



NEWS RELEASE

Contacts: Charlene Ka'uhane
President
Ka'uhane Communications, Inc.
Phone: (808) 243-2290; Fax: (808) 243-2211
E-mail: charlene@kauhanecommunications.com

Keli'i Brown
Director of Public Relations & Promotions
Maui Visitors Bureau
Phone: (808) 244-3530; Fax: (808) 244-1337
E-mail: keli@mauivb.com

NATIVE HAWAIIAN ARTS

Eternal values based on environmental awareness
infuse the ancient arts

MAUI, Hawai'i – Highly skilled, interdependent with their surroundings, respectful of land and sea, yet without a written language, the Hawaiian people expressed, recorded, and remembered their heritage, history, and spirituality through the arts.

The heart and soul of Hawaiian culture became the sacred hula Hawaiian dance which honored the gods who permeated nature, the ancestors and genealogies. Sometimes a prayer, sometimes whimsical, hula preceded important events and brought delight. Dancers committed to years of devotion and apprenticeship and a lifestyle imbued with reverence.

Hula was celebrated throughout the islands until, during the mid-1800s, western missionaries shocked by its natural sensuality forced it underground. In the late 1800s, King David Kalākaua brought hula back to life, but western influences would dilute its original depths. Today, hula has been fully revived in recognition of its paramount significance in Hawaiian culture. Kumu hula (expert teachers) are training dedicated students according to the legacy.

Beloved in Maui Nui is the Central Maui hālau hula (hula school) Na Hanona Kulike 'O Pi'ilani, founded in 2003. Co-kumu hula (teacher) Kaponō'ai Molitau is the son of the late John Keola Lake, a revered leader of the Hawaiian cultural renaissance. Just before his passing in May 2008, Lake wrote, "My hope is that this generation whom I have taught will not only pass along the knowledge to the next generation, but prepare them



to become teachers for the generations to come.” His wish is what has long been part of the mission of Molitau’s hālau.

Maui Nui lost another great legend in 2008, when Auntie Nina Maxwell passed away in June. She was the kumu hula for upcountry Pukalani Hula Hale, a hālau for Maui’s youth. Auntie Nina’s legacy gives new depth to famed and heartwarming Nā Mele O Maui, a song competition for Maui’s children. Through their schools, hundreds of Maui Nui keiki (children) from kindergarten to grade 12 participate in this inspiring event each singing at least two songs in the Hawaiian language. High School students exhibit their Hawaiian-themed arts and judges include renowned Hawaiian cultural practitioners. Since its debut in 1972, and traditionally hosted by Kā’anapali Beach Resort, Nā Mele O Maui has consistently contributed to the perpetuation of the unique heritage of Hawai‘i.

Several other hula festivals grace Maui Nui. On Moloka‘i, the annual Ka Hula Piko celebration draws numerous hālau hula from across the State to celebrate the birth of hula. According to the oral traditions of Moloka‘i, hula traces its origins to Ka‘ana on the heights of Mount Mauna Loa in west Moloka‘i. The vibrant performances during this event set this usually quiet island aglow.

In ancient Hawai‘i, chiefs supported and nurtured musical talent as well, often writing music themselves. Musical instruments were crafted from natural materials. Gourds, coconut shells, and fish skin lent themselves to drums. Pebbles smoothed by the waves and held in a performer’s hand made perfect clicking sounds. Unique and mastered by few today, the bamboo nose flute featured two or three carefully drilled holes and served as a favorite messenger between lovers. Such instruments have been revived today.

Contemporary Hawaiian music draws heavily from post-western-contact days, when Hawaiian songs became infused with a tender sadness for a land and a lifestyle lost. The award-winning kumu hula of Hālau Ke‘alaokamaile, Maui-born Keali‘i Reichel brings together old and new traditions in haunting renditions. His passion for the culture of Hawai‘i also led him to become the founding director for Pūnana Leo O Maui, a Hawaiian language immersion school. Once in serious danger, ‘olelo Hawaii (Hawaiian language) is alive again, thanks to musicians such as Reichel. Hawaiian language classes at Maui Community College are increasingly popular.

New Hawaiian voices continue to rise, most notably Maui’s own Napua Greig, whose 2007 debut album, Pihana, captured the prestigious 2008 Female Vocalist of the Year award at the 31st annual Na Hoku Hanohano Awards on O‘ahu. A passionate, skilled, young kumu hula, Greig was taught by her mother, recording artist Hulu Lindsey, and kumu hula Hokulani Holt-Padilla among other great Hawaiian artists. With her sister Kahulu Maluo-Huber, she also teaches the dancers of Na Lei Kaumaka O Uka, a Merrie-



Monarch award-winning halau for women and girls, embodying the passion a new generation holds for the knowledge and values of old while firmly engaged with the modern world.

Henry Kaleialoha Allen is Maui's own original and legendary Hawaiian Steel Guitarist for the world famous "Hawai'i Calls" radio broadcast show. In the 1950s, he became lead singer for the Martin Denny band which provided fuel for America's exotica ultra lounge craze. Hawai'i Governor Lingle proclaimed a day to honor his name in April 2004. Today, Allen continues to compose a medley of Hawaiian, jazz, and swing jazz songs.

As for the other Hawaiian arts, the ancient Hawaiians were master weavers, practiced feathered art, and made soft intricately patterned kapa cloth from the mulberry's bark. Today there is an exciting resurgence of these arts. Born in Hāna in 1938, Master Wood Carver Sam Kaha'i Ka'ai, created spiritual statues for the first traditional Hawaiian voyaging canoes that were being replicated. His collection includes weaponry, fishhooks, and ceremonial vessels. It is on display at Maui Arts and Cultural Center in Kahului.

Inspired by the skill of his great-grandmothers, Pohaku Kaho'ohanohano is a renowned lau hala (pandanus leaf) weaver and teacher, who has dedicated his life to finding old patterns, applying them and passing the knowledge on.

Seeking a synergy of present and past? Inspired by the Kumulipo (Hawaiian creation chant), and one of the most profound, oldest works to entwine Hawaiian culture with the environment, 'Ulalena is an art-filled must-see theatre production in Lāhaina that explores relationships between people, nature and mythology. Filled with metaphor, it impeccably integrates Hawaiian chants and dances, original music, choreography, and modern technology.

The vibrant revival of the Hawaiian arts finds its ultimate expression during the annual Celebration of the Arts Festival held each Easter weekend in Kapalua. This is Hawai'i's premiere arts and cultural event, attended by some of the islands' most renowned cultural practitioners and artisans. Over the course of three days, Maui Nui strengthens its people, its land, and its native Hawaiian culture in this genuine experience.

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