

## Ray Kahikilaulani Fonseca

Under the direction of kumu hula Ray Fonseca, the Halau Hula O Kahikilaulani has successfully competed in the prestigious Merrie Monarch Festival and the Queen Lili'uokalani Keiki Hula Competition.

Kahikilaulani is my hula name given to me at my ūniki by Uncle George Naope. He used to call me Kahiki because I was always playing the Tahitian drums, and he told me that he would complete the name when I ūniki. My ūniki under Uncle George was held in 1977.

Before I learned hula, I was a Tahitian drummer with Keolaulani Hula Studio and later with Aunty Pauline Padeken and Lokelani Andersen. When I met Uncle George Naope, he asked me to come to his hālau to teach Tahitian. So in the summer of 1973, I left Honolulu to live with Uncle George in Hilo and I never returned home until three years later.

I started to dance hula at the age 17 and while living with Uncle George, I began to ask questions and take an interest in learning the hula. But although Uncle George was my kumu hula for many years, it was he who encouraged me to learn from other hula resources like Lokalia Montgomery. Uncle George made me go to workshops because he wanted me to broaden my horizon. I took workshops from Henry Pa, as well as working with him for the Tavana Show in the Aina hau Princess Ka'iulani Hotel. I also took classes from Aunty Edith Kanakaole and Eleanor Hiram Hoke.

Uncle George is my greatest inspiration. He always told me that in hula, the sharing of one's knowledge was to enhance one's own knowledge. So my job is to share what I have learned with the people of Hawaii and in turn I will gain even more knowledge. Until today, even if we live apart, I am still with Uncle George in spirit. If I get stuck with something like a chant, I will go to him to ask for advice.

In 1980, I opened my hālau in Hilo. I named my halau "Kahikilaulani", meaning "The Staff of Heaven." At that time, Hilo did not have too many teachers, especially in hula kahiko. I keep the traditional dances the same as I learned them from Uncle George so these dances will be

carried on.

My joy to to see my students perform to the best of their abilities and to do it with full love and understanding of the art. In my hālau, we try to do everything ourselves. We make the implements, feather leis, **haku leis** and costumes. When my students dance in costumes that they had made, they have a feeling of accomplishment.

When I am teaching, it is the force within me that drives me. Everything in my life is related to hula. When I win at a competition, I first feel fortunate and blessed. I always tell the children to thank the almighty who allows us to be here because what really matters is that they all come off that stage with more understanding of the art and feel good about themselves.

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