

## MICHAEL KA'ILIPŪNOHU CANOPIN

*Halau Kealakapawa was founded in 1990 by kumu hula Michael Ka'ilipūnohu Canopin. This "inoa", was given to Michael by the late Palani Kahala. The name literally translates as "the path of dawn", and poetically it means "the trail of the morning star".*

In 1982, I began my hula training with kumu hula, Chinky Mahoe, of Hālau Kawaili'ulā. We went through some rigorous training, learning the basic steps. I found Chinky's style to be 'aiha'a. We danced low to the ground with bent knees. Chinky stressed discipline, and I liked that because it was a challenge. After a few months, Chinky asked me if I would like to be a part of his competition group. So I trained and ended up dancing in the 1983 Merrie Monarch Hula Festival. What an experience! I was surprised to see such diversity in hula styles.

My second teacher was Palani Kahala, kumu hula of The Gentlemen of Maluikēao, and The Ladies of Kahanākealoha. His classes were held at the Kamehameha Schools dance studio. I really enjoyed when he explained the background of each mele, and I was fascinated with his method of teaching. He had a very systematic way of explaining things, especially to dancers who were new to the hula. He would stress the importance of the basics starting with the foundation-which was your feet. His style wasn't as 'aiha'a as Chinky's, but it demanded a lot of endurance.

As part of the class curriculum, we were trained to research chants and mele of the hula. It was extremely important to Palani that we have a thorough understanding of the material we were dancing to; so it was our homework to go out and research. Palani also encouraged us to enroll in his "papa 'ōlapa". This class offered us the opportunity to further our knowledge through research projects such as the study of the famous birthplace of our ali'i, Kukaniloko; Laka, the patron god/goddess of the hula; Pele, and her siblings; the kuahu, and plants and vegetation related to the hula; types of chants

appropriate for dancing and hula protocol; these were a few of the many projects included in the "papa 'ōlapa". I completed the training and received a personal 'oli aloha, the red lehua blossom and it's color, and a certificate of 'ōlapa from my kumu.

For a short period in 1988, I had the opportunity to study hula under the direction of kumu hula Robert Uluwehi Cazimero, of Hālau Nā Kamalei. I was fortunate to learn some traditional hula, chants, and wonderful choral singing. It was fabulous!! His style was more of a relaxed, upright style.

In late 1989, I returned to Palani Kahala; he selected me to train as ho'opa'a. Through this training, I learned various chant styles, composition, choreography, and the proper use of the ipu heke.

Palani offered my hula brother and I the opportunity to train the students of Pearl City High School to enter the annual Hawai'i Secondary School Hula Kahiko Competition. It was his way of affording us the hands-on experience in learning how to teach the hula. Later, I taught hula at Damien High School and Saint Francis High School. Through these experiences, I gained the desire and interest to pursue teaching.

It was through Palani's blessing that I became a kumu. He stressed the importance and the responsibility of the title of kumu hula. He gave me the right to teach through "hu'elepo". In 1990, before his passing, Palani gave me his blessing to begin Kealakapawa.

When I look at my students, I encourage them to study and continue to learn. Emphasis is put on the importance of the language, culture, and Hawaiian values. But the thing that I stress the most, especially in the study of hula, is to learn the language. There's much more to a chant than merely looking at the written translation. You must understand each word thoroughly.



I will sometimes compose a chant to express my feelings; if I'm inspired by a certain place or by a certain event, I will put it down on paper to commemorate that particular occasion. I'll also write if I need a special chant instead of using a standard hula ka'i and ho'i. I don't want to say that all kumu should compose, however, if they put their thoughts in writing it would be a record of their time in hula.

When it comes to "hālau", we all know our place, we are an extended family, we stand firmly by our motto: "Mai Ka Lōkahi, Mai Ka Ikaika", and as a kumu, I need to remember that my students come because of their interest in learning hula.

Since 1990, we've been active in participating in various hula events such as the Prince Lot Hula Festival, the King Kamehameha Hula & Chant Competition, and the Queen Lili'uokalani Keiki Hula Competition. In recent years, we have entered the King Kalakaua Hula Competition in Kona, and the Merrie Monarch Hula Festival in Hilo. Hula competitions serve as a time for the dancers to strengthen themselves. As we train together and work at researching the materials we are performing, we gain that special sense of family awareness. At a competition, we present all of this.

We need to adhere to the guidelines set for us by our kupuna. Each kumu should take interest in learning the ancient dances from our hula masters and keep it the way it was taught. I would like to see a stronger involvement in keeping the hula traditional. There's a time and place for "being creative". What concerns me, is what will be left for the younger people and generations to follow if our creative license gets the best of us?