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PALEKA LEINA'ALA MATTOS

Paleka Mattos named her halau "Hula Halau 'O Kamuela" in honor of her uncle and mentor, Sam Nae'ole. Each year, her halau participates in the Merrie Monarch Festival and the Queen Lili'uokalani Keiki Hula Competition.

From the age of six years old, I studied under hula master Sam Nae'ole. He was my uncle, my mother's brother, and he moved in to live with us when I was young. I studied under him and graduated from him when I was thirty-six years old.

My uncle Sam had a combination of methods which came from the ^{his} various teachers ~~that he took from~~. Just because he was a hula teacher didn't mean he stopped learning. He still had so much more to learn from the older people who knew more about things that referred to hula. He put it all together and he formed his own style.

Some of the most prestigious people in hula today attended my uniki. The ceremony was held in Waimanalo in a lu'au tent. Another girl was to uniki as an alaka'i and I as a kumu hula. Two of my sisters dressed me and my uncle did the dressing ceremony for the ^luniki. I had to learn numerous ^{ol}olis, chants and present myself with dances and perform ^{Ed} on the stage. It was a simple ceremony ~~for us~~. He said I didn't have to go through all the other rituals because we were Catholics. ^BAnd even today, we respect the hula and the Hawaiian culture but I'll go to church and say a little prayer

before I go to the Merrie Monarch Festival. That is my way and my uncle did the same thing too.

I just knew hula was my calling. I love dancing and I love every aspect of hula. But my uncle wanted me to learn more about Polynesian dancing. He said that it would be an extra asset when you go into the world. When the hotels call, they will want more than only hula. That was business.

Part of my style is my uncle's style, but another part of it is my style. I stayed with Uncle Sam until he passed away in 1981. It was at his funeral that a lot of his students asked me to take over. I said, "No, I'm not going to take over, but I might continue where uncle left off." So at forty-one years old, I said to myself, "This is it, Paleka. Let's do your thing."

I first went into what you call contemporary Hawaiian, meaning that I started to jazz everything up. I thought this is what the people wanted. Everything was screaming. At the time I had come out full bloom, everybody else were jumping all over the stage doing fabulous fast-stepped kahiko. So there I was, going wild. It was awesome to look at, but it was not really hula. It took me a long time, not until 1990, to realize that I had better get back to basics where I originally started from and it

worked. But I had to get that out of my system.

I remember going to my first competition. I had been only teaching for six months on my own when I entered the Queen Lili'uokalani Keiki Hula Competition. I overheard someone say that Paleka was fabulous in Tahitian but she knew nothing about hula. I said to myself, "I'll fix you." And although I came in third or fourth that first time, I was disappointed because I thought the children were so good. So the following week, I went to the hula competition in Maui and won first place.

Teaching hula is a joy. I can teach everyday for a hundred years. That's how much I love it. My greatest accomplishment in hula is being able to teach the girls who have a hard time learning to dance. Every child does not learn the same way. Every child is different. Teachers have to realize it. She just works at a slower pace. Some are not as quick as others. That's where being patient comes in. I just know that I can make them dance.

Hula goes through periods of change. Styles changed and everybody became fancy. But because of this fancyness, the kids liked it and thought it was exciting. They got back into hula. Then the hula would come back traditional again. But by then, the students have learned to love the hula and they invite tradition. Hula would go through a new wave when

something new comes in and then somebody would bring it back to traditional again. It will never lose tradition, but we go through our little sporadic in-betweens of experimentation and new ideas. Right now I'm settled into a more traditional line. But who knows. Two years from now another hālau might come up bursting with something new and everybody will follow the train.