

ROSE LOOK

I had a cousin who was dancing. She was with Betty Lei Hula Studio and she would teach me. I was about 10 or 9 at the time. I of course had my father, my father who was always with the Hawaiians. And the Hawaiian family he was with was the Langdon family who lived on Pensacola Street. We were always close to the Langdons and my father loved his songs and his ukulele. So mainly it was the Hawaiian music and when my cousin began at Betty Lei in Waikiki, I became interested in dancing. My first teacher was Alice Gardner. I studied with Alice from 13 all through my intermediate and high school years. Her system was built on the basic steps. She was continually drilling us on the basics. I really liked her system. She was strict in the sense she made sure you danced the correct way. I wanted to go into olapa in a deeper way so I went to Lokalia Montgomery. She was not taking any new students at the time but Sam Naeole talked to Lokalia and so she interviewed me and accepted me into her class. As time passed, she asked me if I would go on television with her. She would chant and I would dance but at that time I only wanted to learn. Alice Gardner's studio was at the YWCA on Richards Street and then she moved to Bill Lincoln's Studio.

Lokalia's studio and home was on Charles Street. She would sit with me first and we would talk about all the ancient chants and Hawaiian history then we would go into her halau and go into the dances and she would explain them to me. She was beautiful. I studied with Lokalia for a year strictly private classes. I took a three month brush-up course with Kau'i Zuttermeister who gave me her approval to call myself her student.

Lokalia only said she was associated with Iolani Luahine and Kawena Pukui.

In terms of my training, Alice Gardner was my biggest influence because she was my first and longest kumu. She had such an inner beauty. She was what I felt a dancer should be. She had an inner beauty that seemed to radiate out through her gestures, and in her relationships with people. That's what attracted me to her.

I became a teacher in 1956. I wanted to relate the feeling what a dancer should be. I had that ambition all along as I was learning. At that time in olapa dancing, they did not take Orientals. But when Lokalia interviewed me, she wanted to teach me and that is the way I feel, the teaching of hula should have no prejudice. The main reason I began to teach was I wanted to teach the hula as a classic dance. It used to be that the hula was a dime-a-dozen thing. People would just pick it up, take one course, and start dancing. There's more to it. I wanted to let people see how beautiful the hula really is. Along the way when I was learning I realized that there 's nobody could say which kumu, which method, which step was the correct way. And this is sad. The Japanese have a classical line of dancing. The Chinese have a line. What does the hula have? Who is to say which hula style is the right way. I've seen so many along the way that are so sloppy and so I told myself something has to be done. I also wanted to help children emotionally. I wanted to give them confidence in themselves. Especially the ones who are shy. I just wanted to help the little keikis. A kumu has to pick up the feelings and emotions of her students. You cannot teach everyone the same. Each student has to be handled in the particular way that draws them out the best.

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I begin my youngest students with an introduction to what the hula is all about, not the basic steps. I make it fun for them. By the time their attention span is long enough to accept any teaching then I will start to teach. I don't believe in yelling embarrassing my students. I feel there has to be a better way. The first thing I teach is love for the dance.

I stress that in order to dance the hula beautifully you have to be beautiful inside. I feel like the children I've taught have learned that people can be patient and supportive through my behavior. My greatest accomplishment is that I feel my dancers after they leave me can accept anything or any teacher. I think if you are a good teacher you should be able to teach anyone. There is nobody who has no talent.

My goal throughout everything was to teach, no matter how many students I had, what I considered to be the right way of dancing hula. I feel even the hula auwana can be a classical dance. It all depends on how it is taught. My favorite kahiko mele is, "Haiola O Pele." I also enjoy, "Kaulilua." The theme song of my studio is "Darling Kuuipo" so my students have to learn it. It was the first song that I recorded on 45.

I feel some of the hula kahiko I see today is overdone. I can only hope that they will leave it the way it really is supposed to be.

I think that's the biggest change that some of the kahiko being performed is not ancient hula. My personal observation is that it is not being kept responsible to its roots. When I see kahiko performed today, it is nothing like what was taught to me by my kumu and so I ask myself has it been changed or have I missed something along the way of my training.

I consider Kawena Pukui a grandmaster. If you look at her songs you can read off the translation of the lyrics and get a series of pictures before you. Her thinking is clear and precise. If you have to go for any information, she is the ultimate resource.

If you are not clean inside the movements will be dirty. If you have arrogance or bitterness inside you, your dancing will show it. No matter how well or long you are taught the beauty of the dance will not come out. If you are not sincere with your dancing then you are only a body moving side to side. Beauty has to come from within. The reason for all this is when a dancer dances she is actually talking to the audience in a very special way.