

Wayne Chang

My advice to the young dancers of today is stay with the dance. Don't look for added rewards. Don't look beyond the enjoyment of dance. The dance must be treated as art or else it becomes an endless circle of performances. If you are looking to use the hula only as a vehicle ^{for greater rewards} you are making a mistake. You must be able to dance in a room with no one around and feel the force of hula. You shouldn't need anybody to watch you.

My first kumu was Auntie Nona Beamer who I first met in 1968 as a senior at Kamehameha Schools. From the start what Nona gave me was a joy for performing and dancing. I was raised on the Mainland until I was thirteen so I didn't have a Hawaiian background to fall back on. I did not know the pronunciation and meanings of Hawaiian words so Nona was the perfect teacher for the level that I was at. I think if my introduction to the hula had been more accelerated I would have been intimidated by the culture. With Nona if you danced in time to the beat and you enjoyed yourself that was enough. It wasn't important to be perfectly synchronized with the other dancers. If the audience enjoyed the dance and could see you enjoying yourself that's what really mattered.

I studied with Nona for a year and then in 1974 I began my training under Auntie Maiki Aiu Lake. The halau at that time was located on Keeaumoku Street and in Maiki's school the hula was presented as a form of study and discipline which was something I had never encountered before. There was a sense of continuity that permeated Maiki's teaching. She stressed that the traditional chants must be protected and perpetuated. She tempered this by ~~allowing us creative freedom in the area of the steps and we were permitted to do what we wanted in order to make the dance richer.~~ ^{encouraging us to create new}

^{and new choreography.}
My uniki was held in 1976 and it was a solemn exercise. Many things were not explained but left up to the individual student to interpret as it happened. Frankly the need for definitions and boundaries were unnecessary. The event generated precise feelings without the need for definition.

In 1979 I was led to Kauai Zuttermeister who I am still training under today. ~~Under Auntie Kauai the hula has become even more defined and crystalized for me.~~ Auntie Maiki taught me a reverence for hula and an awareness that there was a reason for every action in the preparation and performance of the dance but Auntie Kauai illuminated the boundaries and protocol within the dance and the importance of acting within that framework. I began to teach in 1974 because I wanted to build a "better mousetrap" so to speak. There was a demand for my teaching and I wanted to find out if I could improve upon the teaching styles that were handed down to me.

When I was being trained the hula was my first priority. It came before work, family responsibilities, and personal commitments. This carried over to when I became a teacher and I stopped teaching in 1979 because of this attitude. A true kumu is responsible for the actions and behaviour of his haumana and after six years I needed to escape the burden of these obligations. I needed to get my world back into a proper perspective.

Leaving, "Na Kamalei", which I had co-founded in 1975 with Robert Cazimero had to be the hardest experience in my career. It meant a total re-establishment and re-evaluation of priorities and goals that I had held all my life. Being human I totally enjoyed the pageantry and public response to our work but I began to question the wisdom of using performance as a measure of success and achievement.

The hula has become over-^{stated} ~~saturated~~ and this has affected the intensity of the interest of the community that used to exist ^{between 1975 to 1980} ~~in 1975 to 1978~~. The wild crowds aren't there anymore so some kumu are choreographing bigger and brasher dances and they are depending on the audience's reaction for their gratification. Most halaus have reduced ~~their performances and the number of their performances~~ and few of these performances are money-makers. Ironically, ^{enough} the creative freshness and integrity of the hula will be protected and retained because of such economic pressure. Halaus will survive and dancers will dance in the future for the pleasure of hula ^{and} ~~not~~ knowledge and not necessarily for ^{public approval} ~~any type of financial~~ gain.

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