

Hoakalei Kamaau

In the beginning I wanted to be a nurse but once I got started in the hula that was it. I danced informally with the U.S.O. (United Service Organization) during the war but it wasn't until 1943 when I first came to Honolulu from \_\_\_\_\_  
(?) that I really began to be trained in the hula.

My first kumu hula was Emma Moniz Bishop. Her studio used to be on Pensacola and King Street and coming from a background of informal training she seemed very strict. She wanted you to learn and really be someone. She was a great influence on me because she gave me a desire for learning from the first day. She made me realize there was a right way of learning the hula and she was satisfied with nothing less.

I learned modern hula and a little kahiko under Emma. Because it was during the war a class would graduate every six months. My mother and the rest of my family lived in the studio and our job was to take care of the building. I stayed with Aunt Emma for three years and then I moved to Kakaako and lived with my aunt, Iolani Luahine, on Ilaniwai Street. It was Kawena Pukui that told Iolani to train someone within her family to carry on her knowledge and that's how she started to train me. Aunt Emma was my greatest influence because she was able to make me see the values that are in the dance and not just the dancer.

She put a tremendous emphasis on fundamentals. She felt unless you had a solid foundation you couldn't grow so we spent the first three months learning only fundamentals. Many people think I was trained by her to only be her chanter but I had to learn all of her dances as well. With Aunt Emma, everyone looked forward to the graduations and receiving her certificate of instruction was a great joy for me. But with Iolani there were no degrees, no certificates. It was a continued learning. Today the paper is very important, but with Iolani it was what you knew and what you could do.

Iolani would hold classes right in her home in Kakaako until she opened her studio on Queen Street between Kalani and Ward Avenue. Her studio was upstairs and this was where I began to teach. In 1969 I opened my halau and I was asked by Alfred Preis of the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts to be the Dance Coordinator for Hawaii. Many people felt at that time that ancient hula was kapu and you weren't supposed to do it. So people were frightened by it more than anything else. Iolani made us enjoy the ancient dances and she never said don't do this or that. My job was to go around and find some of the old-time kumu hula to share what they knew because there were so many hula teachers that wanted to learn.

In addition the State Foundation funded another program that was administered by the Waianae Coast and Kalihi-Palama Culture and Arts agencies that trained hula instructors in the ancient hula so that they in turn could go out and teach it better. In 1969 hardly anybody was doing the ancient hulas and I give Mr. Preis credit because he foresaw the need for this.

Iolani learned and was trained in the old ways but she never said I have to go back to the old ways. She taught it to us, she told us about it, we learned and appreciated it but we have to live in the present. She said you live in the present but respect what was done in the past. I feel however that we are creating something new that is not keeping to the traditions and fundamentals of ancient hula, but we are still calling it traditional hula. I think there should be a limit to creativity in ancient hula. When I choreograph a kahiko dance I choreograph in the style that I have learned. I was taught by Iolani that the ipu and pahu always complemented ancient dancing and the auwana was always accompanied by music. Modern hula could describe practically anything but the kahiko was much more secular and disciplined in its movement. The ancient hula was regimented in its movement but not to the point where it was stiff while the auwana was free-flowing and full of personality.

We Hawaiians are blurring these boundaries and modifying basic motions with movement altogether foreign. I realize that there are many different schools of thought reflecting the hula of different islands but there is a basic set of fundamentals shared by all. Traveling around the Pacific I've seen the different dances and we must keep our dance unique and individual from the others. We have so much at hand and so much to do if we just be Hawaiian and not try to be something else. Perhaps the ancient hula of today will be called traditional fifty years from now but what's going to happen to the authenticity of our culture, of our traditions?

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