

# KAHOLO'ANA



## A NEW CURRENT

For this year's Hō'ike Nui, a recital for his entire hālau, Kumu Patrick Makuakāne turns to Keaouhou, a dazzlingly talented trio from O'ahu, in an exploration of a musical legacy. *by Constance Kiakahi Hale*

*Left to right: Keaouhou (Zach Lum, Jonah Solatoria, Nick Lum); Robert Cazimero; Mahi Beamer; Vickie I'i Rodrigues.*

Every ten years or so, a group hits the Hawaiian music scene like a rogue wave, altering the musical waters. Think: The Sunday Mānoa with *Guava Jam* in 1969. Keali'i Reichel with *Kawaipunahale* in 1994. Amy Hanaiali'i Gilliom with *Hawaiian Tradition* in 1997. Nā Palapalai with *Makani Olu'olu* in 2002.

In 2017, the surprise wave was Keaouhou, a trio of twenty-something Kamehameha School graduates whose first album, *Keaouhou*, won nine Nā Hōkū Hanohano Awards. "That first album was a benchmark in Hawaiian music," says Kumu Patrick Makuakāne. "They were new and fresh, yet familiar."

Kumu Patrick set to choreographing, teaching his classes a dance for "Hanohano Ha'ikū." The original composition praises the valley near Kane'ohe where two of the band's members, brothers Zachary Alaka'i Lum and Nicholas Keali'i Lum, grew up. More recently, Kumu Patrick has been teaching moves to "Kewalo Uka," a song by the band's third member, Jonah Kahanuola Solatoria, about the place where he grew up: Papakōlea, in Honolulu.

Those dances, along with some two dozen others, comprise the first half of *Hō'ike Nui 2019: A New Current* on October 26 and 27. A *hō'ike* is a recital, and this one features the Nā Lei Hulu performing company as well as students from all classes. There will also be numbers by the newly minted 'ūniki class—some 30 students who have undergone a rigorous, 27-month master training program.

In the show's second half, Keaouhou accompanies dancers to classic songs from the repertoires of Aunty Vickie I'i Rodrigues, Mahi Beamer, and Robert Cazimero. Each was born into a legendary Hawaiian music family—Rodrigues in 1913, Beamer in 1928, and Cazimero in 1949.

Makuakāne, known for the groundbreaking style he calls *hula mua* and for operatic hula spectaculars, relishes such *hō'ike*, when he gets to work with a palette of 300 dancers and choreograph "from that non-hula ma, non-epic, regular hula" part of his brain. This show tells a story, but with the fluid, "modern" hula Hawai'i is most famous for. "This is *'auana*," he says, "beautiful in its own right. You don't have to dress it up—especially when you have voices like this."

Keaouhou's sound developed over many years. Nick and Zach played in Waikiki with family, met Jonah in their high school's Concert Glee Club, and, by 2009, were playing the circuit in Honolulu. They took the name Keaouhou, "the new current" or "the new generation," because they wanted to inspire others to preserve Hawaiian language and culture.

But it's neither their name nor their Hōkū awards that sets Keaouhou apart. It's their sound—both classic and bold. And at a deeper level, it's their mission.

"Instead of transforming Hawaiian music," says Jonah, "we hope to reintroduce a style of Hawaiian music that our *kūpuna* (elders) did so well, with a modern air to it."

The second half of the show allows Keaouhou to pay homage to some of those *kūpuna*. Mahi Beamer was a grandson of the nineteenth-century composer Helen Desha Beamer, a graduate of Kamehameha Schools and Juilliard, and a falsetto singer and hula dancer. Among the signature hula to be performed are "Kimo Hula" and "Nohili."

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Patrick Makuakāne and Nā Lei Hulu i ka Wēkiu present

# Hō'ike Nui 2019: A New Current

The tradition continues...

A grand recital featuring more than 300 hula dancers from Nā Lei Hulu! Making its Bay Area debut is one of Hawai'i's most promising new musical groups, Keaouhou.

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## A NEW CURRENT (CONTINUED)

Beamer himself inspired Robert Cazimero. "I saw that a male hula dancer could be comfortable, empowered," Cazimero has said. Kumu Patrick remembers going to late-night bars after he'd danced in shows with Cazimero—from 1976 to 1981—to listen to his kumu sing, to watch Beamer play piano, and to be mesmerized by Leina'ala Heine dancing the hula. "I fell in love with 'Kimo Hula' listening to Mahi and Kumu scale unimaginable musical heights and watching 'Ala float over the sticky floor,'" he says. Cazimero's own compositions, as well as covers of songs like "Soft Green Seas," are featured in the show.

Mahi Beamer and Robert Cazimero are intertwined in Kumu Patrick's memory and are part of his performance DNA. But so is Auntie Vickie, although his appreciation for her came later.

The "magnificent matriarch" of a performing family, Auntie Vickie's legacy includes the 1962 album *Na Mele Ohana*. In it she offered melodious stories and lyrics from her family trove—something rarely shared with outsiders. "Custom dictated that *nā mele bhana* were not to be sung outside the family without permission," writes scholar Kihēi de Silva. "*Na Mele Ohana* was thus an act of extraordinary generosity and risk; it represented a paradigm shift."

Among Rodriguez's precious songs are "Radio Hula" and "Latitū," both highlights of the show. The title of the latter is a transliteration of "latitude," and it tells the sexy and somewhat sad story of a sailor who thought he was the sole navigator to know the coordinates of a certain "kingdom," only to learn that others, too, were intimately familiar with her ports.

"This is the music that is deep in me," says Kumu Patrick, explaining his eagerness to go back in time. "I remember how as a teenager I would lie on the floor with my curved stereo speakers wrapped around my head and get lost in this music."

For Keaouhou, the idea of songs that summon the past meshes with their repertoire. Nick says the trio agrees that its *kuleana* (responsibility; calling) is to stay in a deeply Hawaiian vein. That doesn't mean they are standing still; rather, they are self-consciously walking the line between past and future. "It's innovation through retrospection," Nick says. "We are moving forward by looking back."

Nick gets excited as he articulates the reason that the group's three album covers all feature the young men against a white background. "The blank canvas is the unknown future," he says. "The Hawaiian concept of time is that the future is 'behind us': Our backs are facing the future, because we can't see it. On each album cover, our backs face the white background, the future. We are stepping backward into it."

This is a fresh way of expressing what Kumu Patrick so often explores in his work: the idea that tradition is sacred, but to be vibrant a culture must keep growing. That the songs of the past give us keys to the future. That to stay alive, the oceans must be moved by new currents. 🌿

For more about Keaouhou—including how the band got its start and its name—visit [naleihulu.org/keaouhou](http://naleihulu.org/keaouhou).

### Kaholoāna Staff

Editor:	Constance Kiakahi Hale
Designers:	Chris Uesugi Lauer Linda Zane
Deputy Editor:	Jenny Des Jarlais
Copy Editor:	Julie Holland



Erin Sweeney

# HOPPING HULA

**The swing band Kahulanui has teamed up with Nā Lei Hulu for several performances, prompting hula dancers to expand their horizons and learn the Lindy Hop.**

By Kailani Moran

It seems unlikely that hula could turn you into a swing dancer. Yet in our recent show *I Mua*, I put on a striped top, buttoned up my sailor pants, and laced up my saddle shoes—the first time I'd ever worn any kind of shoes onstage.

Longtime Nā Lei Hulu members and experienced swing dancers Julia Fennell and Erin Sweeney, along with two co-instructors, guided me and 31 other Nā Lei Hulu dancers as we learned to rock step, swing out, and do the Shorty George. Some of us even braved new territory and learned aerial tricks. Julia and Erin are accomplished, Savoy-style Lindy Hop dancers, but they had certainly never applied the style to made-in-Hawai'i music.

It was Kahulanui, a Nā Hōkū Hanohano Award-winning and Grammy-nominated Hawaiian swing band, that inspired our Lindy Hop intensive. Kumu hula Patrick Makuakāne felt an instinctive connection when he heard the band's fusion of jazz and Hawaiian music. "I was blown away. They

sounded hip and authentic at the same time," he says. "My initial reaction was something like, 'We should be dating, or at least have a fling!'" He knew Kahulanui would be the perfect partner for a show.

Hailing from Hawai'i Island, the nine-piece band is the brainchild of bandleader, lead vocalist, and guitarist Lolena "Lena" Naipo, Jr. Inspired by the Hawaiian jazz he'd heard on the radio in his youth, Lena had long dreamed of forming a Hawaiian big band. Then, seven years ago, he put together a four-piece ensemble and began recording an album. The group soon convinced the producer to add a horn section and slide guitar into the mix, and it has been a big band ever since.

The band's name means "the big dance" and pays homage to Lena's grandfather, Robert Kahulanui Naipo, who was once an alternate leader of the Royal Hawaiian Band. Lena's father, Rodgers Naipo, played upright bass with Aunty Genoa Keawe. So Lena grew up around some of the most influential names in Hawaiian music.

But Kahulanui recalls Lena's grandfather's day and the swing bands from the 1920s. It was an era when bandleader  
(continued on back page)

Back by popular demand! The Hawaiian jazz sensation that blew the roof off the theater in 2018 at *I Mua: Hula in Unusual Places*. A Lindy-Hopping, jaw-dropping hula extravaganza.

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—Wall Street Journal



Patrick Makuakāne and Nā Lei Hulu i ka Wēkiu present

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Sun Oct 20 2:00pm

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## HOPPING HULA

(continued from page 3)

Johnny Noble, the “Hawaiian Jazz King,” transformed Hawaiian songs with jazz arrangements and launched them into mainstream popularity. Echoes of his approach persist in the Hawaiian swing bands of today, though some—like Big Kahuna and the Copa Cat Pack—tend to lean more toward the “swing” than the “Hawaiian.” Not so with Kahalanui.

One place we see the band’s Hawaiian roots is when the musicians take a break from up-tempo jazz for the tender slack-key medley “Old Hawaiian Style/ He’eia.” Through it, Kahalanui pays tribute to beloved songs from earlier eras. “He’eia,” which was arranged by Charles E. King, is a *mele inoa* (name song) for King Kalākaua that regained popularity during the Hawaiian Renaissance. “Real Old Style” was written and performed by Keola Beamer in 1972; its lyrics lovingly describe Keola’s relationship with his grandfather. Lena reworks the lyrics as a tribute to his own grandfather: “My tūtū kāne was an old man, he used to sing me the songs he wrote when he was just a young man, and he played in the real Hawaiian style...”

With a unique combination of high-energy jazz and robust connectedness to *mele* (song) and *ōlelo* (Hawaiian language), it’s no wonder that, in a *Wall Street Journal* review, Will Friedwald wrote that



“Kahalanui will make you want to dance a hula and do the jitterbug at the same time.”

That it did. Partner dancing was entirely new for me. In taking on roles as leads and follows, we had to learn how to initiate and respond to cues with another person to execute the dance. It felt like learning a new language.

With time, the weekly lessons highlighted unexpected links between the two styles of dance. Julia and Erin’s instructions to stay low, in the style of Savoy swing, reminded me of *‘ai hō‘ā*, the bent-knee stance in hula. In swing, we focused on being connected to our partner through physical touch and through moving with a shared purpose. In hula, we connect with each other by sending and receiving “rainbows”—tapping into the energy of those around us in order to move as a group and remain in sync.

I never would have predicted this pairing of hula and swing, but it was exhilarating. I’m glad that the audience felt the same way and that Kahalanui is returning for another show. Saddle shoes, here I come! 🐎

Kahalanui performs with Nā Lei Hula on Oct. 19 and 20. See ad on page 3.