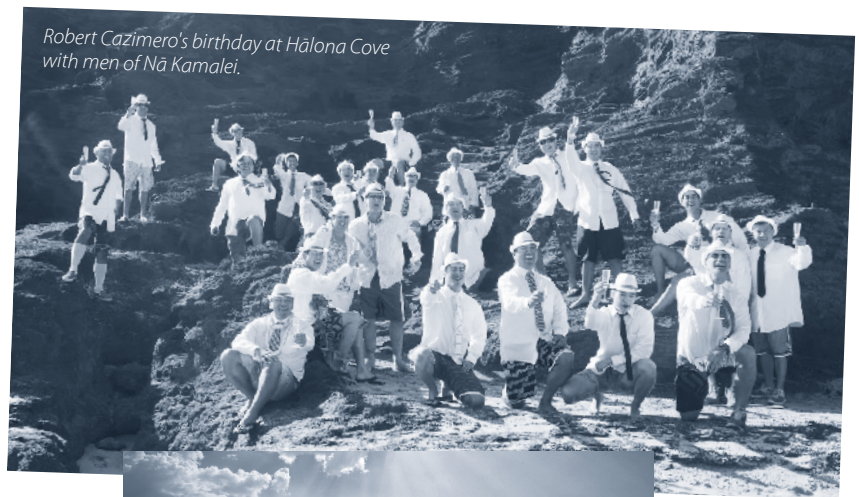


# KAHOLO'ANA



Robert Cazimero's birthday at Hālonā Cove with men of Nā Kamalei.



## "Me ke aloha, Kumu"

A hula teacher heads home for a self-imposed "sabbatical" and sends dispatches to his hālau.

—Patrick Makuakāne

After Kumu Patrick Makuakāne joined a special Merrie Monarch hō'ike last year, he sensed what he had been missing when it came to his own studies of mea Hawai'i (all things Hawaiian). After three decades in San Francisco, he felt a cultural disconnect. And he wanted to be part of the current conversation in Hawai'i, more informed and inspired than ever. He had the luxury of time, since the October 2014 show would be more recital than newly choreographed production. So he moved to Honolulu for four months. The following dispatches were emailed to newsletter editors—and, in a few cases, delivered in person during monthly visits to San Francisco. The sign-offs varied: "Alrighty, Aphrodite, work your magic" or "That's it for now. Mahalo! Kooms." But most emails were signed, simply, "Me ke aloha, Kumu."

### FEBRUARY 13

Waikiki was my playground as a kid. I came here practically every weekend to swim, hang out, and jump off the wall. I'd eat an egg salad sandwich I brought from home on white Hostess bread with no crust. So 'ono (yummy).

My enduring love for Waikīkī has brought me now to a condo on Hobron Lane, directly behind the Ala Wai Canal. From the 36th floor, I look out onto the majestic Ko'olau mountain range. I never close the shades, so it greets me every morning.

I spent my first week equipping my new hale (home) with bed sheets, cable TV, a computer chair, and a giant bottle of Aloha Shoyu.



My kumu, Robert Cazimero, invited me to a performance on my first Friday—a fundraiser for the family of a Hawaiian DJ who had died unexpectedly. A veritable "who's who" turned out to offer condolences and sing. The Brothers Cazimero delivered a breathtaking version of Lena Machado's "Kamalani O Keaukaha." Then we were off to Shinso Tei, a karaoke bar with the best string beans and 'ōpae (dried shrimp).

My first Sunday morning, I started back in hula—as a student, not a kumu. Whoa. Time-traveling back to my early days in the hālau (school), except this time, I am better equipped and have a new hip. Gotta admit, I can't go as deep in 'aiha'a, but my appreciation is deeper than ever. Three hours fly by like minutes.

### FEBRUARY 19

Went to see the Barefoot Divas at Leeward Community College. Six women tied to the indigenous peoples of Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea. Magnificent voices, with charisma to spare.

continued on page 4

# Pūpū O Ni'ihau

*When the haumana of Nā Lei Hulu honored their kumu with a lei made of "shells of Ni'ihau," it turned into the gift that keeps on giving.*

—Constance Kiakahi Hale

Most good stories move in a circle. They start with something that hooks you, trace a gentle arc, and then—in a surprise, a happy coincidence, or a little piece of artistry—return to the beginning.

Most hulas move in a circle, too—not on the dance floor, but in the storytelling.

The main thread is sung in the first verse, then echoed in phrase, sentiment, or movement. The arc is then tied up at the end, "*ha'ina 'ia mai ka puana*" ("and now the story is told").

And, of course, every *lei* moves in a circle, the first flower linked seamlessly to the last, the patterns repeating, the beginning-middle-end less important than the graceful whole. Some lei include multiple strands, the many circles held together by a delicate clasp or bright ribbon.

So where do you begin an article that is about all these things—circles, stories, hula, lei?

**Let's start this one with a big birthday**—Kumu Hula Patrick Makuakāne's fiftieth birthday, to be exact. When August 2011 was fast approaching, the students of Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu wanted to honor their beloved teacher. What tangible thing might express their appreciation for all the intangible things he gives to his *hālau*?

Some recalled that when Makuakāne talked about a recent trip to Japan with his own kumu, Robert Cazimero, he joked about how the other kumu on the trip "busted out" their Ni'ihau shell lei, while he had none. An idea was hatched: to give him an awesome lei.

Manny Dacalano, a member of the performing group, suggested a multistranded lei that could be worn long or twisted short. As the plan came together, so did the students' understanding of the meaning of a Ni'ihau shell lei, which is not just an adornment but a lesson in anthropology.

**That lesson gives us another strand**, which begins on the mysterious island of Ni'ihau, shrouded in mist by day, privately owned, and off limits to all but its 130 Native Hawaiian residents. They don't have running water or electricity, but they do have their own dialect, civic rules, and culture. With *ōhana* (family) at the center of their lives, they hunt, fish, and grow their own food.

And, for generations, they've collected the tiny shells, ranging from one-tenth to three-eighths of an inch long. The *pūpū* gathered on Ni'ihau are more colorful and lustrous (and so more precious) than those from other islands.

Lei makers sort the fragile shells by species, size, and color. After making pinprick holes, they string, knot, and tie the shells into signature shapes and patterns. The ends of the lei are secured with a shell or a small button, and sometimes tucked into a cowry.

Ni'ihau shells have long been treasured. When Queen Kapi'olani attended Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887, she brought and wore a multistranded lei of ivory-colored shells resembling ropes of pearls. And at a recent Bishop Museum exhibition on the shells' history, visitors ogled a four-strand child's bracelet carbon-dated from the late 1700s.

Today, the most common shells are the white *kahelelani* (shaped like turbans), the *momi* ("pearl"), and the *lāiki* ("rice" shaped). Their hues are blue, pink, butterscotch, black, and brown. When strung in myriad patterns, their prices range from \$100 to \$30,000.

**Now, another strand.** Hawaiian composers celebrate these ocean gems in songs as lovely and rare as the lei themselves. (You won't hear them sung in your average Waikiki hotel.)

In thanks to his *haumana*, Makuakāne choreographed a hula to one such song, "Pūpū O Ni'ihau," from the 1930s. "I wanted to commemorate the *hālau's* generosity and aloha," Makuakāne notes. He says that he has loved the *mele* since first learning it from Cazimero in the 1980s.

The lyrics of "Pūpū O Ni'ihau" express intense longing for what the composer once had and desperately wants back. The shells, or one of the shells, stand in for the person the composer yearns for. According to an essay by Kihei de Silva, the composer first pleads for the shell's "attention." In the second verse, he praises her elegant beauty. In the third, as his thoughts return again and again to his beloved, he becomes overwhelmed by memories. In the fourth verse, he implores her to be with him—*pili* (close), *ko'olua* (paired), and together in a *kahi mehameha* (secluded place) "where no one else can intrude."

Each verse of Makuakāne's hula involves intricate footwork and novel gestures. In the last stanza, dancers trace the arc of an imaginary lei on their chests, glancing up with a Mona Lisa smile. The hula is a clasp of sorts—binding the dancers to their cherished kumu and the memory of his birthday gift.

**And here our lei curves into one last strand:** In January 2013, the manager for singer-songwriter Kuana Torres Kahele contacted Makuakāne to ask whether the *hālau* would like a lei pūpū workshop. For \$225, haumana would receive a set of Ni'ihau shells and coaching to make a lei that would easily cost \$500 in a store. "I jumped at the opportunity," says Makuakāne.

Each of two four-hour workshops was filled with song, fellowship, and Kahele's stories: He believes lei-making will allow Ni'ihauan families to stay on the island.

When Kahele first visited Ni'ihau, he was astounded: "The beaches are just pristine." Within ten minutes of landing, he composed the melody and words to "Nanina," named after one of those gorgeous beaches.

This fall, in our *hō'ike nui* (page 8), *hālau* classes will dance to "Nanina." The tune is heartbreaking, its words praising the beauty of Kikepa Point, the calm sweep of the sea, and the sparkling waters of Kaulakahi Channel. The hula moves through ups and downs, twists and turns, loving embraces and sassy vamps.

When we dance to the choreography of our dear kumu, we will wear the pearly necklaces of that ambassador of Ni'ihau, Kuana Torres Kahele.

And with that, we come full circle. ♪



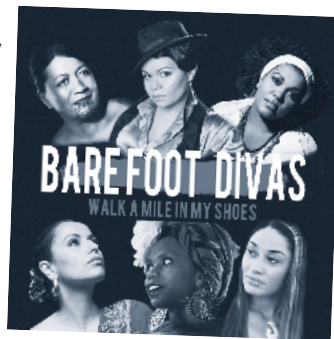
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# "Me ke aloha, Kumu" continued from page 1

The exhilaration of the singers was matched only by the audience's appreciation. When was the last time I saw an audience stand and chant a response in the middle of a performance? The natives were definitely restless that night.

A few nights later, I bumped into the Divas having dinner at Soul de Cuba. Unbelievably, Keao Costa (formerly of Nā Palapalai) was our entertainment, sitting at the bar with his *ukulele* and his dazzling falsetto. He called me up to dance "Waikaloa." I obliged. An estrogened evening ending with a testosteroneed hula.



Barefoot Divas. ▲

## FEBRUARY 20

Been working with a former student, Stephanie Steuri, who is Kauai's representative in the *Miss Hawaii* pageant this June. She asked if I could come up with a cutting-edge, over-the-top hula for her talent. Well, it is *Miss Hawaii* so can't get too crazy! Maybe a song from Keali'i Reichel? Or how about Kahauanu Lake? We decided on "Feeling Good," from Nina Simone. I'm positive *Miss Hawaii* pageant officials have never seen a hula danced to this sultry hit.

[Just before press time, we learned that Stephanie had won the *Miss Hawaii* title. And, even better, she won the talent competition. —Eds.]

## MARCH 15

Preparing for our "Hula Guyz" performance at the Hawaii Theatre, which I remember as a deluxe movie theatre in the 70s and 80s. A lustrously renovated theatre reopened in 1996, and though my hālau has performed there, I've never danced there with Nā Kamalei—and never expected to.

I honestly thought I had given up dancing and transitioned into teaching. I figured, I'm a



Nā Kamalei in Hula Guyz at the Hawaii Theatre. ▲

kumu now. I convinced myself that I was OK with that. But I am so loving dancing again!

I feel like the tin man, though. The joints are a little squeaky. With some oiling and stretching, I'm back in the game, but I'm not as sure of myself. I'm still not a take-off-my-shirt kind of guy. I'll leave that to my younger hula brothers.

When I started, I was 14. Everyone in my hālau was in their teens and mid 20s. Now, our hālau is high schoolers and *grandfathers*. I never used to have to think about the dances. But now I am thinking. And following. My skills at following are unparalleled. The young ones are inspiring me to dig deep and keep up.

I suppress a smile as I watch my kumu in action. At 65, he's still on fire. Nothing passes his notice. He addresses every subpar movement with a stern warning and sharp wit. Several of his graduated kumu are in the room, but there's no question as to who's the big boss.

## MARCH 24

A visit to Kauai led to a brief but meaningful reunion with three of the dancers I started the hālau with: Kehau Munoz, Taddy Penzetta, and Punini Ezera.



We went all the way around the island to the end of the road, to Kē'ē Beach. We climbed the hill up to Ke Ahu a Laka, a sacred *heiau* (temple) nestled on the northern cliffs of the island. It is the only *heiau* in the islands for hula. On the trail, there was an abundance of *laua'e*, *hala*, *kukui*—adornments for hula dancers. We stood there, peering over the crashing waves at Kē'ē.

This ancient temple is dedicated to Laka, the patron deity of the hula. Centuries ago,

students of hula came here to immerse themselves in this profound cultural art form. Behind us was the *ahu*, where offerings to Laka were placed. Hula practitioners in the 21st century venture here to honor Laka and make offerings. Hālau come for inspiration, especially before "Merrie Monarch."

There is no escaping the stunning beauty and *mana*—a spiritual power—that permeates this sanctified shrine. We savored the moment on that cliff by dancing and chanting, celebrating all that Laka and hula have bestowed on us.

As we were standing there, three people approached—very Hanalei, very New Age. We were about to leave, to give them space, when one woman busted out with "Kūnihi Ka Mauna." A beautiful version. Somebody had taught her and taught her well. Being the ranking officer on the ship, I let her in. "*E hea I ke kānaka e komo mai loko*" ("We call to the person to come inside").

Note to self: Never judge a person by the New Age coveralls.



My hula brother Alika Parker invited us to his home in the uplands of Kapa'a, Kauai. It is Hawaiian Homestead land set aside for agricultural use. His grounds would make any hula dancer comparably green with envy: *maile*, *'a'ali'i*, *hala*, *puakenikeni*, *palapalai*, *kukui*, *laua'e*. Every plant from every song has a home here.

Alika's property is smack-dab in the middle of Kaipuha'a. A glance to the left reveals the mountain Nounou; to the right, looming in the distance, Mt. Wai'ale'ale stands in splendor.

The traditional *oli kāhea* (chant requesting permission to enter a hālau) called

"Kūnihi Ka Mauna" references these exact places. (This is the chant our New Age colleagues offered at Kē'ē.)

The beginning of the chant starts us out at the foot of the Wailua River. We need to get to Kaipuha'a (the gourd of humility), where we can witness Wai'ale'ale's magnificence. The goal is to attain the *'ike* (knowledge) found there at the lofty mountaintop, but Nounou hinders our view. ("*Alai 'ia a'ela e Nounou, nalo Kaipuha'a*," goes one esoteric line of the chant: "obstructed by Nounou, Kaipuha'a is concealed." Such is the life of the hula dancer, facing formidable challenges while attempting to gain knowledge that leads to insight.

This is the first time I have ever seen these literal places from this perspective, and the first time the figurative meanings became crystal clear.

## APRIL 18

Pūpūkahi I Ke Alo O Nā Pua (United in the Presence of Flowers) is the high school hula troupe at Mid-Pacific Institute. My hula brother, Michael Casupang, kumu hula of Hālau I Ka Wēkiu, is the director.



▲ Pūpūkahi's 25th Anniversary performance.

In the 70s, our high school hula club was extracurricular: We practiced after school. But Pūpūkahi is part of the academic curriculum: After Geometry and before English Lit is hula.

The students are preparing for their 25th anniversary at the Hawaii Theatre. Michael has asked me to work with him on a few pieces in the show. I don't normally work with a gaggle of teenagers. I forgot how fun and

challenging they can be. Such flexibility! Such promise! Such nonstop chatter!

It's official: I'm jealous.

## APRIL 20

I danced at "Merrie Monarch" many times in my youth and again in 2013 for the 50th anniversary exhibition. But I have come this time as a *kōkua* (supporter) for Hālau I Ka Wēkiu. Participating as a non-dancer is fantastic: all excitement, no stress.



Hālau I Ka Wēkiu. ▲

This was a special year for Wēkiu because the graduating kumu (five *kāne*, five *wahine*) from a recent *ūniki* (graduation) choreographed dances for this year's presentation—all just stunning. Of course, everything was overseen by Wēkiu's two main kumu, Veto Baker and Michael Casupang.

The entire crew shied away from Hilo Bay, camping out instead at the Waiākea Uka gym. In the highlands of Hilo, we pumped up air mattresses and bundled up against in the chill of the night. Ho man, this was colder than SF! But the gym was the perfect alternative to a hotel, with everyone in one place eating, rehearsing, sleeping, laughing, crafting leis, strengthening bonds.

We trekked to Kīlauea several times to pay homage to Pele and offer our gratitude with *ho'okupu*—our offerings of chants, hula and lei. Awe-inspiring.

Throughout my Hilo adventure, everyone asked me, "Would you ever bring Nā Lei Hulu to *Merrie Monarch*?" My answer in the past was always a resounding "no." But now—let's just say, I'm entertaining thoughts.

## MAY 7

Hilina'iikaponoaupunio'umialiloa Sai-Dudoit is a boy who has just possibly the world's longest first name, meaning "Find truth in the government of 'Umialiloa.'" This family name refers to the *kuleana* (responsibility) of the clan. That clan is his mother's; the 13-year-old is the seventh child of my dear friend Kau'i Sai-Dudoit, a historian and leader in the initiative to digitize the corpus of 19th- and early 20th-century Hawaiian-language newspapers, so familiar to our hālau.

When I arrived in January, Kau'i mentioned that Na'i (as her son is mostly called) would start football this summer. Could I pass on a few weightlifting tips? I had had a career in San Francisco as a physical trainer, so I decided to train him personally. Na'i worked out with

zeal and dedication, losing over 30 pounds in four months. *I mua!*

Na'i attends Ke Kula O Kamakau, a Hawaiian-language immersion school in Kāne'ohe. His Hawaiian is impeccable, as is his English. Our topics of conversation included atheism, Christianity, sexuality, sovereignty, history, language, hula, and, of course, lifting weights.



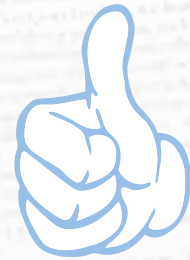
Na'i (on the left). ▲

Na'i's cultural inclination starts at home under the influence of his erudite mother. Between mom and school, his cultural foundation is deeply rooted. If the many Hawaiian immersion schools cultivate

children even half as smart and curious as Hilina'iikapono-aupunio'umialiloa, our future is in great hands. ♡

# The critics speak:

Excerpts from reviews of *Ka Leo Kānaka* (“The Voice of the People”), performed May 9 and 10, 2014, at the Hawai‘i Theatre



## Wayne Harada (Star-Advertiser blog)

Adaptation leads to innovation in the performing arts.

Consider: We wouldn't have *West Side Story*, based on *Romeo and Juliet*, if it didn't serve a dollop of jazz dancing and story-progressing tunes rendered by conflicted teens from two opposite sides of the tracks. Similarly, *Rent* added a rock core to Puccini's opera *La Bohème*, speaking a new language targeting a contemporary audience not commonly considered for the Broadway genre. In this spirit, this past weekend's visit of Patrick Makuakāne's San Francisco-based hālau, Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu... discovered resources for reinterpretation with uncanny and unexpected results.

There's no denying: Makuakāne is on to something vivid and vibrant and immensely refreshing.

[In] a nimble and nuanced coupling of two unrelated modern songs, Michael Jackson's "Dangerous" and Spandau Ballet's "True," the juxtaposition of a hip-hop hit with a romantic ballad provided contrast and challenged the dance couple, Kahala Bishaw-Fisher and Jason Laskey, to be frisky with the upbeat and smooth with the balladry. They killed it with formidable chemistry and artistry. Again, it was Makuakāne, thinking and reacting outside of the box.

So: Stop the presses! Makuakāne may not be a Merrie Monarch winnah (he acknowledged this) but he knows how to adapt and turn the familiar into the fabulous. He is a master of innovation, bar none.

## Wanda Adams (Star-Advertiser)

Patrick Makuakāne knows just how far to stretch the rules of hula—just far enough so they don't snap back.

Charming, articulate, *kolohe* (rascally), Makuakāne narrates his 30-member troupe's shows, choreographs them, beats the *pahu*, sings, and even dances (most kumu don't, in performance). While the dances remain grounded in the familiar foundation movements of hula, Makuakāne weaves in his own ideas, employing music and moves that range from Charleston to modern dance, jazz to rap. Costuming is scrumptious, sophisticated and ideally suited to each selection.

The inspiration is 100 years of Hawaiian language newspapers published in Hawai'i [from 1834 to 1948].

The performance was a sight for this reviewer's bored eyes....His dancers eschew Stepford perfection for an air of relaxed confidence, eyes that connect with the audience, faces that authentically express emotion.

It is impossible within the confines of this medium to convey the breadth of this show. Makuakāne went from King Kalākaua to Louis Armstrong (who knew he did a "Jazz Goes Hawaiian" album?)... His spoof on allegations that Pres. Barack Obama was not born here, "The Birth Certificate Hula" (to the familiar tune of "Aloha Week Hula") brought down the house as well.



# Hula Guyz

What do you get when you bring 40 years' worth of hula brothers together onstage?

—Kailani Moran



For the past ten years, Kumu Hula Patrick Makuakāne has thought of himself primarily as a teacher and choreographer. But that changed this spring in Honolulu. He reunited with his *kumu hula* Robert Cazimero and resumed dancing with Hālau Nā Kamalei O Līlīehua, the *hālau* he belonged to from 1976 to 1985. "It's different when I'm choreographing and teaching a piece, versus when I'm in a line, dancing with my hula brothers," Makuakāne says. "To be back in that rush, in rehearsal and in performing, has been such a gift. I get to remember what it's like to be a dancer. It's marvelous."

- It's marvelous also for Cazimero, an award-winning singer, songwriter, and kumu hula. When he learned that other former students, in addition to Makuakāne, were also returning to Hawai'i in 2014, he brought them back into the fold. And that inspired him to create a new show for his expanded hālau. *Hula Guyz* debuted in March at the Hawai'i Theatre in Honolulu.

With Nā Kamalei approaching its fortieth anniversary in 2015, *Hula Guyz* is a timely production, telling the history of the hālau while bringing generations of haumana together.

The show journeys forward from the hālau's early days in the 1970s, when Cazimero's kumu, Aunty Maiki Aiu Lake, harbored the dream that Cazimero would start an all-male hālau. It also highlights Cazimero's commitment to instilling his students with the idea that "hula is the art of Hawaiian dance expressing everything we see, taste, touch, smell, feel." Many of his students embody this credo, whether through composing *mele* or becoming kumu themselves.

Cazimero says that having students rejoin his hālau after so many years away helped shape his thinking: "It's one thing for me to have the opportunity to look back, another to look back through the eyes of these students."

Bay Area hula audiences are in for a treat this October, when Cazimero and Makuakāne join forces to bring *Hula Guyz* to the Palace of Fine Arts. Coming from an all-male hālau, Makuakāne has always had the dream of doing a men's show in San Francisco, but never had enough male dancers in Nā Lei Hulu to do so. The San Francisco version is based on the Hawai'i Theatre show but will include men of Nā Lei Hulu and as well as those of Nā Kamalei. In all, more than twenty dancers will grace the stage.

"Doing *Hula Guyz* together forms a union that is going to connect across the ocean, from one city to another, from one student to another, from me to Patrick," says Cazimero. "We got a good thing going, me and Patrick Makuakāne."

Makuakāne puts that another way. "I'm constantly making mental notes to myself to beg, borrow and steal from his genius," he says, laughing.

Patrick Makuakāne & Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu present

# Hula Guyz

Robert Cazimero, one of Hawai'i's most treasured entertainers, brings Nā Kamalei O Līlīehua to San Francisco to join forces with Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu. A rare hula show featuring the men of two groundbreaking hālau.



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