

Hokulani Holt-Padilla

Hokulani Holt Padilla started her halau in 1976 and has been teaching hula for over twenty-five years. She is also the coordinator of Na Pua No'eau-Maui.

There are several reasons why I chose the name "Pa'u O Hi'iaka" for my halau. One is for my mother's family who has always been ocean people. The Pa'u o Hi'iaka is a beach plant and it is also a native Hawaiian plant. The story about how this plant got its name comes from the Pele and Hi'iaka myth. It tells of Pele going down to the beach with her baby sister, Hi'iaka i ka poli o Pele in the early morning. She leaves her sister by the beach and goes into the water to surf. As the sun gets warmer, she thinks about her sister and went back to where Hi'iaka lay. She found that a small beach plant had grown to cover the baby to protect it from the sun. So Pele gave that small beach plant the name Pa'u o Hi'iaka which means, the skirt of Hi'iaka. In Pele and Hi'iaka stories, the pa'u is magical and it can defeat enemies and it was her protection as she traveled through the islands. For all these reasons, we thought it was a good symbol to have for our halau.

Hula has always been a part of my life. My first teacher was my tutu who was Ida Pakulani Long. I was also taught by my aunty, Kahili Cummings and of course my mother, Leiana Woodside.

Learning from my tutu and aunty meant being very disciplined; no fooling around. You had to watch, listen and follow. There wasn't a whole lot of indepth explanation of what you were doing. You were expected to know it. She explained some things but not like what I do for my students today.

Her style was half way between the strong bombastic Hawai'i styling and the more flowing style of O'ahu. We were encouraged to dance low and what is now called aihā'a. We were also encouraged to utilize our body fluently.

Because I lived for a time with my tutu and my aunty, they would teach me when they were in the mood. My aunty also had a group of dancers composed of my cousins and the people who lived in the neighborhood. Then we would meet twice-a-week. By the time I was in the 8th or 9th grade, I was considered her alaka'i. She would work out her choreography with me and when the other dancers came, I would be the alaka'i for the class.

My interest and my love for kahiko grew because of Aunty Hoakalei Kamau'u. When I was about nineteen, the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts began a program in which they were encouraging the development of kumu hula. That's when I began learning with Hoakalei. She started with about thirty students. She used to teach in different areas like Waimanalo, Kalihi and Kane'ohe. As the students started to drop out and each class size dwindled, Aunty Hoakalei brought us all together in one place up in Nu'uanu.

For the first three years, we did nothing but kahiko. It was like a regular halau. We would do a little bit of chanting and do primarily hula. Aunty Hoakalei taught without any paper or tape recorder. We had to pay attention, listen and follow. When we got the choreography part, then she would pass out papers and we would sit and do the ho'opa'a part and learn the accompanying myth.

While I was still studying with her, she came to me when it was time for me to have my own class. We arranged for the first class to be in Kaimuki. She would come for the first couple of classes and observe me. She'd give me feedback and she would leave me alone for a few weeks. A few weeks or a month later, she would check on me again. The classes were usually held in school cafeterias and open to the general public.

As I see what other people call 'uniki, I would say I did not 'uniki. I talked to my mother when I was ready to begin my halau after returning to Maui. She told me that it was not necessary for me to do that kind of 'uniki because hula was in our family. It wasn't absolutely

necessary for me to go through a formal ceremony. She said it was enough that I go ahead and do it because my tutu would have wanted that for me. My tutu had already passed away by the time I wanted to start a halau. Although my tutu never mentioned it, I do recall at family parties, I would see her sometimes eating particular parts of the pig when she thought that no one was watching. She must have gone through a formal 'uniki herself.

I am a third generation kumu hula, perhaps even more generations than that, I'm not sure. My mother comes from a family of fifteen and I have forty plus first cousins. All of my cousins learned how to dance but I am the only one right now who is a kumu hula. Becoming a teacher was a conscious decision. First of all, I wanted to be a good dancer. Then as I started learning from Hoakalei to develop into a teacher, I found that teaching was something that I liked to do. I always wanted to share my love for the hula with others and to have others love and enjoy the hula as much as I do.

Hoakalei taught me how to teach, but my mother taught me how to be a kumu hula. She taught me the little things on the quality of movements, the dress, the philosophy and philosophical behavior of kumu hula and their relationship to their students. She taught me how to take responsibility for the needs of my students.

I have my family style of hula. Lots of hip movement and lots of upper body movement in expression. I'd say upbeat but not too fast. I try to pass on the dances as they were taught to me by my various teachers. But I also feel that what makes a kumu hula, a kumu hula, is that they have this creativity within them as well. So there are hula kahiko as well as 'auana that I choreograph today.

Hula is a very demanding profession. When a person decides that they want to make hula a major part of their life, their life is taken up with all aspects of hula. You need time not only for choreography, but studying, costume making, lei making, performances, competition and so

on. If we are not careful, it can put a strain on our personal life as well. I have been very fortunate that my children are very supportive of my hula and they participate in my activities. Hula becomes a family thing.

For me, hula kahiko is a styling of hula, utilizing chants rather than singing and using traditional percussion instruments rather than contemporary instruments for accompaniment. It is basically drawing more upon those basic foundations of hula steps and presentation. It is more earthy. Its expressions come from the movements of nature. The purity of the movement is what is important. Simplicity is not the word, but it is more a purity of the movement and a styling that has come through the generations. The stylings might be different because of the different traditions you might come from.

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