



By Dennis Oda, Star-Bulletin

After 10 years of guiding his own two halau, Frank Palani Kahala will retire to help his students who have become kumu hula.

## KAHALA: Bidding aloha to halau

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song capping years of work. It's not a sad time, but a time of celebration. I will continue to contribute through the efforts of my own students.

"I decided to dissolve the organizations for several reasons," he explained. "One, for personal reasons, for my own health. Two, if I continued teaching, I would end up competing against my own students, who are establishing their own halaus. I prefer to be helping them, instead of competing against them."

Five of Kahala's former students now have their own halau: Palani Agosto, kumu for Namakalaniakamaluhia in Waipio; Ka'ilipunohu Canopin, kumu for Kealakapawa in Honolulu; Momi Cruz, kumu for Namakahonuakapiliwale in Wahiawa; Pomaika'i Gaiu, kumu for Keahiokamalulani in Waimanalo; and Piilani Winchester, kumu for Nawahine'ikekukahi in Pearl City.

So, after a decade of of hula contests — with their whirl of color and motion, and the fragrance of dozens of haku lei — Kahala no longer will compete. Instead, he will support his proteges through a non-profit entity.

"The day after the performance, Saturday morning, will be the birth of the foundation, aptly called the Kahala Foundation," he said. "Its purpose will be to help and to serve the interests of my students, to make available as much information as possible and many things we are collecting about teaching hula."

Wailani Robins, 34, a halau leader, will be inducted as foundation president at 9 a.m. ceremonies Saturday at Kawaiahao Church. A reception will follow in the church's Likeke Hall. The public is invited to both events.

Robins said the Kahala Foundation will host lectures, give scholarships and form a library of the kumu's original chants.

"We have already copyrighted three volumes of his works," she said.

**H**IS life work, hula, is an allegorical art form, with layers of meaning. Friday's performance offers layers of significance — personal, artistic and historical.

The show's theme is "The Kauwa: The Forgotten People" — about a caste of untouchable slaves who lived apart and were used as sacrificial victims.

"It has a very personal connection with those of us who are victims of bigotry and prejudice," he said. "It extends to people of color, to women, to people who are suffering from debilitating illnesses, such as AIDS.

"The show is a means to discover the kauwa artistically. Although I feel sometimes I may be a victim of subtle prejudice, nothing can com-

**“**  
*It will be an ending,  
but it will be a good  
ending.*

**”**

**Frank Palani Kahala,**  
kumu hula

Kahala's research showed the kauwa to be normal, physically beautiful people.

"I always thought of them as the dregs of society, as murderers or rapists, but they weren't. They were born into a class. They were branded on the forehead, tattooed with different symbols. They covered themselves because they were shamed," he said.

For the breakthrough artist, who introduced hula innovations such as synchronized, marching-band formations (along with Johnny Lum Ho), the final performance is another opportunity to innovate.

"We're doing some chancy things," he said about the theme, five new chants and costuming, which includes feathered owl masks.

Dorothy Thompson, executive director of the Merrie Monarch Festival, said the annual hula competition would feel the absence of Kahala's innovative spirit and his dancers.

"Yes, definitely they're going to be missed," she said. "They always placed in the Top 5. Hawaiians are very creative, and his creativity — the way he composed a lot of chants, and his choreography — was remarkable. It is an outstanding halau."

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