

A night and message to remember

□ Palani Kahala's aloha is full of hope and a rebirth of spirit

*No Puna ka 'eha ku'i 'Ulumano.
Po uli ka makani wili heihei.*

By Catherine Kekoa Enomoto
Star-Bulletin

THIS chant poignantly expresses the pain, physical and mental, that kumu hula Frank Palani Kahala must have felt during the first 18 months he had AIDS. He kept the knowledge hidden from the public and from many of his students.

Hidden like the dancers who covered their faces with plain-cloth shrouds at Kahala's program Friday at Kapiolani Community College. The male dancers stamped their feet in frustration and slapped their thighs in agony to depict the show's theme, "The Kauwa: The Forgotten People of Old Hawai'i."

The chant is a metaphor about the kauwa, an ancient Hawaiian class of outcast servants who were drawn upon for sacrificial victims. In poet's language, it relates the feelings of kauwa and, similarly, of an AIDS victim: The driving rains of 'Ulumano are the confusion, emotional turmoil and physical pain of a body-racking illness. Then comes the darkness of fear and despair — and the snaring wind of discrimination.

Little is known about the kauwa. But Kahala, as has been his wont as a pioneering hula teacher for a decade, spoke at length of the kauwa. The occasion was the farewell show of his two halau, Ladies of Kahanakealoha and Gentlemen of Maluikao.

"I did what many kumu are not able to do — to say aloha gracefully," Kahala said of the two-hour performance before 370 people. Three hundred filled KCC's Ohia cafeteria. Another 70 watched the show on a big-screen TV in a downstairs auditorium.

The event was a solemn gathering of family, friends, peers, students and admirers. The audience watched and listened in respectful silence as Kahala shared through chant, dance and narrative the kauwa's — and his own — pain, suffering, sorrow, rebirth — and love, caring and strength.

He unveiled an owl dance, "Ma'ike'ike Mai ka Pohaku Mai," dedicated to his housemate and long-time student, Wailani Robins. She has cared for him since May, when he publicly revealed his condition.

The owl dance showed troupe members with feathered masks, making birdlike movements with

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The Gentlemen of Maluikao, left, cover their faces with plain-cloth shrouds during Frank Palani Kahala's final program as a kumu hula. The male dancers stamped their feet in frustration and slapped their thighs in agony to depict the show's theme: "The Kauwa: The Forgotten People of Old Hawai'i." Below, Kahala, far right, shares a hug with Aliimanuokai, left, and Pomaika'i Gai.

Photos by Dennis Oda,
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Mahealani Tavares, left, and Kimo Lopez during the owl dance, "Ma'ike'ike Mai ka Pohaku Mai" — dedicated to kumu hula Frank Palani Kahala's housemate and long-time student, Wailani Robins.

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