



Maui is Rich in Things Hawaiian

Hawai'i's rich cultural heritage is one of the grandest in the Pacific. In approximately 450 A.D., voyagers sailed their double-hulled canoes from the Marquesas in the South Pacific and planted on these shores the seeds of their Polynesian culture.

It was in the utter isolation of these islands, 2,500 miles from the nearest landmass, that the early Hawaiians established their system of land and ocean management. Its chiefs and rulers honored strict religious laws, and later, in the 19th century, established a monarchy that lasted for several generations. Among the respected members of traditional Hawaiian society were its artists. Spiritually and culturally important, they created a legacy that endured against all odds.

The annals of history are filled with accounts of that fateful day in 1778 when Captain James Cook first set foot in these islands. In the years since western contact, despite the far-reaching changes that have occurred, the Hawaiian culture has proved remarkably resilient. From hula to music to the Hawaiian language, things Hawaiian have undergone a welcome resurgence. On Maui, there are many beautiful and authentic expressions of this culture.

One of the most prominent Hawaiian events in the world occurs on Maui each Easter weekend. For four days, The Ritz-Carlton Kapalua's annual Celebration of the Arts draws Hawaiian artists, scholars, musicians, and the treasured resources of Hawai'i to a cultural celebration of the highest order. In art and craft demonstrations, seminars, ceremonies, entertainment, workshops and panel discussions, the deepest traditional values of Hawai'i come alive and are reinforced.

The Hula

In the absence of a written language, the history, genealogy (critical to the spiritual beliefs of Hawaiians) and the recording of great events were preserved in the chants and dances of the native people.

From early childhood, a hula dancer was dedicated to a life of discipline and study. Dancers, both male and female, left their families to live in hālau hula (hula schools) where they were taught the spiritual as well as physical aspects of the sacred dance. Their place in society was secured.

Through the hula, stories of the people were passed from generation to generation in haunting, melodic chants and flowing movements. Hula was accompanied with instruments made from gourds, bamboo, feathers, sharkskin, and ocean or river pebbles.



Closely tied to religious as well as secular celebrations, the hula declined with the fall of the ancient kapu, or taboo system, after the death of Hawai'i's great king, Kamehameha I. Its closely held secrets became even more hidden. But the most devastating blow came with the arrival of Christian missionaries from New England in the 1820s. The unclad bodies and "suggestive" movements of the dance scandalized the newcomers.

Regretfully, hula went underground from many years and was practiced and passed on in secret until the ascension to the Hawaiian throne of the elected King David Kalakāua in 1874. Kalakāua, nostalgic for the glory of old Hawai'i, wrestled with the tumultuous changes of the time. When he reintroduced the hula in a grand manner at his inauguration on the grounds of Honolulu's 'Iolani Palace, the Hawaiian people were ecstatic.

The new hula (hula 'auana) and the ancient (hula kahiko) continued in the years that followed. The new dance incorporated imported instruments such as the ukulele, guitar, bass and the steel guitar. Hawaiian songs began using English words and the "hapa haole hula" (half-white) was born.

Since what has been called the Hawaiian Renaissance of the 1970s, hula and related Native Hawaiian arts have been revitalized like never before. On Maui, leading proponents such as the late Auntie Emma Sharpe, Nina Maxwell, Hōkūlani Holt Padilla, Keali'i Reichel and Uluwehi Guerrero have made giant strides in presenting hula in an accurate and respectful manner.

Hula is now celebrated in several Maui festivals including Nā Mele O Maui, Hula O Nā Keiki and Moloka'i's Ka Hula Piko. Through these events, the knowledge of hula is passed from one generation to the next. Hula is also performed in the resort hotels, at public lū'au, and in shopping centers. Free hula lessons in the modern version are offered at many of the hotels.

Hawaiian Music

Contemporary Hawaiian music has come to be identified with the likes of the late Israel "Iz" Ka'ano'i Kamakawiwo'ole, with his famous renditions of "Over the Rainbow" and "What a Wonderful World." If you are older, you grew up to the strains of "Hawai'i Calls" on the radio. It was the syrupy, nostalgic music of movies and nightclubs.

But music was always important to everyday life in Hawai'i. When the missionaries arrived, they immediately formed church choirs and translated hymns into the Hawaiian language. Those hymns are still sung in churches throughout Maui.



Many of Hawai'i's rulers supported musical talents and wrote music themselves. Hawai'i's last queen, Lili'uokalani, wrote haunting melodies of a land lost while wrongly imprisoned in a room in 'Iolani Palace by American sugar planters and their supporters. Her most famous composition is the poetic and beautiful "Aloha 'oe."

Along with the resurgence of interest in hula came a renewed excitement for Hawaiian music. Contemporary Hawaiian music, with its inclusion of musical forms from reggae, country western and Broadway, is enjoying a new "golden age." Its growing global popularity was acknowledged by the larger music world when the Grammy Awards added a new category for "Best Hawaiian Music Album" in 2005.

Among Maui Nui's most prominent Hawaiian entertainers are Keali'i Reichel, Uluwehi Guerrero, Amy Hānaiali'i Gilliom, Willie K., and Moloka'i's own Raiatea Helm, whose family is renown locally for their musical gifts.

The Lei

Hawaiians had no precious stones or metals. Their jewelry came from the land and sea: garlands of flowers, ferns, shells, feathers, seeds and leaves. They are still given to mark every occasion in a person's life – birthdays, weddings, graduations, arrivals, departures and funerals.

When a building is dedicated, fragrant strands of maile are untied at the entrance to signify good tidings. Sweet smelling lei such as pīkake (jasmine) or pakalana (Chinese violet) are given to women to be worn as a seductive perfume. A man celebrating an important occasion will be given a lei such as maile entwined with bright orange 'ilima.

Maui's school children celebrate May Day as Lei Day and come to school wearing lei of every conceivable sort. Even candy, yarn and money lei are seen. Lei-making contests are held to show off the diversity of materials and styles. Lei are worn as hatbands, on the wrists and ankles of dancers, encircling the heads of brides and canoe paddles. Even horses have grand special lei for parades. While lei are ubiquitous on Lei Day, employees at many resorts wear them as a daily adornment, if not made of fresh flowers, then of polished kukui nuts, shells from the Pacific Ocean or intricately strung seeds such as wili wili.

The Hawaiian Quilt

When the missionary wives unpacked their trunks from New England and the Hawaiian women spotted their quilts, a new art form was born in Hawai'i.



Hawaiian women learned to stitch and quilt their own designs cut in one piece out of cotton calico. The result was spectacular. Soon, designs were kept secret, as other Hawaiian crafts had been in ancient times. They obtained great spiritual and artistic significance. Quilts were designed with subtle meanings and named accordingly.

When the Hawaiian kingdom was illegally overthrown and Hawaiians were no longer allowed to fly their flag, they quietly made their bed quilts into flags so that each morning they could still wake up “ma lalo o ka hae Hawai‘i” – “under the flag of Hawai‘i.”

Today, the Hawaiian quilting technique can be seen in pillows, children’s crib quilts, beach totes and even Christmas ornaments. Hawaiian quilts have traveled to exhibitions in the Smithsonian Institution and beyond, and hotel lobbies hang magnificent quilts as decorative works of fine art. The designs have also become popular fabric motifs, silkscreened onto bed comforters, towels and even women’s muumuu (Hawaiian dresses).

Kapa

Ancient Hawaiians pounded the bark of the mulberry, or wauke tree, into a felt-like fabric called kapa, which was used for everything from sails for canoes to bedding and clothing. The arduous process of stripping the wauke bark, soaking and softening it, and pounding it into thin sheets of fiber was a finely honed Polynesian art that reached its pinnacle in Hawai‘i. To create the kapa reserved for royal burials, the sheets were soaked in taro fields, where the minerals of the mud reacted with the sun to dye the fibers black. The pounded fabric was also decorated with colored natural dyes and appealing geometric designs made of hand-carved bamboo stamps. Often the kapa was perfumed with maile and fragrant blossoms.

Kapa is almost considered a lost art. It is so prized that when you see it displayed in museums such as the Bailey House Museum in Wailuku or in hotel lobbies, it is usually under glass. Today, Hawai‘i’s most gifted and noted kapa maker is Pua Van Dorpe, formerly of Lāhaina and now residing in South Kona, Hawai‘i Island.

Lau hala

The hala tree (pandanus or screw pine) was important to the Hawaiians for its spiky long leaves, used in weaving, and its fragrant, fibrous fruit. The fruit was eaten in times of hardship, and, when dried, its fine, brush-like fibers were used as nature’s paintbrushes. The dried hala leaves were stripped of their spines, cut into strips, and woven into sails, baskets and mats in an art form called ulana lau hala. Trained by the few Hawaiian masters remaining, a new generation of weavers is continuing this labor-intensive craft. Lauhala mats, hats, baskets, and



accessories can be found in boutiques and galleries throughout Maui and the rest of the state.

Featherwork

Features were used to create the highest forms of Hawaiian jewelry and adornments. Only men and women of the highest ranks wore feather lei, helmets and capes. The native birds that supplied the feathers were carefully cultivated. A natural glue was applied to the limbs of trees to catch the birds so a few feathers could be taken from their tails. The birds were then released. Unfortunately, many of these early birds have died off due to the urbanization of Hawai'i and the importation of diseases.

Today, the most common feather work is seen in lei and hatbands. A number of fine examples are beautifully showcased in various hotels. Featherwork can also be acquired from craftspeople at community sales throughout the islands.

Woodcarving

Hawai'i's forests yielded many beautiful woods such as koa, milo and 'ōhi'a – hardwoods of exceptional beauty that were used for furniture, flooring and containers. Hawai'i's cabinet makers flourished in the years after western contact in the 1800s and early 1900s. In recent years there has been a renewed interest in working with Hawaiian woods, and many Maui art galleries and craft fairs feature the contemporary work of island artists.

In 2003, The Year of the Hawaiian Forest, the islands celebrated 100 years of forest management in Hawai'i as well as a growing interest in alternative woods and sustainable forestry. The non-profit Hawai'i Forest Industry Association has taken a lead in encouraging the use of non-native woods such as mango, ironwood and eucalyptus.

'Ōlelo Hawai'i

While language is not strictly an art form, it is critical to the survival of any culture. Native Hawaiian language belongs to the same root group as Tahitian, Samoan and Maori.

Once commonly spoken through the island chain, 'ōlelo Hawai'i (the Hawaiian language) is undergoing a renaissance as Hawaiian language immersion schools and the University of Hawai'i system teach growing numbers of young students. Once spoken mainly by kupuna (Hawaiian elders), Hawaiian can be heard among new generations of children who are growing up with a fluency in the language. Common words used in everyday conversation include pau hana (finished work), 'ono (delicious), mahalo (thank you) and hiki nō! (can do!).



Today many Maui children are taught the Hawaiian language in the immersion programs of the Pūnana Leo pre-school, by Hawaiian Studies teachers at public elementary schools, in private institutions like the Kamehameha Schools, and at University of Hawai'i campuses throughout the state. There are efforts at all levels to relearn and use the language in a correct and accurate manner.