in the eyes of purists. Renegades or not, both have roots in the Hawaiian Renaissance, the reawakening of indigenous identity that swept through the islands in the 1970s. Makuakāne’s kumu was the venerated Robert Cazimero, who, in contrast to decades of Hollywood images of girls in swaying skirts, helped reinvigorate the *kāne*, or men’s hula.



Ho’omalulu attended Aiea High School during the renaissance years, when the school was a recruiting ground for Kumu Daryl Lupenui and other founders of the Men of Waimapuna, the “bombastic school of hula.”



Late afternoon sunlight slants through the imposing bay window of Makuakāne’s apartment as he goes over details for the twenty-fifth-anniversary performance. He’ll be reprising numbers from his showcases; he does five of them a year, all hālau fundraisers—and the house is always packed, says Makuakāne, shaking his head in seeming disbelief at his quarter-century of success in the City by the Bay. “How did this happen here, when so many hula brethren back home are holding sweet-bread sales just to get by?” he asks. “Well, of course, San Francisco just has so many resources,”

he answers. It’s more than that, though. Makuakāne is a magnet, a consummate aesthete, with an imagination that brings all things Hawaiian alive wherever he stands.

At the moment, that’s right in front of me on the soft white carpet. This is where he invented his trademark style, *hula mua*, or forward hula, setting hula to pop songs. “It started with me messing around to Terence Trent D’Arby’s “Sign Your Name Across My Heart,” he recalls. Makuakāne felt that D’Arby’s tune conveyed King Kamehameha’s love for Queen Ka’ahumanu just as effectively as any traditional Hawaiian chant, so why not go for it?

Such casualness is in contrast to some of Makuakāne’s most famous productions, including the 1998 premiere of *The Natives Are Restless*. That production included “Salva Mea,” which critics hailed as a masterpiece



Photos courtesy of Jack Wolford, *Hana Hou!* magazine

on a par with Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*. The piece decries the suppression of Hawaiian culture by Christian missionaries; in one particularly graphic scene, a priest, played by Makuakāne, grabs a female hula dancer by the hair and throws her to the ground, an obvious metaphor for Western assault on native values. The normally easygoing Makuakāne says anger drove him to create the piece after he read nineteenth-century missionary journals brimming with contempt for native traditions, especially hula. "I started feeling how many of us Hawaiians are under the muzzle of Christianity and have veered away from our true *kanaka maoli* past, where spirituality was inseparable from how we lived," says Makuakāne, adding from the lore of hula, "Pele destroys and Hi'iaka heals, and that's the cycle of life Hawaiians thought about."

The rest is hula mua history.

Makuakāne was a young dancer in the Robert Cazimero show at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel when he took leave of Hawai'i's burgeoning hula scene and headed to San Francisco State University to get a degree. He missed hula and vowed to return to Hawai'i, but fate intervened. He fell in love with a partner and with a city that "embraces diversity, doesn't just tolerate it."

In San Francisco Makuakāne started his own hālau. Performances began piquing interest not only in Hawaiian circles but in grant-giving organizations. Makuakāne laughs that when he received his first award for \$10,000, it seemed like so much money that he was of a mind to run away to New Orleans to stage a performance. But moderation kicked in, and he began "climbing the grants ladder," which led to the start of regular

showcases. Even as he innovates, he has an abiding love for classic hula. "These are our heirlooms. I cherish them," he says. "I pull them out so audiences will understand that this is our foundation."

There are endless variations on the story told to me by Ryan, a UC Berkeley graduate student whose Samoan grandparents dabbled in Hawaiian entertainment. One night at a San Francisco arts festival, he heard the pumping bass of house music. Makuakāne's kāne, outfitted in street clothes and raffia skirts, were onstage performing hula moves with break-dance attitude. "My jaw just dropped," recalls Ryan. "My friend said, 'You can do that.' And so I signed up for class."

Makuakāne revels in the eclectic look of his hālau. He encourages non-Hawaiians to use his beloved Hawaiian dance as a route to their own roots. Hālau member Jason, who has Japanese and Caucasian ancestry, says Makuakāne designs altars backstage at performances, where dancers bring mementos of their respective ethnic traditions. "He reminds us that the collective actions of all who came before us brought us together in this moment," Jason says.



Potential students aren't the only ones taken by Makuakāne's vision. In 2009, Makuakāne's interpretation of Roberta Flack's "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" (see page 8) was awarded the highly coveted Izzie Award for best company performance, beating the San Francisco Ballet and other renowned professional troupes for the honor. I ask what was special about the number. Maybe the slow pacing, or perhaps the classic romance of the lyrics, he replies. He mimes the line from the song "The moon and the stars were the gifts you gave," and his voice trails off as he moves gracefully.

"Often audiences just see beautiful faces and dresses and hear great music but have no understanding," Makuakāne muses. "Here's the good thing about hula mua: You're singing a familiar song, and people are immediately engaged. They're swept up in a new way, and they become part of what we do." ♥

A longer version of this story, which focused equally on Hayward kumu Mark Ho'omalua, appeared in the February-March 2011 issue of Hana Hou! magazine.

Songs for San Francisco

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Sierra foothills and sought fortune farther west; musicians who brought their 'ukulele to the Pan-Pacific Exposition in 1915; singer Lena Machado, who crooned her way through the Golden Gate International Exposition in 1939; native Hawaiians who migrated en masse during the late-twentieth-century diaspora; Ocean Beach surfers who sought the waves of Waimea Bay; Robert Cazimero, who brought his hula troupe to the Bay Area in the mid-1980s; and one of Cazimero's former dancers, Kumu Hula Patrick Makuakāne, who years later started taking his own San Francisco troupe to Honolulu each year to perform.

And that just scratches the surface.

In his annual hula extravaganza at the Palace of Fine Arts this October, Makuakāne will explore these and many other links between San Francisco and Hawai'i. He has the perfect collaborator in University of Hawai'i language scholar Puakea Nogelmeier, who is composing a sequence of *mele*, or poetic chants, about the two places. Makuakāne will choreograph hula to these chants, and the resulting Nā Lei Hulu production, *The Hula Show 2011*, will both celebrate and deepen an ever-evolving connection.

Poetry, of course, is all about unlikely connections, and Hawaiian dance is all about poetry. The best of this Hawaiian poetry, Nogelmeier notes, reflects a rich layering of myth, history, geography, images, experiences, and memories. The dancer, as well as the spectator, receives all this, drawing on his or her cultural background and a private pool of experience and memory to "understand" the text.

For dancers in San Francisco, this poses a particular challenge, as many of the touchstones of Hawaiian chants are deeply esoteric—we may have never felt the spray of the 'Alekoki waterfall, can't imagine Lili'uokalani's smile, have never stood atop Mount Wai'ale'ale. Of course, we can tap our own reservoirs of images and memories: the first time we fell in love, the backyard flower that resembles a plumeria, the way Diamond Head looms in every postcard we've received from Waikiki. But language is often a barrier

in interpreting Hawaiian songs: we who lack fluency in the Hawaiian language may miss many clues and metaphors.

Makuakāne has often collaborated with experts and elders in conceiving his shows, but he had long puzzled over how to develop a repertoire especially meaningful for his mainland troupe. He saw in Nogelmeier the rare scholar able to compose beautiful Hawaiian chants *and* to translate them into lyrical English. "There is an art to translation," he says. "The way Puakea translates gives you that added heft—the complexity, the layers."

*"The way Puakea translates gives you that added heft—the complexity, the layers."
—Patrick Makuakāne*

Then, in 2007, when the two spent hours together as judges at the Iā 'Oe E Ka Lā hula competition in Pleasanton, Makuakāne learned an intriguing fact about Nogelmeier: the Minnesota native with a thirty-year history in Hawai'i was actually born in San Francisco's Presidio. "The final piece of the puzzle fell into place," Makuakāne recalls.

He proposed that the Hawaiian-language master compose a unique suite of chants, to be choreographed by Makuakāne and danced by Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu. Nogelmeier said yes. They received a grant from the National Museum of the American Indian in 2010, began to brainstorm in winter 2011, and have continued to develop their material. "We may have fulfilled the grant," says Makuakāne, "but we haven't fulfilled the project."

Nogelmeier echoes the sentiment: "Inspiration goes beyond intention."

Whether or not the process of creating their sequence ends in October, this much is known so far about *The Hula Show 2011* at press time: Following hula protocol, the presentation will trace a distinct movement, from a *ka'i*, or opening (which in this case is also a migration chant, bringing Makuakāne to San Francisco, but also San Francisco to Hawai'i), through a body of chants (in this case, honoring people, places, and historical milestones), to a closing (in this case a *mele ma'i*, or "procreation chant," that honors a generational link to ancestors and future progeny).

"I've been composing for a long time," Nogelmeier says, adding that he has "done chants for other *hālau*. But I've never composed for a city. And I've never done a suite, an entire body of poetry that works as a package."

Worked into the suite are island mountains and forests of *maile* (fragrant twining shrubs), *ali'i* (royalty) like King Kalākaua, San Francisco's rising hills and castles of art, songbirds like Lena Machado and Emalia Kaihumua, a "pyramid spire" summoning our city's skyline, the Mōa'e breeze of O'ahu and the Hu'e Pā'ū wind of Potrero Hill, and "twining cords of lasting aloha."

In a conversation the two have about the process of creating the suite, the image of lovingly intertwined cords of aloha pervades:

"I knew I was in good hands, but I wasn't sure what the finished *lei* would be," says Makuakāne.

"These *mele* come out of you," Nogelmeier counters. "Patrick, do they feel like yours?"

"Yes, they absolutely do," the *kumu hula* responds, pausing for a moment and musing. "They are mine, but they are enveloped in something that was woven during our many conversations, in a veil that you and I understand." 🌿

Patrick Makuakāne & Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu present

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FIRST TIMES

— by Jenny Des Jarlais

How I wanted to pull my camera from the pocket of the jeans beneath my *pā'ū* (practice skirt).

At the end of a line of dancers during rehearsal, I snuck a peek to my left and could see all my hula sisters dancing in unison, bodies dipping and arms rising to the music. Beyond them, singing at the piano, was the legendary Roberta Flack.

"Just one snap!" I thought. "What a memento." But I didn't dare.

Twenty minutes earlier, Flack had breezed into the theater with her entourage, never removing her sunglasses, and taken control of the rehearsal. "Why are they dancing over there?" she demanded. "Because of the lights? They should be over here. I want lights here!"

Whoa, she doesn't mess around.

We were nervous about the performance. Even though we'd danced to Flack's recording of "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" countless times before, the unpredictability

of live music could throw off even the most seasoned ensemble. And with that music coming from Flack's own mouth, the surreal experience might leave us even more ruffled.

Later we went backstage and, accompanied by a recording we'd surreptitiously made during rehearsal, ran through the piece again and again. But we had no guarantees she'd sing the song the same way that night.

Finally, it was showtime. Flack toyed with the melody and phrasing, letting the words surge and slow, but the basic beat held steady. We clung to it like a life raft, intent on moving together. Luckily, our concentration left little mental space to soak in the magnitude of the moment. If it hadn't, I fear we would've been distracted by our thoughts—I'm performing with Roberta Flack!—and lost our place in the dance.

After the show Flack came to us and asked, coyly, "How can I bring you with me everywhere I go? I feel the emotion of that song every time I sing it, but with

your dancing . . . it really enhances what I feel."

We knew she meant it. In rehearsal when she started to watch us, she had said, "Oh, I can't even look at you, I'm gonna cry," and promptly turned away. ♡

Nā Lei Hulu performed with Roberta Flack at the War Memorial Opera House in February.

