

"Nana I Na Loea Hula" Project
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Halau Kealakapawa was founded in 1990 by kumu hula Michael Ka'ilipunohu Canopin. This name was given to Michael's halau by the late Palani Kahala and poetically it means "the trail of the morning star."

Composing chants is my form of expression. If I am 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, but they should put their thoughts down and that could be a recordation of their time in hula.

In 1982, I began my hula training at Enchanted Lakes Elementary School cafeteria with kumu hula Chinky Mahoe of Halau Kawaili'ula. We went through some rigorous training, learning the basic steps. I found Chinky's style to be very aiha'a. We danced low to the ground with bent knees. He was a disciplinarian and was very strict in his basic training, but 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 danced in the 1983 Merrie Monarch Hula Festival. What an experience it was! It was there that I began to notice other styles of hula and chant.

After a year with Chinky, I chose to study hula with Palani Kahala. I met Palani at a party and I asked him if I could join his halau. He knew I was involved with another halau and he told me the only way I could come into his halau was to make sure that I made a clean break and that I needed to rest out a year before he'd accept me.

Palani's classes were held at the Kamehameha Schools Dance Studio. I found his style to be different and to my liking. What I liked about Palani was that he explained the background of each mele and I was fascinated with his method of teaching. He had a very systematic way of teaching, especially to dancers that were new to the hula. He would start with the foundation which was your feet and he would stress the importance of your basics. Then he taught the hands. 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 disciplined in various research techniques of the mele hula. Palani also encouraged us to enroll in his 'olapa program. This program offered each individual multiple opportunities to further your knowledge through research projects such as the study of Kukaniloko, of King Kalakaua's Hale Naua Society and hands-on training in kapa making, lei making, making of natural dyes, etc. I completed the training and received a certificate for 'olapa from Palani.

For a short period in 1988, I studied hula under Robert Uluwehi Cazimero. I was fortunate to learn precision in hula movements, some traditional hula and choral singing. His style of dancing was more of a comfortable, relaxed, upright style.

When I went back to Palani, he selected me to train as ho'opa'a. Through this training, I learned the proper use of the ipu heke, various chant styles, composition, and a method by which to choreograph. I guess he felt that during his later years that it wasn't necessary to give out certificates like he did for 'olapa.

Palani offered my hula brother and I the opportunity to train Pearl City High School students to enter the annual Hawai'i Secondary Schools Hula Kahiko Competition. It was his way of putting us through training to prepare

ourselves one day to take on the role as kumu hula. Later, I also trained the students of Damien High School and Saint Francis High School. Through this experience, I gained the desire and interest to take on the tremendous responsibility of having my own halau.

It was through Palani's blessings and wishes that I became a kumu. He stressed on us the importance and the responsibility of taking the title of kumu hula. He gave me the right to teach through huelepo. In 1990, before his passing, Palani gave me his blessing to begin Halau Kealakapawa.

I knew the commitment I had to make if I was going to take on the responsibility of being a kumu hula. I'm not going to start something and not finish or quit after a few years. It will take a lifetime to learn everything about hula and I am committed to hula.

There's a lot of demands that I put on my students, but I find that no matter how strict your demands are, you have to treat each haumana as an individual. They all have different backgrounds and personalities and you have to handle each differently. But they all come because they are interested in hula.

When I look at my students, I know that some of them have aspirations to teach and at this point in time, all I can do is encourage them to study and continue to learn. But the thing that I'd like to stress the most, especially in the study of hula, is to learn the language. The Hawaiian language is the root of hula. There's much more to a chant than merely looking at the written translation. You must understand each word thoroughly.

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 in 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 in the sense of dancing together, in the sense of feeling each other and to strive to research the material we are performing. And we get to present all of this at a competition.

Traditional hula is going in the right direction because there's a lot of students and kumu who are strongly involved with the Hawaiian language. 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 thank all the kumu who have taught me. I've learned a lot from each and every one of them and I'll try to pass on what they have taught me.