

# KAHOLO‘ANA

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## HĀNAU: Reimagining Ourselves in a New Era

### Carefully crafted kahu bring life to hula class

by Constance Kiakahi Hale

On a dark winter night in January, Zoom hula class opened in an entirely new way. While dozens of students waited patiently, Kumu Patrick Makuakane kept his video screen dark and began to chant: “E ulu, e ulu kini o ke akua...” (“Inspire us, o multitudes of gods...”).

Then Kumu Patrick turned on his video, and we saw that he had transformed the office from which he had been, for 10 pandemic months, conducting classes. Gone were the koa bowls and family photos. The back wall, opposite his computer, was covered with a cloth facsimile of a plank wall. At each end were two wooden etagères holding various objects, plants, and lei. At the center, on the floor, was a pile of river stones. It was a stunning tableau.

Finishing his chant, Kumu Patrick explained that he had built this kahu, or altar, for us. He touched each object lovingly and explained its significance. In its totality, the shrine celebrated Laka, the divine essence often called the goddess of hula. The idea was to summon her, to ask her to inspire us so that we could invest power and meaning into our dancing.

But the kahu has another purpose: It helps us shift our focus at the end of a pandemic day, escape from the monotony of too many

“gallery views,” enter a consecrated space, connect with each other, and spend a special hour and fifteen minutes together.

Since that first dark night, Kumu Patrick has built a different kahu each week, foraging among the ferns and leaves in his garden on Potrero Hill, making trips to the San Francisco Flower Market, dragging in drums, draping fabric, and placing mementos. He launches each class with a chant for the kahu, often placing a lei in a place of honor.

“The kahu are like portals through time and space,” comments student Stephen Wu. He adds that through these shrines, students gain new understanding about Hawaiian history, become acquainted with certain deities, observe new rituals, and learn about special contributions to the hālau by various artists and fellow dancers.

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Save the Date  
October 23, 2021 @ 7pm



## Carefully crafted kuahu

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was seen as something best left behind, partly because it conflicted with Christianity and partly because practitioners might unintentionally cause things to happen that they were not prepared for.

And yet the idea of a shrine appeals to Kumu Patrick, with his love of craft, lei-making, and adornment—and with his own abundant garden to pluck from.

"Gathering the greenery brings me the same excitement I would get by going into the mountains back home," he notes. "But I don't have access to lehua, maille, 'e—so I have to make adjustments."

He makes other adjustments as well. The kuahu are informal in that they don't follow strict protocol, but formal in the sense that they create a vibe demanding our attention. "I'm using the kuahu to engage my haumana (students) in this platform we're stuck with," Kumu Patrick says. "I want to have a higher-level communication with the people in this room with me."

"It's made the Zoom class different," says student Kirsten Kvam, "changing my perspective on being what has felt like a webcam dancer. It creates a space beyond the computer screen."

This isn't the first time Kumu Patrick has made kuahu central. In 2016, for the Yerba Buena Garden Festival, he participated in The Ola Project, which included an outdoor shrine as the focal point for hundreds of Nā Lei Hulu dancers who descended upon the gardens to build, sing, dance, and celebrate.

The idea to build a kuahu for the Zoom room, though, gave him pause. There was a slight worry about "doing something hewa, or wrong, and bringing harm to my students." But he did it and felt invigorated, saying, "It did inspire me to do the best I can as a kumu."

"I appreciate his dedication," said Kvam. "All the work, the thoughtfulness, and the way he brings us into it, telling us what is on

the kuahu, and involving us in the chants. His intention and purpose is something to behold. We can take that into other parts of our lives."

"Kumu is able to respect Hawaiian tradition and also demystify it," says Watson, adding that certain traditions were forbidden even to be discussed when she was growing up. "Building an altar to an akua (deity)? Forget about it. (What would God think?) A pahu (drum) was scary—it was something my grandma told me you heard when the night marchers were out looking for keiki kolohē (naughty children)."

Kumu Patrick has continued to innovate. He has given us lectures about traditional greenery used on the kuahu: fragrant male, starlike fronds of the 'e'ie, scarlet pompons of the lehua and ohia', varieties of fern, lemon-colored hibiscus, breadfruit, native banana, ti leaves, and royal yellow 'ilima.

And Kumu Patrick taught us a new prayer to activate the kuahu, composed by Kumu Kalei Nu'uhiwa. (See sidebar.) Entitled "Pule Hi'iakapōmakole," it summons one of the many Hi'iala sisters of Pele, all of whom help us with health and restoration. This one, Hi'iakapōmakole, is the Hi'iala of the night rainbow, a woman who dwells in mystery, in the Pleiades. It can provide us inspiration and clarity.

One week, Kumu Patrick showed us a bouquet of ferns bound together as a ho'opuku, or gift, to offer us protection. After placing the bouquet on the kuahu, he added a maille lei made of glass leaves made by our hula sister UI Campaña, and he sang a chant that is rarely heard, because it is reserved for a particular hula ceremony.

"Many of us in Papa Liko felt like we were being honored with privileges not yet earned," says Wu, using the name given to the beginner class. When Kumu Patrick shared that particular chant, Wu adds, "I literally stopped breathing from excitement at what I was witnessing." 🙏

## Giving the Land a Hand

From blue-collar Wai'anae boy to academic powerhouse and innovation rainmaker

by Constance Kiakahi Hale



Before the pandemic, some haumana had long been vaguely familiar with the work of the Enos family, whose farms in Wai'anae have become stops on the haka'i (educational journeys) taken by classes in their hula development. At Ka'ala Farms, we have listened as patriarch Eric Enos talked about the link between kalo (taro) and Hawaiian culture, and about how working in lo'i (taro fields) has allowed at-risk youth to heal trauma and reorient their lives. Then we have headed to the fields, feeling the mud between our toes and exploring our own connections to that land, that valley, that collective past.

At MA'O Organic Farms—where Eric's eldest son, Kamuela Joseph Nui Enos, was director of social enterprise for 11 years—we learned how the nonprofit connects youth to the land while strengthening work and life

skills. But we didn't hear Kamuela's personal story of transformation, from alcohol-addled teenage dropout to Native Hawaiian visionary. That we learned when he joined the hālu on Zoom in December 2020.

The story took off when, as a 17-year-old, Kamuela was roused early one morning by his father and sent to the back of the valley in a zipped-up mechanic's suit. There, hot and hung-over, he had an epiphany. "It dawned on me while I was weeding," he said. "I was looking at the structures of the lo'i and thinking of the work that went

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## The Sky Is the Limit

Ethnoscience Kumu Kalei Nu'uhiwa expands minds at Nā Lei Hulu

by Kazz Begelman

Kumu Patrick Makuakāne met Kumu Kalei Nu'uhiwa in 2019 at Burning Man, the annual arts extravaganza in the Nevada desert. Kumu Kalei's reputation as a Hawaiian astronomer preceded her, as composer and Kumu Hula Keali'i Reichel had been singing her praises. Wherever Kumu Patrick and his performing group gathered under the desert skies, Kumu Kalei would join them and chant a meaningful oli. Her mana'o, or thoughts and theories, radiated so strongly that Kumu Patrick knew he had to bring her in to speak to the entire hālu.

Kumu Kalei's thesis about the Hawaiian Moon Calendar helped her earn the first-ever master's degree from the University of Hawai'i—Mānoa's Kawailiuealani Center for Hawaiian Language. Her passion is to make knowledge from Hawai'i's past relevant and accessible today. So what could be more appropriate than a series of Zoom lectures—beamed up to satellites in space and bounced back across the Pacific to homes on the mainland—in which she discusses ancient astronomy, history, religion, 'ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian language), and the very skies through which the signals are traveling?

Kumu Patrick invited Kumu Kalei to present hālu workshops throughout the pandemic. In these, she spoke about ideas from her book, *Papaku Makawalu: A Methodology and Pedagogy of Understanding the Hawaiian Universe*. She also shared pictures of the sky from the Maunakea telescopes; notes on how the Hawaiian concept of lanī, or "heavens," differs from the Christian construct; and ways that the skies appear in countless chants and dances.

"Today in Hawai'i, we are elevating our personal consciousness to the ways in which our kūpuna, our ancestors, thought about their environment," Kumu Kalei says. "How did our ancestors see the universe? Or the multiverse? If that's not enough to make your brain explode, her lectures on akua (gods) are guaranteed to. She could not possibly cover them all: There are 400,000 Hawaiian deities recorded. Both figuratively and literally, Kumu Kalei has expanded our horizons—up, up into the lanī." 🙏

"The kuahu with the backdrop of the Ko'olau stands out for me," says student Lehua Watson. "My family is from the windward side of O'ahu, so seeing those lush mountains and dark green ravines made me feel safe and homesick all at once. Kumu Patrick adorned it with plants I grew up with that still thrive in my mom's garden: palapalai, ti, hāpū'u. And the pōhaku (stones) at the base reminded me that we stand on the shoulders of those before us—in our hula family."

Building an altar in hālu is hardly a new idea. In fact, it's a very old one. Nathaniel Bright Emerson, in *Unwritten Literature of Hawaii*, wrote in 1909 that an altar for Laka was set up in the traditional hālu, the "meeting house" where people gathered for instruction. The building of the hālu itself followed "strict tabu and rigorous etiquette," according to Dr. Emerson, as did the construction of "a rustic frame embowered in greenery." The gathering of natural fibers followed precise rituals. Deflowering the woods was seen as both honoring and despoiling Laka and so, Dr. Emerson noted, "the dispoiling must be done with all tactful grace."

"The pule, the prayers, summon the deity, the elemental force," says Kumu Patrick. Though he was taught the prayers, the kuahu was never used by his three kumu. In fact, in the modern era, kuahu no longer appear in most hula studios. Our hula great-grandmother, Aunti Maiki Aiu Lake, did not teach that aspect of the practice. For some of her generation, the kuahu

# Hula by Zoom

by Kazz Regelman

The subversive joys and discovered tricks of dancing through a pandemic

I can pinpoint the exact moment it struck me that hula online was a whole new experience: early May 2020, when my teenage daughter baked cheesecake with fresh strawberry sauce. I was taking my Wednesday-night hula class in the kitchen, facing my laptop on the counter. Photos wandered in to plate her masterpieces. The family converged for dessert, oohing and aahing, while I danced, just feet away. I love my hula class, but I am only human. So, I improvised a dance-along: Kāholo to the right—step, together, step, tap—so far to the right that I was offscreen altogether. Take a bite of cheesecake. Kāholo to the left—step, together, step, tap—far enough to the left that I was back onscreen. Kāholo right, take a bite of cheesecake, kāholo left, smile for the camera. Repeat till song is over or cheesecake is gone.



Like an explorer of old, I wondered, "Am I the first human in history to take an online hula class and eat cheesecake in the middle of a dance?" I just might be. I wondered the same thing when I once lele'd myself—step and lean right, step and lean left—straight off the screen to go loss something pesky stuck in my teeth. That's something I can't normally do mid-dance, surrounded by classmates, facing Kumu. Never has a teeth-flossing felt so lyrical, so graceful, so naughty.

We've all grown accustomed to meetings, lectures, and happy hours by Zoom. But hula? It presents a unique challenge of lefts and rights: If the teacher doesn't "mirror" (face us and dance in reverse), we students have to dance towards the right while the teacher on screen dances towards the left. Tuning in to fellow students (which is de rigeur in a regular class) poses the same problem: They all appear to go one way while I alone dance the other. When you consider that both feet and both arms may be doing different motions—simultaneously—hula goes from being a

small brain teaser to something completely kapakahi (loosely: messed up!).

When Kumu freezes—I'm looking at you, Comcast—we have to continue dancing without model or music, feeling as though we're untethered, adrift in open seas with no land in sight. We continue on our own (if we actually know the steps) trying to sync up with other un-frozen dancers in their tiny squares. Sometimes the sound and picture slow down, then quickly catch up all at once so that we're dancing Slinky-style—stretched out, then bunched together.

Then there is the problem of chanting. In person, we all sync up—ideally—with both key and tempo. It may not be what Kumu would call perfect, but at least he would call it bearable. With 50+ people attempting to sing together—yet with a lag—on Zoom, it's both asynchronous and cacophonous. We call the akua (gods) to inspire and watch over us, but they must surely be covering their ears.

Over time, we've all become Zoom-savvy, and classes have become smoother. The first trick we learned—or, most of us did—was to mute ourselves. In one early session, however, one extraneous voice kept muddling our efforts. Because classes often run to multiple pages with grids of dozens of students on each Zoom page, Kumu couldn't spot the offender. He kept calling out, "Somebody's not muted!" to no avail. He hit upon a creative solution, "On the count of three, everybody shout your own name!" In the silence of the Zoom mute, one voice rang out, "Rita!" (Name changed to protect the guilty.) Kumu cheerfully responded, "Rita, mute yourself!"

Though it didn't take long before Kumu understood that he had the akua-like power to mute all haumana with a single click, Kumu decided in a recent class that he missed hearing the multitudes. He told us to unmute and prepare for a "hot mess" and, boy, did we deliver. He went back to mass-muting.

Just as Kumu has learned a few Zoom tricks, so have we. Being muted does more than protect the rest of the class from background kids, TVs, and barking dogs. It provides us certain freedoms. Recently, my other daughter Ginger muted herself during her own keiki (kids) hula class to yell downstairs proudly, "I just got singled out for my lovely helal!"

Let's not forget Stop Video, which you need on days the WiFi is weak. One click on the icon, and you disappear, dancing in an anonymous black square. Once or twice, I must confess, I have faked the "oh-no-my-WiFi-is-weak" expression as an excuse to turn off my camera when I didn't know the steps well. I can't be the only one guilty of this.

Of course, we miss the harmony (literal and figurative) of chanting together and the energy and flow of dancing in union. We miss the "turn to your neighbors and wish them aloha" hugs at the beginning of class and the joy of conversations as we take off our pā'u (skirts) and get back into street clothes after we're finished dancing.

Yet Zooming into hula class from home has been a godsend over the past year. There is a deep joy in reconnecting each week and in the temporary reprieve from our isolation. The classes get us up and moving—even if we're in our own homes, in pajamas and slippers—and they keep our minds active and engaged. Kumu has leaned into the format, whether it's

beaming in guest lecturers from the islands or sharing videos that allow us to practice dances and chants on our own. He's taken to showing us treasured hula artifacts stored in his home and talking story—it's "show and tell" for grownups.

When this pandemic is done, we will certainly rejoice in dancing and chanting together once again. We won't miss the illness around us, the cabin fever, or the loneliness. But we just may miss those illicit bites of mid-hula cheesecake. 🍰



## The Show

by Kazz Regelman

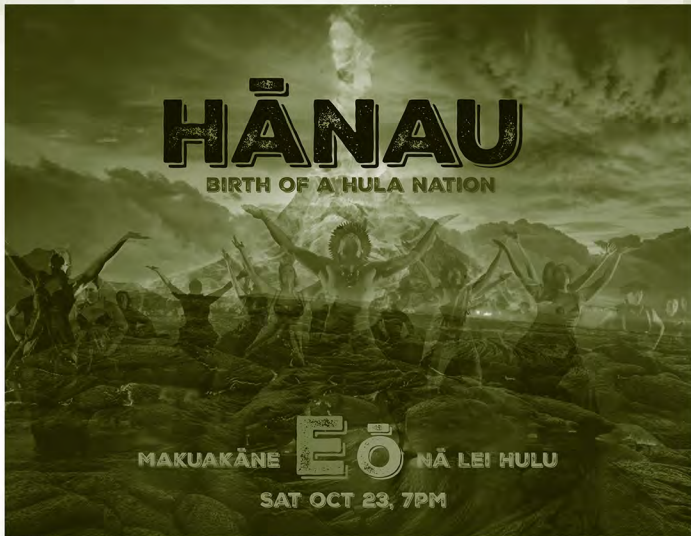
Kumu Patrick Makuakāne chose the title of this year's show, *Hānau* (Birth), as a nod to (what we hope is) our collective post-pandemic rebirth. This version of Nā Lei Hulu's annual October spectacle will feature all-new choreography set to many original and a few rejuvenated songs. "You can't be rebirthed and do the same old dances from your old life!" Kumu Patrick says.

Kumu himself has gone through something of a rebirth in the past year. He is now lead singer of a new band, Eō. As the front man ("How funny is that?!" he laughs), he will perform original songs for *Hānau*, backed by Eō. But the threat of pandemic complications looms large enough that the show will, once again, be virtual. Unlike last year, though, the hālau will have the chance to practice and perform newly choreographed pieces for the camera in person and unmasked.

"Maile Sisters," based on the epic romance of Lā'ieikawai—and featuring guest vocalist Lihau Paik—takes us on a lush, dark, intoxicating journey into the reaches of the rainbow-lit forest. A remake of "Kiekie," originally part of the Mele Iubile collection honoring King David Kalākaua in 1986, reimagines the Golden Jubilee celebrants as a New Orleans-style street band bouncing its way down Honolulu's King Street to serenade the monarch.

Most of the dances, which run the gamut from kahiko to 'auana to hula mua (traditional to modern to innovative), will be filmed at the cozy Presidio Theater, with some outdoor settings around San Francisco and Hawai'i thrown in for variety. The advantage of planning a filmed virtual show is that the hālau can shoot each dance ten different times from ten different angles, "indulging my control-freak tendencies," Kumu Patrick says. While last year's show had to rely on archived videos, *Hānau* will be choreographed, designed, lit, and filmed specifically for virtual broadcast.

Expect the appearance of guests so special we can't even give hints. With a twinkle in his eye, Kumu Patrick simply says spectators should expect what they get in live performances: "something beautiful, unusual, poignant, traditional, and untraditional!" *Hānau* will be broadcast the weekend of October 23, 2021, with additional broadcast dates likely. ☞



## The Album

Remembering our ancestors while leaping forward

by Constance Kiakahi Hale

For Kumu Patrick Makuakāne, it isn't enough to dance outside the hula box. With the release of "Hānau," the title track of a forthcoming EP, San Francisco's favorite hula teacher is ready to expand the known boundaries of Hawaiian music, too.

His first musical release takes inspiration from an epic creation chant chronicling the birth of the Hawaiian Islands, as told by the historian Kahaluikamoana. Here the ancient story is woven into a mesmerizing soundscape that swells with hypnotic urgency.

Hānau literally means "to be born" or "to give birth," but Kumu Patrick sees layers of meaning. "The idea is to build upon the foundation of our ancestors, celebrating their spirit of innovation and adventure," he says, "but also to leap forward in surprising ways."

The word *hānau* also implies rebirth, and this song, album, and musical group are a response to the post-pandemic moment. "Coming out of the past year," Kumu Patrick muses, "I asked myself: What is the new world we are being reborn into? Do we want to go back to our 'normal' life, or to create new ways of being—as a hālau, as a community, as a world?"

As part of this gestation, Kumu Patrick formed a band, Eō, teaming up with Patrick and Scarlet Eskildsen of Saddle Road Productions on Hawai'i Island. Their idea is to form not a traditional band but rather a collaborative that incorporates an array of talented guest artists—from Lihau Paik to Starr Kalāhiki.

"Eō means 'to call; to answer,'" Kumu Patrick says. "The musical adventures are our answer to this moment of nascent change."

Curious? Buy a ticket to our October show, where you will hear some of Eō's new songs and experience how hula makes mele come alive. Take that 1933 hapa-haole ditty "My Little Grass Shack in Kealahou, Hawai'i": Here it is reborn as an irreverent rap performed in a raucous bar on Honolulu's Hotel Street. ☞

*The single "Hānau" is available for download on iTunes, Spotify, and other digital platforms.*

Yes, it's October.  
Yes, we have a show.  
Yes, it's the best ever.

Sat. October 23, 2021

Join us for a special production

<https://naleihulu.org/hanau>

## Giving the Land a Hand

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into building those 'auwai (irrigation ditches), bringing water from the mountain. We could not have been a dysfunctional people and created this." He realized he had bought into a specious narrative fed to Native Hawaiians, that they were capable of nothing but beating each other up, doing drugs, and being unemployed. "Our poverty was taught to us," he said to himself. "I was, like, 'Fuck, I'm done.'"

He changed friends. He got his GED. He went to community college, then majored in Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He kept going to UH-Mānoa and got a master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning. He struggled with what he calls "blessed schizophrenia." He joined nonprofit boards and served on President Obama's White House Initiative on Asians and Pacific Islanders.

Recently, he landed a job at UH-Mānoa as director of the newly created Office of Indigenous Innovation in the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation. There he looks to past practices in culture, agriculture, and sustainability to transform how Native Hawaiians live, work, and design their futures. He has killer PowerPoint presentations on "Restoring Ancestral Abundance," but his work is hardly "academic." He is using the ivory tower to make change on the ground—literally. He identifies young innovators and finds them grants as well as classes in fundraising, policy, and climate science. "My job is to bring money to Hawai'i to grow out projects," he said. Among his successes are acquiring a 235-acre

valley while at MA'O Organic Farms. And, in his new job, he has established a new bachelor's of applied science in sustainable community food systems at UH-West O'ahu and helped the He'eia community develop strategies to incorporate ancestral systems in their restoration work.



*Then-First Lady Michelle Obama visits with Commissioner Kamuelo Enos, November 12, 2011 (Photo: The White House)*

"We are creating the preconditions for agency," he said, using the Hawaiian board game of *kōnane* to explain: "We don't play checkers, taking one move at a time, or chess, thinking 10 moves ahead. In *kōnane*, we are thinking 100 moves ahead. What is the long-term way we can play to win?"

At the end of his Zoom presentation, Kamuela reflected upon the moment he saw *The Natives Are Restless* at the Hawai'i Theatre in 2001. That performance—and Kumu Patrick's way of working—was a catalyst, he said. It made him realize that "we have a license to continue what we do, to be fearless." 🌿