

A long time student of Hoakalei Kamau'u, Cecilia Akim teaches with her kumu at the Nu'uuanu Day Care Center.

How do you teach somebody who does not know the language? I've seen a lot of misinterpretations of dances. They don't understand the beauty of what the chant is talking about. Our old chants are in Hawaiian and today's students need to understand the Hawaiian language to know what they're dancing about, especially because the motions are very simple. "Kawika" is a beautiful chant because the vocabulary is there, the poetry is there, the history is there. The romanticism, an important part of our cultural heritage is there. It's all there. As a dancer, you're painting a picture. You put into motion our oral history.

My mom took me to learn hula from Auntie Lolani Luahine when I was three or four years old. I stayed with her for about six years until she retired from teaching and moved back to Kona. The girls she taught were eight to twenty years older than me. She had me dance with all of them. We performed all over Waikiki and different places. I learned both kahiko and 'auana from Auntie lo. She taught us dances like "Little Brown Gal", so we could learn basic hula motions and how to be a little more graceful. We learned our kahea and mele while learning the dance. It was very repetitious. We would go over it again and again.

When Auntie lo retired, I went to Auntie Pele Puku'i. I think because I was <sup>so young,</sup> the only student my age, Auntie Pele gave me private classes. Her fundamental steps were the same as Auntie lo's. Auntie Pele reviewed the dances that I had learned with Auntie lo so that she knew which ones I had learned. With her I learned more numbers, many with implements and she worked on my chanting for the hula noho.

After about a year and a half, <sup>at 14</sup> and because of my young age, she suggested that I go to another teacher. So I went to George Naope and stayed with him for over seven years until he moved back to Hilo. I was just turning thirteen or fourteen at the time I started with George Naope. That was the first time that I was actually in a class with other dancers who were the same age as me. Uncle George had a studio in Kalihi a few blocks from my home. So why stay home and help mother clean house when I could go down to the hula studio and help Uncle George. I literally hung out at the studio and danced with all of his classes. We did shows in Waikiki, for private parties and on the outer islands. We did a lot of island travelling with him.

After Uncle George moved to Hilo, I couldn't find any other teacher. And between school and extracurricular activities, I really didn't have much time to go to classes. So I freelanced on my own doing the shows at the International Market Place with Uncle Johnny Watkins and Aunties Lydia Wong and Louise Freeman. After I graduated from high school, I went to the University of Hawaii and I dropped out of hula completely. A couple of years later, I took a group made up of three girls to do shows on the East Coast for a year and a half.

When Aunty Hoakalei started classes for the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, I went back to hula. The object of the classes was to train dancers to be teachers and that's what I've done. She started going over all the fundamental hula like "Kawika", "Lili'u E", and Ulu No Weo".

Being with Aunty Hoakalei is a continuation of Aunty Io. Her style of teaching is the same. I am very comfortable with Aunty Hoakalei. She is a different person from Aunty Io but she's just as beautiful a person.

combine. ↑ ↑  
When she did "Aia La O Pele", it was like going back to the days of my youth with Aunty Io. I've remained with Aunty Hoakalei since 1969 and I'm still learning with her.