

HAWAII

Ua pau, ua bala loko...e ho'i no na Pua.
(They are gone, they are no more...all that remains are their descendants)
—ancient Hawaiian chant

Ulalia Berman, Phil Kwiatkowski, and Armstrong Yamamoto are symbols of Hawaii. Their names notwithstanding, all are descended from the seagoing Polynesians who settled the islands 1,300 years ago. Ulalia is a green-eyed *kumu hula* (master hula teacher) on the Big Island; her maiden name is the robustly Hawaiian Kaai and her genetic mix is Hawaiian, Chinese, and Irish. Phil—whom everyone calls Ski—is one of the islands' most avid petroglyph hounds; he searches the Big Island for *kabakii* (literally, "scratched images"), carvings made with stone tools more than a thousand years ago. Ski is half-Polish with some Portuguese thrown in, but his grandmother was pure Hawaiian. Armstrong, of Hawaiian-Japanese-Portuguese descent, grew up on the north shore of the Big Island; a master stonecutter and plant expert, he

gained his knowledge from his grandfather.

These three, then, are not only true natives but also full-fledged members of a new movement in Hawaii, the celebration of an ancestry that until recently meant little more than second-class status in their home islands. The signs of change are evident all around: the state's current governor, John Waihee, is the first ever to have Polynesian blood; the Hawaiian language is now being taught in public schools (another first); and a multitude of traditional arts and crafts—some of them once thought to have been entirely lost—are being revived and reintroduced into Hawaiian society. As Ulalia puts it, "Pride is what is coming back. It had disappeared."

And if cultural replication projects are any indication, the appetite for tradition is growing heartier all the time. In addition to the established attractions—such as Oahu's Polynesian Cultural Center, which provides a

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But when a culture ceases celebrating itself, it begins to die." Van Dorpe's choice of phrase is, probably unintentionally, more than just metaphorical; the Westerners brought with them a number of diseases for which the Hawaiians had no natural immunity, and a native population of 300,000 at the beginning of Kamehameha I's reign in 1795 had been reduced to 135,000 at the time of his death 24 years later.

By 1840, the old ways of life were all but gone. Village society and traditional ways disappeared almost entirely, or else went underground. Sacred temples of worship were smashed to rubble, the *kapu* all but discarded, the *kabuna* (priests) ridiculed and persecuted, the *hula* banned by Christian missionaries, *kapa* cloth replaced by Western fabrics, and the Hawaiian spoken language reduced to 12 letters by Westerners so that it could be written down.

The next 100 years saw increasing devastation or perversion of the language, traditions, crafts, and skills that had once been the cornerstones of a vital civilization. Canoe makers, *kabuna* who were once counselors to kings, found themselves dispensable. Woodworkers now carved knickknacks. *Limu* (seaweed) was no longer a valuable additive to foods and medicines, but something to rake off the beaches. The *hula* and *mele* chants became tourist attractions, decked out in plastic "grass" skirts and performed to the beat of rhythm machines.

The skilled crafts—canoe construction, stonemasonry, weapon and toolmaking—were probably the least able to withstand the onslaught of the modern world, along with the arduous occupations of guiding the traditional spiritual life and interpreting nature's signs. Music, dance, and language fared better, preserved in less conscious and perhaps more corrupted ways.

"The customs and mannerisms were always there," says Ulalia, "because the elders didn't know how to turn them off." She has been dancing the *hula* since she was two, absorbing the stories and the chants. "Mu-

sic is the easiest medium for any culture," she believes. "That's how our culture was kept alive." The *hula* was—despite the way it's usually presented in tourist shows—much more than entertainment in pre-Cook Hawaii. For one thing, it is thought to have originally been per-

formed only by men. Combined with the *mele*, it embraced Hawaiian history, religion, customs, and beliefs. It perpetuated the stories of the great sea voyages that brought the Polynesian people to Hawaii, the tales of great battles and kings, of miraculous events, of a life in harmony with nat-

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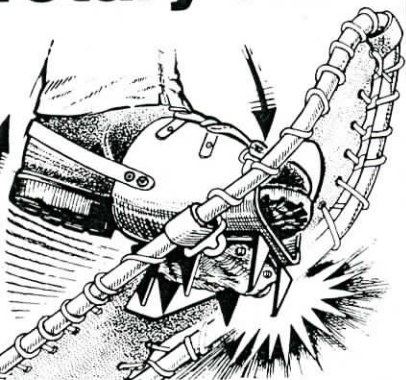
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ure. It asked the gods to use their influence on events. It even served as a tool for the intimidation of rivals when performed by warriors.

Moreover, the *bula* was often far earthier and more vigorous than the gently swaying dance on which the prudish missionaries insisted. It is the earlier verison—*bula kabiko*—that is today being revived all over Hawaii. Ulalia Berman is one of the many women teaching hundreds of young girls at traditional *balau* (schools). One of the best ways of seeing the dance today is to attend the annual Merrie Monarch Festival, which is held just after Easter in Hilo on the Big Island. An integral part of the merrymaking is a three-night-long competition in both original and modernized *bula*.

Another facet of traditional culture that is returning is the Hawaiian language itself—and not a moment too soon. There are only about 9,000 fluent speakers of the Hawaiian tongue left today, although a great many more islanders understand certain words and phrases. "When I was growing up," says Armstrong Yamamoto, "it was forbidden to speak Hawaiian in school." Ski Kwiatkowski adds, "Generations were skipped when it wasn't fashionable to be Hawaiian. I speak Hawaiian only because as a kid I was around many, many people who still spoke it. But they didn't teach it."

Even traditional spiritual beliefs are returning. All the islands have numerous sites called *heiau*, the temples around which Hawaiian religion and ritual were centered. Most are today sorry remnants of stone walls and platforms, having been reduced to rubble in the violent wave of anti-pagan feeling that followed Kamehameha I's death in 1819—a movement fueled by the adoption by many Hawaiians of Christianity.

Perhaps the oldest, largest, most sacred, and best preserved of the

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