

IOLA YOLANDA CALDITO BALUBAR

Iola Balubar founded the Halau Hula O' Keola-Aliiokekai in 1975. She teaches at the Central Maui Youth Center in Kahului, Maui.

Mrs. Elizabeth Lum Ho, a Chinese Hawaiian lady, taught me the basics when I was in the second grade. She had been teaching hula in Wailuku for a long time and she was also my mother's hula teacher. The first thing she concentrated on, was the basics. She went through the steps and if we had a hard time doing the 'ami, we placed our hands against the wall, bent our knees and pushed, concentrating on the hips. I remember kneeling down and she stepping on our thighs so we would be more limber. I also remember she used the bamboo stick to correct us: just a tap, to remind us. I went through an 'uniki with her but not to graduate. After the 'uniki, she took time off and we never returned.

Later when I was in the sixth grade, Auntie Beck Kaopuiki taught my sister and I in her yard in Nasca. We learned implement numbers, Polynesian numbers, hula kahiko and 'auana for performances at small hotels.

Auntie Becky asked Johnny Hokuana to teach us his hula. He's a long-time, well-known kumu hula from Maui. I learned from Uncle Johnny and Uncle Robert Kalani who also came to help Auntie Becky. Uncle Robert taught us hula kahiko and implement numbers. Although I was with Auntie Becky for seven or eight years, I didn't uniki from her.

Auntie Becky gave me the freedom of just going and sitting under the tree with her daughter and creating a hula for her. She said, "You and Luana go sit under the tree. Take this sheet of paper and go make up this hula for the show." So we were creating during my seventh grade year. I felt confident, creating my own hula.

People knew me as a dancer. During my high school years, I danced at the local night clubs and later I danced at the Kaanapali Beach Hotel. My dad was a politician and whenever I went to rallies, I was always asked to do a hula.

After my son was born in 1974, I couldn't go back to dancing because I put on so much weight. My husband told me to stay home with the baby and open up a dance studio. It was so overwhelming because many students came in response to my ad in the paper. All of a sudden I knew this was my bag. I really liked it.

I started teaching hula 'auana. Then I taught what I learned from the different shows, hula kahiko like "Lili'u E", "Kawika", "Hana Chant" and "Ho'opuka" oli. After that I went to see Uncle Robert Kalani to learn more of the kahiko so I could teach my students. I didn't get into the language until three or four years ago when I got into the Hawaiian Studies Program.

Around the 1980's, I started entering hula competitions here on Maui. The first year I entered the Ka'ahumanu Festival with senior girls and keiki. We entered the 'auana divisions and placed first. Uncle George Naope saw us and asked me several times to come to the Merrie Monarch. I just wasn't ready for that kind of competition. I was more interested in Polynesian so I entered the Tahiti Fete on Kaua'i and the competition in California.

I became interested in hula kahiko when my halau was invited to participate in the Queen Lili'uokalani Keiki Hula Competition. That's when I started creating my own kahiko and trying to put my own tune to the contest chant. Watching the video tape every year, I see my growth. I'm still learning.

'Uniki to me is to graduate from a halau that you have studied with for years. You should know the kumu's basics, how she interprets her dance, how to describe it and your feelings in your dance. You will create your own 'auana and kahiko. I think my students will learn what I can teach them in twelve years.

When I started hula, it was simple. It wasn't like today. Because I know the different Polynesian dances, I see these different steps in our hula. Sometimes I see a Samoan step in the hula dance, sometimes it's visa versa; Hawaiian into Tahitian, Tahitian into hula. We are all

intermixing, I see the difference. It's a little bit more modern, and away from the simple hula style. I think we should try and get back to tradition.

When I first started to teach, I asked other kumu hula to help me with the beats for the kahiko. I realized that I needed to bring my own creativity to the dance. People don't want to see dances copied from other halau. So now I create my own beats to my own motions.

Corrected: 9/22/95jy