

# Old hands at hula have lovely time planning comeback

By Wade Shirkey

Gladys Brash is preparing for the reunion. This time, she won't have to braid the cellophane hula skirts. Her sisters, Lorraine Daniel and Blossom Kunewa, have some left over from the war.

After all, their mother invented them. And, thank goodness, none of the famous Joshua Sisters will have to perform in gas masks again. Those things can really ruin a good hula.

The last time the daughters of noted *kumu hula* Auntie Rose Joshua performed together professionally, it was wartime. Their screaming audience consisted of the GIs of World War II.

Gas masks made the girls look "like monkeys," said Blossom, the middle sister.

Next Friday, at its opening to the public, the USS Missouri will take the sisters on a nostalgic voyage back to the days they were the teenaged sweethearts of Hawaii's stage — this time without ever leaving the dock.

Back then, "we entertained

on every ship that came in," said Blossom, "including the Missouri."

Taught by their mother, and booked by their amateur promoter father, they were suddenly under a local spotlight that made for a very different life from that usual for a wartime teen. They were whisked from school by chauffeured military sedan or jeep to as many as four gigs an evening at wartime nightspots.

"After school, Mom would (accompany) us down to Lee's (a Kapahulu nightclub) for one show, rush us down to Lau Yee Chai (in Waikiki), back for the last show at Lee's then to Rudy Tongg's Waikiki Tavern for the late show," said Blossom. "Mom was stage mother. Remember, we were still underage. We'd often not get home until 10 or 11 p.m."

There was an added benefit. In a wartime economy, which required students to sacrifice Friday school days to work in the pineapple fields, the Joshua Sisters "were excused" to allow

study time, said Blossom.

To their variety act, military performers would add an occasional accordion or an impersonation of Frank Sinatra or Al Jolson— even a mandolin, backyard wash-bucket *pakini* bass or spoons, said Blossom.

The girls would do the *hapa haole* hulas so popular with the servicemen: "Holo-holo Ka'a," "Hawaiian War Chant," "Hapa Haole Hula Girl."

"Anything with a little movement," Lorraine said, laughing. "The boys were always happy to see us."

Next Friday, a new audience will see additions to the Joshua act: a dozen daughters and granddaughters.

The *tutus*, now in their 70s, "probably won't get the same reception," Blossom chuckled.

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Joshua Family photo

The three Joshua sisters, who danced to the accompaniment of older musicians, were the darlings of wartime Honolulu.