

Robert Cazimero

I was in high school at Kamehameha and I remember that I was a sophomore and I was in a group called the Concert Glee Club. Guys were just beginning to start dancing and Nona Beamer was the teacher. I was amazed to see guys dancing. So pretty much through my association with Nona at Kamehameha schools I became interested in the hula.

So Nona Beamer was my first kumu and she was my first contact with hula. The class I was in was for students who had never had hula training before and I thought at that time that she was the best and because it was a new thing it was the most interesting thing for me. It was just real delightful to have this new experience. Because I was new and young and eager she was willing to share.

Nona taught me kahiko and auwana but it was on a surface basis. We were on jo in high school and Hawaiiana still hadn't hit it yet.

I went onto Maiki after that and that's where I stay to this till this day. I was a senior at Kamehameha and Aunt Nona was teaching Hawaiian history. We had to take a song and interview the person who wrote the song. I had chosen Kui Lee. And my very dear friend Puna Klama Kalama did Maiki, a song that Maiki wrote called Aloha Kauai. You had to try to get your subject to come to the class and Puna got her aunt to come. And she entered the room and I think I fell in love with her immediately.

Well after she got through speaking we asked her to sing a song and I played piano for her. She said to me when she left that if I ever wanted to learn hula or do anymore with what I was learning that I should come to her. It took me quite a while after that to come to her but from that time on I was always in awe of Maiki Aiu. When Nona was teaching at Kamehameha at the time there was a kapu on dancing where no one was allowed to stand up and dance. Nona changed that. With Nona we began to stand up and actually dance.

Men's dancing back then was a novelty and I think to a point it still is today. But it was real novel in the sixties. Men just didn't dance. That's what really caught my eye to, all these guys that I knew from school dancing hula. I was from a time in the sixties where being Hawaiian was not important. It was more important to be American. You were trying to get through school so that you could become a worker in Hawaii or maybe go away to school. The idea of hula was foreign it was an embarrassment to want to do it for all of us. And even though people liked it we were subject to ridicule. The hula just wasn't important at all. Especially for men. During the sixties the idea of kahiko hula wasn't even thought of. It was just a very basic. No one really cared and there was nothing exciting happening about it anyway. It was just mundane.

Kahai started far before me and I remember watching his boys dance. And they were just fabulous. Ed Collier was another one who had a male halau years before I even began to train and he had three boys at the most when he danced. It took a lot of guts for a guy to get onstage in the sixties. There was an immediate branding of being effeminate and so it was really hard. I'm glad that things had changed a little and on the surface it looks like it's changed a lot but it really hasn't changed that much.

My training with Aunt Maiki was a one night a week class. It was every Friday and we would go in and stay for several hours. We learned how to oli and we learned how to play instruments, dance, we had to do everything. But I loved my kumu so much that it was a labor of love. She was one woman that I could never say no to. When I think about it now it was like a dream. I was so taken with her that if she told me to jump off the building, willingly with maile leis on I would have jumped. When I was 18 there were two goals that I set for myself when I met Maiki. One was to hear myself sing on the radio and the other one was to become a kumu hula. I told my mother years ago if anyone asked me now to train with them I would give up everything. I would give up work and entertaining and my home life and I would move in with that person. Maiki took me and so said you can still do whatever you want and be a hula student of mine. I just loved it. Classes were formal in the sense that you gave the respect to the teacher in that you were there on time. We never had like you have with Aunt Kau'i where you oli kahea before you can enter the halau. Ours was never like that. The only time we had to Kahea was if we came late.

When she would start us off with having us sit in a circle and we would talk about what we had learned and about what we would be learning. Maiki allowed us to have paper and pencil which was a privilege she was never allowed. I have always enjoyed the idea of learning without paper and pencil. ~~Imhikantombanghn~~ I think if you are going to call yourself a kumu hula you must be able to grasp that and pass it on to someone else the same way it was given to you.

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All the things I teach my gents, that I learned from Maiki are very few. Say of 20 chants I learned from Maiki, the boys only know one. I guess I'm more selfish. I won't teach them, it's too precious, it's mine yet. When I'm ready to die or give things up, then I'll be ready to teach. it to them.

I was with Maiki off and on for seven or eight years. That included auwana and dancing for her up at ~~a~~ Paradise Park. But as far as training f-r kumu hula 4 or 5 years. I unik'd in '72, ~~a~~ which was Maiki's ~~xxxxxxx~~ first class.

There were six boys in my ~~xxxxxx~~ uniki class. There ~~x~~ was Tuney, Bro. George Maile, Ka'ahi, Kalana Silva, Keahi Taua, and myself. The uniki, in thinking back upon it was awful. It was every emotion you could think of. I mean it was wonderful, it was terrible, it was full of jealousy, it was full of love, it was threatening, it was depressing, disappointing, it was elating, I tell you I ~~k~~ never want to go through it again. There were so many students in my class. I don't remember, maybe about 29. Ther ~~x~~ uniki was so scary add ~~ngnix~~ ugly, cause there was so much huki-huki. in our class.

When it came time for ~~x~~ us to chant it was terrible. Some people were going faster than the other, and no one wanted to give the nod to one person in particular because we all came from different areas. There were people in Maiki's first uniki class who had been with her for 25 years. And then there were people like me ~~x~~ who had been in for four. or two. Some people had never gone to Maiki, but had been brought into ~~xxx~~ the class because she thought they had something she could work with and contribute to. There was alot of dissension. A lot of people didn't like each other, myself in -luded. I didn't

care for this one, I couldn't understand why they were here. And I was real cocky, and I ~~x~~ still am.

Selfishly, I felt at the time I was ready to be a kumu hula. I thought I possessed the ~~g~~ qualities of kumu hula, but now that I look back-- no way was I ready to become a kumu hula. No way is anyone ready to become kumu hula when they are ready to become kumu hula because you become a kumu hula when you become a kumu hula you hve to work at it and you ~~xxx~~ become more of a kumu hula as you work at it. It's like being a parent, you learn how to be a parent from your children. I ~~x~~ never would have known what it would be like ~~x~~ to be a kumu until I became a teacher. with my owh ~~x~~ students.

I consider myself a contemporary kumu. and I get into so much trouble for it. To me hula includes the sound of jackhammers, cranes, ~~xxxxx~~ buildings going up, traffic--because in traffic I see hula. In building I see hula. I like being a teacher of today.

what they had
In comparison the kumu ~~x~~ of the past were not any different, *they loved* but what they had is not what we have today. I'm ~~xxx~~ sure ~~xxxx~~ they ~~xxx~~ saw palm trees, and the sound of the waves, and the ~~x~~ rain coming down from the mountains, because they didn't have cranes and lots of traffic. But you do have chants like piano ahiahi, and kaula aukai and stuff like that. So in ~~xxxxxxx~~ their own way they were influenced ~~x~~ too.

I taught a little hula when I was in highshhool. ~~xxxx~~ When I got out of highschool I did things ~~x~~ with the Sunday Manoa. I just dabbed, because my training wasn't complete and in ~~x~~ depth--it still isn't, I have so much more to learn. My mother had a troupe of dancers I taught them, but not ~~x~~ too much. It was at Kamehameha that I ~~xxxx~~ *really* began to teach more. From '73 after graduating as ho'opa'a and olapa I ~~x~~ was teaching up at Kamehameha and there was an opening for a Hawaiian chant and dance teacher. At this time there wasn't the number of boys dancing openly as there is today. I taught three classes of girls, which my kumu called my internship. By the end of that year I became a kumu hula. Next was Nakamalei, which formally began Kamehameha ~~x~~ day 1975. So in 1973 I graduated first as a hoopa'a and olapa. Then a year later I was given the title of kumu hula.

Graduation night is another thing I will not forget. The whole thing was wonderful but it was awful. Auntie Maiki introduced all of us individually, it was like our great big debut to Hawaii. We didn't know she was going to do this, and what happened was as she introduced each of us everybody stood up. And i didn't want to stand up/ Now Maiki isn't the kind of person who likes to be on stage. She called me by my pet name, "stand up Cookie," and I just put my head down. I didn't want to stand up because I was ~~xxxxxxx~~ embarrassed. Our class

was fighting each other, no one was together. Kalena Silva's pa'u pa'u fell as he~~x~~ was dancing, there was so much huki huki, and I was embarrassed that she was taking all the brunt of it, because as the kumu you take all those things on.

Later after the curtain came down everyone was into their own space, some people were happy, I just sat by my drum. My friends came behind to give me leis and I looked at them and I said, "don't come in, don't talk to me, don't give me ~~a~~ any of these leis cause I don't want them." Then my teacher ~~xxxx~~ came to talk to me and she said, I'm giving this to you and ~~youxxxxxxx~~. you're going to ~~xxxxxx~~ go on with it. This all happened behind the curtain.

There are things now when I think about it I am so sorry. If you ~~xxxx~~ talk to any of my hula brothers and sisters they will tell you that I was a ~~p~~ spoiled brat. Because I was the favorite, and I ~~knew~~ ~~k~~ it. I knew I was the favorite and I played it. I was a son-of-a bitch.

In terms of the hula I feel I ~~w~~ have shaken this state up. I have opened their eyes, I have kicked them in the pants. But you know what, I didn't know I was doing that. I became such a threat, that everybody thought, well if he ~~shshshshshshshshshsh~~ thinks he going to get away with this he's ~~xxxx~~ crazy. Years from now I always would ~~k~~ like to think that when people talk about the history of the hula they will say hula enjoyed a wonderful beginning, then the missionaries came it was squelched, and ~~Kalalakaua~~ Kalakaua came and he brought it up again, then with the demise of the monarchy hula again did not flourish, and then in 1970 came this renaissance period and one of the people who made the hula come alive was Robert Cazimero.

One of the greatest sacrifices was that I ~~w~~ had to give up alot of my private enjoyments, because of my private life my boys were being affected. Everyone in this state thought that I ~~x~~ was having an affair with everyone of my dancers. I don't know where they got ~~xx~~ is from. And I thought if this is what is going to happen, then I'll just not go anywhere. or ~~x~~ do anything--I'll just stay home.

People knew the best way to hurt me was to hurt my boys. And when they hurt my boys, and I knew my boys were hurt, I suffered. But I figure that was part of being kumu hula. So I gave up all that comraderie and going out at night. ~~x~~ Yet no matter what I did people still talked. So finally my boys and I sat down and they said forget about them. No matter what I do people are still going to talk, so I went out and had a good time. At first this was ~~xxx~~ what I had to give up the most.

But now I don't have to give up anything. I'm Robert and I play many roles. I am the teacher, I'm the entertainer, I'm the joker, and I'm the private ~~R~~ Robert.

The most gratifying things about being a kumu is seeing the boys dance. And I'm sure you'll get that from every kumu hula. It's because when I teach or choreograph something to the boys I don't think it's that hot, some things excite me, but they make it their own. They make it us. It's fabulous. Its lie a part of me yet more because i could never do some of the things they do, but through them I can. So when they go running across the floor, or spinning those ti leaf skirts, or just posing--I am in their body. I am in the beautiful instrument called the dance. That's the rewarding part. The most gratifying things is to see them dance, to see them move.

When I started hula one thing I made up in my mind was I was going to prove to people that men could dance. That you didn't have to just get on the stage and stomp ~~xx~~ and get a spear, throw the spear and hit the paddle against the canoe. There is such a thing as manly grace. And that's another thing that's caused alot hindering as far as ~~xxxxxx~~ people accepting our work, because my boys move their hips. So much so that it antagonizes people and their thinking. But my teacher is a kumu, she taught me to move my ~~xxxxx~~ hips. And then I watched Mahi Beamer and he moves his hips. If you go to any party and if a Hawaiian gentleman stands up the first thing he does is move his ~~xx~~ hips. I was dead set that when I did my halau my boys were going to dance no matter what anybody thought. They weren't going to just stomp around the stage.

My definition of hula kahiko changes every year. Right now hula kahiko is anything that was ~~w~~ taught to me before I became a teacher. But now that I am a teacher, what I teach is a modern kind of kahiko. I think I have been one of the ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~x~~ reasons for competitions wanting to segregate kahiko kahiko from modern kahiko because. I'm so different.

I've influenced a ~~x~~ lot of young teachers too. Our halau was one of the first to dance on point.

To the hula teacher there are benefits and there are non-benefits. It depends on taste. with taste it can be exciting, exhilarating, it can take hula to a new level. Without taste it can be sloppy, it can be a copy of something ~~x xxx~~ that is not truly crystal or downright ~~xx~~ shitty. If ~~x~~ nothing else, using creativity for kahiko ~~xx~~ helps to elevate hula to the level that yes hula is a dance form as beautiful and as important as the ballet. I have worked for that for a long time, and that is off from my kumu. I think that ~~x~~ it is important that the world realize that we have this beautiful, beautiful dance. If we can show Hawaii what we have in hula both traditional and contemporary, what a wonderful thing to be ~~x~~ proud of.

It is important to share the hula to show that Hawaiian culture is not dead, that we do have something beautiful to share. something delicate, strong, and part of a culture that nobody else has in this world. The best thing that Hawaii ~~x~~ can do is let the world know that there is dance in Hawaii. And that this dance form is called hula.

The young people of today have through their own changes in the hula made ~~me~~ legitimate. today they are doing things I would never have thought of doing or never ~~x~~ will. Yet I see myself in each of them

I think ^{my hula} that somewhere in the master plan of God's hula kahiko ~~x~~ is going to go back down. I think that the importance of it and the excitement of it will go back down. It will become diluted. and this will be the fault of the Hawaiians. It will be the Hawaiians themselves who destroy it, but Kealemoku said "hold fast to what is yours." because it will emerge again.

I think I am the only one now who acknowledges the fact that male hula is ~~dying~~. I don't think anyone does. It ~~x~~ will go on for longer than ten years. Yet I hope someone will be able to pass one this knowledge. As you know if you train 100 students you'll be lucky to get one who is able to teach. ~~x~~ I hope somebody will be there.

Be careful. this is one thing I would tell those involved with the hula. Be careful of everything ~~xxxxxxx~~, everyone, of hula peoples opinions, of yourselves, of the students you teach. Be careful that what you do is good, clean, and sanctioned. in some way by someone in the past that you can say you had in your lineage. of hula.

I for example can trace back to five generations, ~~xx~~ six now, and if I ever uniki any of my boys they can go out and have that sanction- which has been a god ~~xxxx~~ to me.

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