

Iola Yolanda Caldito Balubar

Iola Balubar founded the Halau Hula 'O Keola-Aliiokekai in 1975. She has taught in her home, the Salvation Army Hall, Central Maui Youth Center and presently at her halau in the Wailuku Industrial Park.

My friends knew me as a dancer. During my high school years I danced at local night clubs, hotels and local luaus. My dad was a politician and whenever I went to rallies, I was always asked to do a hula. The love for hula lives on in me and I am proud to carry on the culture through song and dance.

My mother's kumu hula was Elizabeth Lum Ho. Mrs. Lum Ho was also my first kumu hula. She was a Chinese-Hawaiian lady who trained us from the basics in learning the foot steps and making sure we learned the name of each step. If we had a hard time doing the 'ami, for example, she had us place our hands against the wall, bend our knees and push our hips making sure we moved only our hips. I remember kneeling down and she would push against one of my thighs with her foot to strengthen the thigh muscles. I also remember she used the pū'ili to correct us. Just a tap on our hips, elbows, knees or feet to remind us to concentrate on doing our steps correctly. I was very disappointed that after the hula 'ūniki, I was unable to go back to hula because it was too expensive since only my dad worked.

Later when I was in the sixth grade, Aunty Becky Kaopuiki taught my sister Charlene Rodrigues and I with her daughter in her yard in Naska. We learned implement hula, Polynesian dances, hula kahiko and 'auana for performances at the local hotels.

Although I was only ^{thirteen}13, Aunty Becky Kaopuiki gave her daughter Luana Kanamu and I confidence to use our creativity in creating our own hula 'auana. I enjoyed being creative and I felt confident creating my own hula.

I was very fortunate to have studied under na kumu hula Uncle Johnny Hokoana and Uncle Robert Kalani. Uncle Johnny Hokoana concentrated on hula 'auana and comical hula. Uncle

Robert Kalani taught hula kahiko, implement numbers and Polynesian dances.

After my son was born in 1974, I couldn't return to dancing because I became very momona. My husband suggested I stay home and care for our son and start a dance studio. I put an ad in the local paper, and the response was unbelievable! I enjoyed using my talents and I really love teaching.

I continued learning kahiko from Uncle Robert Kalani so I could teach my students. I also decided to teach Hawaiian Studies through the Department of Education so I could become more familiar with Hawaiian vocabulary and language.

In the 1980s, I started entering hula competitions 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. It was not the right time. I was busy being a mother and teaching my halau. 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 have grown, but there is so much more to learn.

My father Richard Caldito Sr. is of Filipino descent. My mother Dorothy Lovell Caldito is of Hawaiian, Chinese and German descent. My na kupuna are the late Hiriam La'a and Victoria Lovell La'a. I was strongly influenced at a young age with Hawaiian songs and dance by my na kupuna. I remember my mother's step-brother, William La'a, playing his guitar and singing his Hawaiian songs while my mother danced the hula.

I feel the same "Aloha" with my students when I teach them the fundamentals of the hula. I also train the haumana to help one another and to use their good judgement and common sense. To have carried on the Hawaiian culture through hula has been very rewarding in so many

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different ways. Mahalo ke Akua for the guidance.

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