

Cecilia Akim has been teaching hula with Hoakalei Kamau'u for over 25 years, and currently

CECILIA KAWAIOKAWA'AWA'A AKIM

a student of Hoakalei Kamau'u since 1969,

A long time student of Hoakalei Kamau'u, Cecilia Akim teaches with her kumu at the Nu'uanu Day Care Center.

How do you teach somebody who does not know the language? I've seen a lot of misinterpretations of dances. They don't understand the beauty of what the chant is talking about. Our old chants are in Hawaiian and today's students need to understand the Hawaiian language to know what they're dancing about, especially because the motions are very simple. "Kawika" is a beautiful chant because the vocabulary is there, the poetry is there, the history is there. The romanticism, an important part of our cultural heritage is there. It's all there. As a dancer, you're painting a picture. You put into motion our oral history.

My mom took me to learn hula from Auntie 'Iolani Luahine when I was three or four years old. I stayed with her for about six years until she retired from teaching and moved back to Kona. The girls she taught were eight to twenty years older than me. She had me dance with all of them. We performed all over Waikiki and different places. I learned both kahiko and 'auana from Auntie 'Io. She taught us dances like "Little Brown Gal", so we could learn basic hula motions and how to be a little more graceful. We learned our kaha and mele while learning the dance. It was very repetitious. We would go over it again and again.

When Auntie 'Io retired, I went to Auntie Pele Puku'i. I think because I was so young, Auntie Pele gave me private classes. Her fundamental steps were the same as Auntie 'Io's. Auntie Pele reviewed the dances that I had learned with Auntie 'Io so that she knew which ones I had learned. With her I learned more numbers, many with implements and she worked on my chanting for the hula noho.

After about a year and a half, she suggested that I go to another teacher. So at ^{fourteen}14 I went to George Na'ope and stayed with him for over seven years until he moved back to Hilo. That was the first time that I was actually in a class with other dancers who were the same age as me.

Uncle George had a studio in Kalihi a few blocks from my home. So why stay home and help mother clean house when I could go down to the hula studio and help Uncle George. I literally hung out at the studio and danced with all of his classes. We did shows in Waikiki and on the outer islands.

After Uncle George moved to Hilo, I couldn't find any other teacher. So I freelanced on my own doing the shows at the International Market Place with Uncle Johnny Watkins and Aunties Lydia Wong and Louise Freeman. After I graduated from high school, I went to the University of Hawaii and I dropped out of hula completely.

When Aunty Hoakalei started classes for the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, I went back to hula. The object of the classes was to train dancers to be teachers and that's what I've done. ~~She started going over all the fundamental hula like "Kawika", "Lili'u E", and Ulu No Weo".~~

Being with Aunty Hoakalei is a continuation of Aunty 'Io. Her style of teaching is the same. I am very comfortable with Aunty Hoakalei. She is a different person from Aunty 'Io but she's just as beautiful a person. When she did "Aia La O Pele", it was like going back to the days of my youth with Aunty 'Io. I've remained with Aunty Hoakalei since 1969 and I'm still learning with her.

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