

GEORGE LANAKILAKEKIAHIALII NAOPE

Pulama Award Recipient

One of Hawai'i's most beloved and respected hula resources, George Lanakilakekiahialii Naope is known to everyone in the hula world.

Born in Honolulu and raised in Hilo, Uncle George learned the foundation of hula at the tender age of four from Mama Fujii, the mother of Edith Kanakaole. He continued his formal training for the next nine years under the tutelage of hula

master Joseph Ilalaole, and later studied chanting under Anna Hall and hula auwana from Jennie Wilson.

To help pay for his schooling, Uncle George opened his first hula studio in a barber shop in Hilo at the age of thirteen. Since graduating from high school and traveling as an entertainer with Ray Kinney, he has devoted most of his life towards teaching hula and sharing his love of

his Hawaiian culture with the young people of Hawai'i.

In 1975, Uncle George moved back to Honolulu and began teaching hula at the Kamehameha-Kaahumanu Housing Community Hall under the auspices of the Kalihi-Palama Culture & Arts Society, Inc. He quickly won the love and admiration of all his students as well as the leaders of the Kalihi-Palama community.

Uncle George was asked by the Kalihi-Palama Culture & Arts Society, Inc. to co-chair a planning committee to establish a special hula competition just for keiki as part of a festival to honor Queen Lili'uokalani. On September 11, 1976, the children of Hawai'i were given the opportunity to show their accomplishments in hula and express their love for their ali'i at the first Queen Lili'uokalani Keiki Hula Competition held at the Aala International Park. In sixteen years, the keiki hula competition has grown in participation from six to twenty-four halau and has hosted groups from Canada, California, Kaua'i, Maui, Hawai'i, and all over O'ahu.

Currently, Uncle George entertains at the Keauhou Beach Hotel in Kona and remains active in preserving our Hawaiian culture by volunteering his expertise as a hula consultant for the Merrie Monarch Festival, the Kona Kupuna and Keiki Hula Festival, and the Maui Intercontinental Hula Competition. Despite his busy schedule, he still finds time to conduct hula seminars here on our islands as well as on the Mainland, Japan and Canada.

In recognition and appreciation for his many years of contributions toward the perpetuation of the Hawaiian culture, the Kalihi-Palama Culture & Arts Society, Inc. is most honored and pleased to present the 1991 Pulama Award to Uncle George Lanakilakekiahialii Naope. He has touched our hearts with his aloha and has enriched our lives by unselfishly sharing his mana'o with all of Hawaii. Photo credit: Shuzo Uemoto



George Lanakilakekiahialii Nā'ope

In 1973 George Nā'ope co-founded the Merrie Monarch Hula Festival that is held annually in Hilo. Born in Kalihi, O'ahu, Mr. Nā'ope was raised in Hilo, Hawai'i.

In the old days, everyone was afraid of knowledge being stolen so the old masters would die without sharing it. The different races that live here are part of the future of the culture. I teach Haole, Japanese, Pākē, and I used to get scoldings because of it. I want to share because if we don't share these dances they are going to die. My students are all different races but when they dance I know they're Hawaiian.

My first kumu was a woman who lived next door to my family in Hilo. She was Edith Kanaka'ole's mother. Her name was Mama Fujii. She was married to a Japanese man. She was a short lady, even shorter than me but she was a master of the hula. I studied under Mama Fujii for five years and I will always remember her. I started with Mama Fujii when I was four-years-old. I'll always consider her my kumu because she did the hard work. She was the one that gave me my foundation and my basics. The teacher that laid the foundation should be the teacher you give the greatest credit to. That's the hardest thing to teach. Mama Fujii, first of all, was very strict. She and my great-grandmother were dear friends and that's the reason I went to hula. My great-grandmother told me that our kupunas were kumu pa'as so she felt someone else in the family had better learn the hula. So it really wasn't a matter of me having a choice about learning or not learning.

I was forced into the hula so the more I was taught the more I didn't like it. It wasn't until later that I realized how great a teacher Mama Fujii was. She spoke the language fluently and she had a deep-down, root feeling for the

hula. Mama Fujii taught me only kahiko but since she was a Christian she only talked about the kapus during my training. She would also teach us sitting dances and the oli but there would be no kuahu. There would only be Christian prayers before and after we danced.

At the age of ten, I went on to Joseph 'Īlālā'ole who I stayed with for ten years until he left for Honolulu to become a policeman. He taught me the kapu dances and unlike Mama Fujii the training was like the olden days. You had to chant a password to enter the hālau and if it was correct, he would answer your chant and let you in.

After graduating from high school, I studied under Aunty Anna Hall who taught me chanting and Aunty Jennie Wilson who taught me 'auwana. Aunty Jennie had a very sedate way of moving her hands. She taught me that the hands tell the story so nothing can be kuikau. Every hand movement had to be a definite motion.

My family was poor so I began to teach when I was thirteen-years-old. This Japanese lady named Mrs. Tsubaki was retiring from the barbershop business in Hilo so she took out all the chairs and let me use her shop to teach. I charged fifty cents a week and with that money I was able to get through school.

I think we need a separate festival of contemporary kahiko because I think within its own limits it's great. Then we can have the great young kumu of this time create the chants and dances that reflect their era. I've seen tremendous changes in Hawai'i since the Forties but of my generation there is not one chant that talks about the coming of the airplane, the war, or statehood.

I have tried to teach the hula as a classical traditional dance but others are teaching it as a modern, creative dance and are still calling it a traditional dance. Today we are seeing modern-day versions of what people think went on in ancient Hawai'i. You have kids coming out who are confused and are calling personally-created motions, kahiko motions.