

Nana I Na Loea Hula
1st draft

MICHAEL KEKAIMOKU TOSHI YOSHIKAWA

Kumu hula of Kepomakolekapuakane, Michael Kekaimoku Yoshikawa is currently teaching hula at the Shriner's Hospital auditorium.

For some reason, I was always interested in hula while I was growing up in Carson, California. Book reports or art projects were always done about Hawai'i. My younger sister was taking hula from Sissy Kaio and I kept asking my mother when she would start a class for boys. I kept hanging around, just trying to show my face, so she finally created a teenage group for four of us. Myself and three of my cousins.

At the age of fourteen, Sissy gave me a very good base of hula, a very strong foundation of humility or ha'aha'a, and the enjoyment of hula. There was an aspect of spirituality involved, not just physical activity. It gave me such a wonderful feeling inside. I always felt an attraction towards hula kahiko and especially chanting.

Sissy saw that I remembered things quickly and that I made myself available because I wanted to learn and absorb as much as I could. She gave me duties such as making costumes. When our teenage group blended in with the men's class, she started to incorporate me as an alaka'i. I started running the classes, doing basics. When I became 18, she let me become a kokua kumu. I was very young to have a duty like that but I developed quite rapidly. Eventually the men's class became mine. She would just come in and watch me run the class. She would ask me to choreograph a mele or we would do it as a team. It was very enjoyable.

I was the nucleus of the halau because I was their only ho'opa'a with a voice. I had no training and Sissy herself was basically self-taught in oli. One summer, my mother returned from Hawai'i and she brought me a whole bunch of chanting

records of people like Kanaka'ole, Kaha'i Topolinski, Keli'iTaua and that very old one from the wax cylinder. Once I got a hold of those, I would listen to them day after day and I started to pick up the mele. The records came with words so I would mimick and pronounce them back with the record. That's how I developed my oli skills.

I stayed with Sissy for a total of 8 years. We experienced a lot of things together as kumu and haumana but my yearning to learn more was great and I thought coming to Hawai'i would help me even more. At first I tried to extinguish the little fire that burned inside of me but it only lasted a couple of months. Then I started thinking and contemplating who I would like to learn from. Eventually an opportunity came where I was invited to Palani Kahala's halau. Palani was impressed by me but said I had to let Sissy know that I would be joining his halau. I called Sissy and she gave me her blessings.

Palani refined me. He smoothed out all of my rough edges. His costuming was always impeccable and precise. He stressed the importance of learning language which I am still trying to achieve. He opened up my sense of creativity. He was a very creative person and he always had a new idea. He always strove to push himself up to higher levels or goals. Those are the things that he instilled in me. To strive to do well and to enjoy it at the same time.

I was in his ho'opa'a class when Palani was getting sick and our classes had to be stopped until he was in better health. Unfortunately, we were unable to finish because of his untimely death. But prior to his death, he gave four of us his blessings to go out and teach. He spoke to us as a group first and later he spoke to me in private. That was a very special time. He instilled in me nothing but positives saying that I should continue what I was doing and that I would be a good teacher. I think that was his way of letting me know that he would always be there for me.

Palani knew that I wanted to teach and to start a halau. One of the things that I didn't have was a name of the halau. He came over to my apartment and said that he had been dreaming of this Hawaiian name for three nights in a row. He believed that this name was for me. The name he gave me was Kapomakaleikapuakane meaning the sacred night rainbow of Kane. He advised me to have it blessed and I did.

A few of us from Palani attached ourselves to a school to get some teaching experience. I started teaching at Kawananakoa Intermediate School's afterschool program and took the girls to the hula kahiko competition.

My greatest accomplishment as a teacher is seeing my haumana perform a mele and as they walk off stage, you feel their joy and see their glow and pure love flowing through all of them at the same time. I tell my haumana that the highest achievements don't necessary come as an award or trophy. Winning is nice like the icing on the cake. But feeling good about your performance is the achievement.