

Kamalei Sataraka

Kamalai Sataraka opened her hālau, Hui 'O Kamalei, in 1976 so she could share her love of hula with the people of Hawai'i.

Hula teaches you everything about life. It teaches you about nature, respect and about God. It teaches you how to be humble and disciplined.

My mother thought that I was born to hula. She took me to Sally Kamalani when I was two years old, and even at that young age, I remember enjoying hula.

A year later, we moved into town and I remember going to Emma Bishop who taught on McCully Street. Emma Bishop used to take us to perform at the Kapi'olani Bandstand where we wore paper leis and mu'umu'u. In those days, the people threw money when we danced. Everybody used to laugh because I would sit down and collect all the money and take it to my mother. Those were the good old days with Emma Bishop. I stayed with her until I was about six or seven years old.

I ended up taking hula from John Pi'ilani Watkins. I started when I was nine and I graduated with him twice. His graduations weren't the traditional graduations. At that time, people didn't put an emphasis on traditional ceremonies, like the ailolo ceremony. It was more like a recital. We graduated to another level, up to another class. And he gave awards.

To graduate, he wanted us to pass our test. He used to give us a written exam and a dance exam. As long as we passed, we could go to the next level. The written exam was about the songs ; ~~and~~ the background of the songs and how well we knew the words and the translation. That was his criteria ^{for} to pass. ^{ing.} Because I was teaching for him, I was embarrassed if I got a low grade, so I tried my best to get A's.

Whenever he was busy or he couldn't be there, he asked me to open the hālau and teach for him. That's where I learned to teach. I taught for him many times and I ran his hālau for

him.

I attribute most of my hula training to John Pi'ilani Watkins. He was really before his time. What I got from him was basically show business and not much traditional. He took us to New York where we worked under June Taylor, the choreographer for the Jackie Gleason Show and the Dean Martin Show. I really enjoyed dancing with him because I'm pretty much an entertainer myself.

When I was eighteen years old, I left Johnny Watkins and a couple of us formed our own group. We started traveling on our own all over the world. We went to Japan many times and to Africa. We tried to travel as much as we could when we were young.

I started yearning for the traditional part of hula that I did not get from Johnny Watkins. When I came back from traveling, I studied and did research on my own. I taught myself most of it. I took anything that I could learn from anybody. I was very curious and very inquisitive. I think that a lot of where I am today is attributed to trying to make myself a better kumu hula.

What I wanted to do is to open a hula studio to teach people that hula can open gates for them. They can travel around the world and they can do anything they want to do as long as they put their mind to it. Nothing is unattainable. My goal was to take my students around the world as entertainers.

? I think I'm a protege' of Johnny Watkins. I have his style. I teach my girls that hula is not just motion, but it's emotion, from your na'au. You need that emotion that comes from within to portray what you're talking about.

The greatest accomplishment for me is just the fact that we can enter competitions. When I opened the hālau, I had no inkling. Competitions were out of my league. But the kids asked to enter. So I try, and whether you win or lose, it makes you feel that's an accomplishment in itself.

I 'uniki my students but not traditionally. They have to go to language classes. They have to be able to make their pahu drum and their ipu heke. They have to be able to oli, ~~be able to~~ dance kahiko and 'auana, and ~~they have to~~ dance with the implements.

The advice I would give the young hula teachers of today is to instill in ~~your~~ children — confidence. You have to tell your children to be inquisitive and to do their research if they want to carry on the traditions of hula. I don't consider myself a traditional hula teacher, but I do consider myself a good hula teacher.

I think hula has gotten more lively and more progressive. There's a purist who wants it to stay the same, but I really don't think hula will stay the same. Like everything else, Hawai'i is progressing; things will keep moving and we do move with the flow. It would be nice if we can keep our traditions the way it was in the past, but I really don't want to go back to the past. Hula is progressing but it will get to a point where it will come full circle. Like our clothes that we wore in the '40's, they'll come around again.