

Chinky Mahoe

The hula kahiko of today is a modernized form. To me, nobody knows how the hula was danced in ancient times. People can only retrace so much and what they recover has been interpreted to them by somebody else. When you enter some competitions today they categorize the kahiko into a certain period. To me the boundaries they set up are very ambiguous and inconsistent. Are you going to limit kahiko to the Kamehameha reign or set the limits at the Kalakaua reign? Why should one be included and the other excluded? Somebody at that time had to dream up the motions and the steps so why can't the kumu create now because today's kahiko has to be a combination of modern ideas and traditional movement. We wouldn't be doing anything different then the kumu of fifty or a hundred years ago did not do themselves.

After I got out of high school I began to work at Kaneohe Marine Base. I started to fall into a rut and I looked at all the people around me and I told myself I was too young to be growing old. I stayed there for two and a half years and then I quit. I went down to the beach and I just wanted to be a bum. I bodysurfed, grew my hair long, played ukulele and then I saw a performance by Robert Cazimero and "Na Kamailei". I didn't know there are specific times for new members to be accepted into the halau so I went to see Robert and Kaha'i Topolinski and they both told me I would have to wait. I was too anxious so I started training under Uncle George Naope at Kalihi-Palama Culture and Arts. Uncle George would show us the motions and foot movements and we would just follow his lead. At that time I didn't know anything and it was very hard for me to take in so much. Uncle George made the class a lot of fun. It wasn't pressured and that's what I needed at that time. A friend of mine who was taking classes with Uncle George would come over and help me practice. He would remember the motions because everything was Greek to me. If it wasn't for him I might have quit a long time ago.

I studied under Uncle George for a year but Kalihi-Palama was a community group and I felt I needed the structure of a halau. I heard about Darryl Lupenui so I went to see him and he took me in. With Darryl it was his mother that gave him the knowledge for his dances. He felt once you knew the basic steps then the handmotions would just come naturally. We would go through hours and hours of just working on those basic footmovements. When we started to dance, Darryl would explain what footmotions should be used at the different points in the chant and he would show us the handmotions. Then he would pick one of the students, explain to the dancer what was to be done and the rest of the class would follow the dancer.

I began to teach in September of 1979 with a group of guys from the Kailua Madrigals. I went to Darryl for his consent and he said I could teach as long as it wasn't hula taken from Waimapuna. The students wanted kahiko so I went home and opened up the "Pele and Hiiaka" book and tried to find a chant that I could handle. The boys kept asking me for more numbers so I figured why not put together a halau separate from the Madrigals. We started out with fourteen boys and by the third week we ended up with four. But those four stuck with me and we went out and did shows.

You want the dedicated ones because everyone wants to dance and they disappear when they find out how much work it is. I liked the style of Waimapuna so I fashioned our practices around Darryl's practices. I figured if that's what it took to be successful then that's what we would do. Duplication of success I guess.

I wanted my dancers to experience what I went through at Waimapuna. My goal is competitions. To me that is the highlight and reward of dancing. Win or lose, just to be a part of it. I think the only thing that matters is that the audience appreciates the dance.

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I saw the Cazimero's halau dance, Na Kamalei. I thought that was something that I wanted to do. So I went out looking for a kumu to teach me. I didn't know that they had specific times when new members were allowed into the halau. I went to Robert and I went to Kaha'i but they both told me that I had to wait until the classes were open. I couldn't wait so I started dancing for Uncle George Naope at Kalihi-Palama Culture and Arts. I studied under Uncle George for a year. He mentioned who his kumu were but I don't remember at this time. Kalihi-Palama was a community group and I felt I wanted to learn within a halau structure. I heard about Darrell Lupenui so I went to ask him if I could join. He took me in about two weeks after. I stayed with Darrell for about four years. With Darrell it was his mother Auntie Muriel that gives him the knowledge for his dances. Darrell concentrated on the basic steps. He felt once you knew the basic steps then the handmotions would just come naturally. We would go through hours and hours of just working on these basic feet movements. When we started to dance Darrell would explain what foot motions should be used at the different points in the chant and he would show us the hand motions. Then he would pick out one of the students, explain to the dancer what had to be done and then the rest of the class would follow the dancer.

Uncle George would show us the motions and foot movements himself and we would just follow his lead. At that time when I started I didn't know nothing and it was very hard for me to take in so much. Uncle George did make the class a lot of fun and because it was a community group I don't think he was very demanding. It wasn't pressured and that's what I needed at that time.

My greatest influence was my friend Buzzy who was taking classes with Uncle George at the same time I was. If it wasn't for him I would have quit a long time ago. He would come over and help me practice. He would remember the motions. (Everything was like Greek to me. As soon as I came home I would forget everything.) After one year dancing with Uncle George I got the hang of it. When it came time to go on to Waimapuna I was hesitant because I didn't want to leave Uncle George. But George was going to be leaving Kalihi-Palama so everything worked out fine. But I was dancing with Waimapuna for two months before I had the guts to tell Uncle George that I was dancing with another group. The training with Waimapuna was two classes a week and they charged us a dollar a month for refreshments. Uncle George and Kalihi-Palama charged us two dollars a month which is nothing and that's why when I opened up my halau I charged nothing to my students. I feel it didn't cost me anything to learn what I learn now so it's hard for me to charge my kids.

I began to teach in September of '79. A group of guys from the Kailua Madrigals liked the style of Waimapuna and asked me to come and teach them a few numbers for their show. I asked Darrell if I could go and teach these students and he told me as long as it was hula that I had created myself and not anything from Waimapuna. The students wanted kahiko so I went home and opened up the Pele and Hiiaka book and tried to find a chant that I could handle. It took me a week before I could even dream up the motions for just the entrance. It took the guys about three months before they learned the dance. After that they asked me to do more and more numbers so I figured why not put together a halau separate from the Madrigals. So I asked the boys and the first week 12 boys came out. The second week 6 boys came out. The third week 4 boys came out and it was those four boys that stuck with me and we went out and did shows. I liked the style of Waimapuna so I fashioned our practices around Darrell's practices. I figured if that's what it took to be successful then that's what we would do.