

Nana I Na Loea Hula
Kumu Hula: Paleka Mattos
Interviewer: Lovina LePendu
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My name is Paleka Leina'ala Seto-Mook Mattos. (HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE YOUR NAME IN THE BOOK?) Paleka Leina'ala Mattos. (WHERE DO YOU TEACH?) At Palama Settlement. (AGE OF YOUR STUDENTS?) They range up from 5 years old to 58. (NAME OF HALAU?) It's called "Hula Halau 'O Kamuela". (BACKGROUND ON THAT?) This is actually a continuation of my Uncle Sam Nae'ole who was also called Kamuela. So in honor of him we kept the name "Hula Halau 'O Kamuela", and we'd like to keep that name for the next generation of kumu hulas under me too and that's like my niece now with me that I think will eventually take over. And I have this young boy, Kau'i Kamana'o, and that's the first "Master Keiki Hula". I think he will follow my footsteps too. (YOU TEACH BOTH KAHIKO AND AUANA?) I teach both kahiko and auana. (DO YOU TEACH OLI AS WELL?) Oli as well. (DO YOU TEACH OLI WITH THE HULA YOU DO OR DO YOU TEACH SPECIAL CHANTS ALSO?) No. I teach only with the dance, that's in reference to the dance that I'm doing. (HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN TEACHING?) [pause] (ABOUT WHAT AGE DID YOU START TO TEACH?) I started when I was 17, to teach. I studied when I was 6 years old under my master kumu

hula Sam Kamuela. But I taught for him when I was 17 years old, with him. (WHERE DID KAMUELA TEACH?) When I first remembered, a long time ago, I think he was teaching at his home, at first, and then he moved to Fort Street Mall, and was teaching in an area there on the mall. (A STUDIO THERE?) Yea. He had a studio. (HOW DID YOU MEET KAMUELA?) Well, Sam Nae'ole, Kamuela, is my uncle, my mother's brother. I studied with him for a long time. (HOW DID YOU GET TO HULA WITH HIM?) Well, he was already singing and entertaining. He was already teaching. When he came back from the army, I remember, he sold his piano to a buyer, a dealer, so he could have the money to study under Lokalia Montgomery. That was one of his many teachers, and Hoakalei Kamau'u was another one of his teachers, and he took sometimes from Tom Hiona. When I was young, he decided he'd move in to live with us. Our kumu lived with us. He was my uncle but he lived with my mom and me and my brother. And all those years we studied under him until I graduated, which was 36 when I graduated.

(CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE METHODS HE USED?) As far as I can remember, being that young, so I cannot say actually when it started, but he had a combination of methods which came from the various teachers that he took from. Because he was a hula teacher didn't mean he stopped being a hula teacher. He still had so much more to learn. And these were

master kumu hulas that he went to, older people, that he needed to know more about things that referred to hula. So I would say it's a combination of other teachers and himself. Put it all together and then he formed his own style.

(YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH YOUR KUMU HULA? HOW WAS HE?) He was very strict. (DID HE HAVE MANY STUDENTS?) Well, from what I remember, back then, yea, he had quite a bit, maybe at the most, at the time that I can remember was about maybe 90 to 100 students. (THEY WERE GIRLS AND BOYS?) They were basically all women, girls, ranging from small to older. And that's about it for now. (YOU STAYED THERE UNTIL HE DIED?) No. He was coming into town off and on, and he died at a friend's house. I was in shock when he died. I was working. (YOU WERE TEACHING ALREADY WHEN HE DIED?) No. Well, actually I didn't go on my own because he told me to go on my own but I said, "No, uncle. I still don't feel sure of myself. Just because I've danced the hula that long and I've helped you that long, I'm not too sure of myself." But I studied a lot of Polynesian dances when I was young. (WITH HIM?) Not under him. I had different teachers.

(DID YOU UNIKI FROM UNCLE SAM?) Yes I did! (HOW DID HE CHOOSE YOU?) Well, he always knew. He said, "I was going to graduate you when I think you're ready." (WHAT AGE WAS THAT?) I was 36 years old when I

unikid. In fact, I don't want to mention names, in fact they know who they are, some of the most prestigious people in hula today, in fact a lot of the judges, the older judges, were there. I think Aunty Edith was one of them. There were so many of them. (WHERE WAS THE CEREMONY DONE?) The ceremony was done in Waimanalo, in a lu'au tent. It was a lu'au for my uniki. What he did was he brought kumu hulas. . .[*pause in tape*] . . .on the stage, nobody was allowed to come in, just them and me and my sisters, and we went through a dressing ceremony. (WERE YOU THE ONLY ONE TO UNIKI?) No. There was another girl, an alaka'i, not a kumu hula. I was the only one of the two of us, but it was me was the main thing, okay? And two of my sisters dressed me. He did the dressing ceremony for the uniki. And, of course, I had to learn numerous olis, chants and stuff, and then present myself with a bunch of my dances and perform on the stage. And that was a simple ceremony for us. He said I didn't have to go through all the other rituals because he feels, you see we are Catholics. We respect the hula and it's ancient ^{rites} ~~rights~~, but I am a Catholic. A lot of people ask me why I don't go up to the volcano and dance before I said, "I don't disdain that or anything like that." I said, "I respect that part of my Hawaiian culture and Hawaiian hula, but I am a Catholic. I go to church before I go to Merry Monarch and I say a little prayer, and that is my way. And my

uncle did the same thing too. We were all like that and only follow in those footsteps. But you know that there is respect for that. But I believe in the other way.

(WHAT REQUIREMENTS DID HE SET FOR YOU?) First of all, time. He was my only teacher. I stayed with him all the time. I did not go to anyone. He said, "You don't have to go to anyone. I go to her. I'll be the one that's moving around," and he moved to these other teachers and formed his own method and he moved it to me. But the preference was time. And it wasn't the kind everyday you had hula, that's what the old way was - taking it for years. He did it in stride. He never forced anything. It just had to come.

(WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO BE A TEACHER?) I just knew hula was my call, not because you dance hula, because I guess I wanted to, and being with it so long. I love doing hula. I loved every aspect of it. But I was more into the Polynesian because he wanted me to learn that because he said, "That will be an extra asset for you when you go into the world. Not all people that you dance for want hula. They want a little bit of this, a little bit of that, so you go out and you pick it up because if you want to make money that's the way it is. That was business. That was the business point that he put across to me. He said, "You can love your hula

and you can teach your hula, but you have to learn these other things because when those hotels call you up they don't want only hula - they want a little move, a little shake, shake, here and a shake, shake there. And you go learn the right way," and I did.

(HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOUR DANCING STYLE?) Well, part of it is my uncle's style, but another part of it is my style. When I graduated he asked me, "Are you ready to go?" I said, "No, uncle. I'll stay with you. I still think I have a lot to learn." He said, "Oh good, because I need the help," because there was only him. I stayed up with him until I was 41 and then, unfortunately, he had an aneurism and he passed on. And then when we went to the funeral parlor, the cutest thing was that a lot of his students who were still with him asked me, "Are you going to take over?" I said I didn't like the word "take over". It was like I was waiting for him to die. So I said, "No. I'm not going to take over. I might continue where uncle left off. Is there nobody else but me?" He uniked someone else. You know who it was, huh? (NO. CAN YOU TELL ME?) (?)Leleo.(?) (?CATHY LELEO?) Yea. She was the one after me because he thought I had left him. Because one year I had left him. Prior to 41, I think when I was 40, or was it 39, I might have gotten burnt out. I don't know. But I think it was because I wanted things to happen and it was not happening. He was still

traditional, simple. (YOU WERE YOUNG.) To me 36 years old was considered young. If I was 20 it would be different. I said to myself, "No. I won't do this." So when I was 41 I said, "Oh oh. This is it, Paleka. Let's do your thing." So I went to what you call "Contemporary Hawaiian", meaning I started to jazz everything up. I thought this is what they wanted. Everything was screaming. But by the time I had come out full bloom, everybody was jumping all over the stage doing fabulous fast stepped kahiko. "Oh. I'm in with this new crowd. Let me try it." So there I was going wild, trying. It was awesome to look at, but it was not really hula. It took me that long, it took me to last year to realize, "Gee, Paleka. You'd better get back to your basics where you originally started from," and it worked. But then I had to get that out of my system. (YOU HAD THAT IN YOUR SYSTEM?) Yea. I waited so long and I was in my 40's and I was still waiting. And I said, "Oh. I got to do it now." So I had to do it so I could come back to where I am now. (IT WAS PART OF YOU?) It was part of me - a thing to let out. I burnt it all out and that was it. And then I look back and said, "Now I better go back home. Let's get back to where it's supposed to be. And that's why I came back to it.

(ANY DIFFICULTIES IN YOUR HULA CAREER?) Well, I remember going to a competition, my first competition. Of course you have other things in-

between that. And this is what was said. I remember hearing some other kumu say to me. . . (WHICH COMPETITION?) This was the first one I entered, Queen Lili'uokalani Keiki Hula. That was my first try into hula, into a competition. Someone said, I'll never forget this, "Oh! Ooo! Who's that?" "That's Paleka." And one of the kumu said, "Oh, don't worry about her. She's fabulous in Tahitian. She knows nothing about hula." What they hadn't realized, I had graduated a kumu hula, not a Tahitian instructor. Okay? So I heard that and I said, "I'll fix you." Now this person is still going today. I entered the first year, and I was teaching only 6 months on my own. I started teaching before that, but I got the kids together after the funeral and I said, "I'm going to continue." I said, "I'll give myself two years." On February 14th, I think it was Valentine's day, they had a meeting of what uncle had left of the girls, it was just a small bunch. And I decided to give it a shot, two years at the most. I was going to try it. Of course, you know, up to now it's been 9, 10 years. But when I entered the first competition, and I heard what I had heard, I said, "I'll fix you." So in the competition I entered the first time, I think I came in 3rd or 4th. My first chance at competition, I was only teaching for 6 months and with a brand new bunch of girls I had not seen for a year prior to him dying. I was so disappointed because I thought I was so good. You know how you

first come and, "Oh, wonderful!" And so I remember going home and my mother telling me, "Why don't you try going outside first before you come back home. They think you're Tahitian. They're not thinking hula." [*pause in tape*] So I went. So I said, "Okay. I'm going Maui next week." "Next week?" "This week and next week get one competition in Maui." I said, "What? That's just like one week later." I said, "Call and see if we can still enter." In two days we flew down there and I won 1st place. But I had to try. So I came back home. While I was home, Keith and Tommy Huggin(?) was at a pizza opening and I was down at the Bishop Museum, but I heard my girls dancing over the radio. . . They saw my little girls dancing, and the musicians called them up and asked me if I wanted to enter a keiki hula that was opening for the first time called the "King Kalakaua Keiki Hula Festival" with Uncle George Naope. At this time the airlines was sponsoring 11 tickets per halau, but the airlines was sponsoring other halaus. So Mid-Pac decided to sponsor us. I went up there, that was 8 months later, and now these are people who went up there for the first time too, they didn't have more experience than I had and this is a brand new competition. I won the whole thing. But the pride about it is they had a judge there, I'm not going to put his name down, who was notorious for giving zeros. Giving zeros to anybody; he couldn't care

less. But, fortunately, I don't know why, but he liked me because I got only 10's from him, perfect 10's across the board, and this is the judge that gives nobody points. (SO THAT MADE YOU FEEL REALLY GLAD.) Why he liked me I still, to this day, I don't know. . . It seemed that he liked Kamuela and he liked the girl. . . The first thing he asked me, "Where's that pretty, dark Hawaiian girl you have?" I said, "That's my niece "Oh, you don't remember, you used to always be with your uncle. He adored her. He told me she was so beautiful. She's dark skinned with small features; a pretty girl. But he loved her. And I said, "That was it!" Then afterwards, a couple of years went by, no it wasn't it. It was just me. I did it.

(WHAT GAVE YOU THE MOST JOY IN TEACHING HULA?) I don't know. I can't say what gives me joy. The whole thing gives me a joy. Teaching hula is a joy. I told you I can teach everyday for a 100 years. That's how much I love it. But unfortunately prices of rooms, for renting places, are too expensive, so I can't afford to teach everyday. So I have to bunch it all in one day, two days, three days, like that. (HOW MANY STUDENTS DO YOU HAVE?) I don't have that much, maybe 150 to 200.

(WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT IN YOUR CAREER?) As a kumu hula? This year? (WHATEVER. YOUR GREATEST POSITION.) My greatest accomplishment in hula is being able to teach the

girls that cannot dance, they say cannot dance the hula. They call, "Oh, aunty. I cannot dance," or "Look this girl, how slow." My greatest accomplishment. . . I had one girl, this is one of my many girls. I kind of put them all together. I had a girl who started off in the Keiki Competition. The other girls went on but she was still dancing by herself, so I had one of my alaka'i go get her. And then another bunch of girls came in, she trained with them. When those bunch of girls left to go on she was still there. The third bunch came in. Trained them. They left. She was still there. I wouldn't give up on this girl. I said, "There's no such thing as 'No can dance'." After the third year I watched her. She started to swing into it and then she became so good. I said, "I'm glad I never gave up, turned around and cut my girls." It's just it took a while. Every child does not work the same way. Every child is different. Teachers have to realize it. "Oh, look the dummy." No. There's no such thing as dummy. She just works at a slower pace. (IF THEY WANT TO DO SOMETHING THEY CAN.) They can, but they're just different. Some are not as quick as others. You get some that pick up quick and you get some that take long time. And that's where being patient comes in. Every time I see that they cannot dance, it's just that I know I can make them dance. (THAT'S A HULA TEACHER ACCOMPLISHMENT.) Right. But one of the greatest accomplishments here

for me was winning the Merry Monarch. That was a big pea prize. I couldn't care if I won "Ia 'Oe E Ka La". Two for me is great. Not only that one, at least winning, placing at the Keiki Hula too because these to me are the two prime ones. This year was a beautiful year for me.

(DO YOU UNIKI STUDENTS?) No I don't. (WHY?) For one reason, uniki is a graduation, right, which is just a step. If you realize today, it has nothing to do with uniki the students. I uniki'd 1, 2, 4 of them.

(PREVIOUSLY?) Yes. But I uniki'd them up to the standard of alaka'i, haumana alaka'i. These students are gonna go on. They are going to be teachers. And the reason that I have no uniki for regular dancing students, you look today and the students are not in the halau long enough. They're just flying in like nobody's business, dancing for 2, 3, 4 years and boom, they're gone. They're getting pregnant. (THERE'S NO OTHER MENTORS FROM YOUR HALAU TO BRING OUT.) No. Everything that I teach, I teach them there. They aren't there long enough to pick up anything else. They're either getting pregnant or they're going off and getting babies. This is the biggest thing I see in my halau. Some of them I had them from babies all the way up, and I asked them if they want to be so _____, and then they cannot think of that. They have to go raise a family. (THEY DON'T COME BACK LATER ON AS LADIES?) Well, they just started. My babies are

just starting to have babies, so they have to settle their lives first before they come back. (YOU DON'T HAVE ANY LADIES THAT HAVE BEEN THERE LONG ENOUGH, FROM BABIES?) No. They're all gone! They somehow reach 18 and they go boy crazy, and they run away with the boys. I mean, it's just a part of life. And then you have girls coming and dancing. But you look at the quality - they're good dancers. The only problem: A lot of them not long enough. So you're going through all the problems with uniki and for what? Because you only uniki them from one stage to the next, to the next, to the next. After you get to the first stage, the second stage you going make it there for nothing. You won't have them on the second stage. The students are not there long enough. It's probably, you know, hula is so expensive. Even to go costs to much(?).

(WHAT DO YOU THINK OF HULA TODAY?) I think it's great. My mind is also modern for the fact that things change and things have to change. But remember, we only go thorough a period. Let me tell you something - I'm a very good observer. At the time that Merrie Monarch was going on, styles changed. Everybody became fancy. But because of this fancyness, kids saw this. They like it. It was exciting. It was not "One and two and...". Oh! They got right into it. How do you think everybody got back into hula? Because of these short renaissance periods going through, bursting out. . .

(THE YOUNGSTERS GOT INTO IT.) Yea. They got into it. They say, "Oh. It's really different. It's not the same old. . . Everybody gets excited. They come back to hula. Then you know what happens? You fold it. It comes back traditional again. But by then the students have learned to love, and they invite tradition. At one time you go through a new wave, something new comes in and boom! And then somebody will bring it right 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 more a traditonal line. Who knows? Two years from now another student might come up bursting with something new and everybody will follow the train. I have to change the train too. . . .to keep up with them. It's not going to last. To tell you the truth, it's going to change for a while. Traditional first. Now we're traditional again. About three years ago. . .banging all over the place on the stage until now we come back to tradition.

(YOUR DEFINITION OF HULA KAHIKO?) Well, to me it's supposedly the ancient form of hula. Unfortunately what the old had already taught the young had slightly changed. The young are going to hold it. For instance, you are taught a basic dance that was taught to you a hundred years ago. By the time that thing come down to 200 years, some stuff has already

changed, so you don't know where the authenticity lies originally. (DO YOU PREFER KAHIKO OR AUANA?) You know something, at one time I could tell you auana, but now I love both the same way. But I kind of like kahiko a little bit more now. (DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR CHANT OR SONG THAT IS SPECIAL TO YOU?) No, unfortunately. I've learned all the old ones from Uncle Sam. But unfortunately, at competitions now, they tell you you can make up your own chants. So now we're getting all our own. What was the original question again? (IF YOU HAVE A SPECIAL CHANT OR SONG.) Well, the song that brings me memories of my kumu, Sam, it's the song "Mi Nei". That's his family song. Everytime I sing that song I think of him. I rarely do that song for the fact that I get so moody. But if I listen to it, it's okay. (DO YOU TEACH YOUR CHILDREN THE CHANTS YOU LEARNED FROM YOUR KUMU?) Yes. I run to the basics of the old chants. I've kind of slacked off a little because now they're coming in with their new chants and I'm using my own chants too. (DO YOU WRITE CHANTS?) Most of it is either written or worked with with Puakea Noglemeier. Do you know him? He helps me with my chants. (ARE THOSE CHANTS THAT YOU WROTE OR DOES HE WRITE?) Generally we both work together on the chants. And we're also working together on auana songs. I might want to do some recording later on.

(DO YOU THINK HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT?) Oh, very important. (WHY?) Because they more or less stressed it in the competition. They have an area that's judged [on language], so naturally they'll have more in the area of language, and this helps a lot if you're going into the language department for a competition. Other than that you don't have to tell that it's important. Everybody's taking it. I take it too. Believe me or not. Just because we're kumu hula doesn't mean we speak Hawaiian. A lot of us don't even speak. Fortunately some of them do, which is very lucky for them. Believe me, if I need help I will seek for somebody. I'm taking language from Ledward. I took a language class with her. (WHERE?) It's at Farrington. The only reason I don't take a full course is because I had to do so many jobs. [end of side 1]

(WHO DO YOU CONSIDER HULA MASTERS? I KNOW YOU CONSIDER SAM AS YOUR HULA MASTER.) Yes, definitely! (ARE THERE OTHER PEOPLE WHO YOU LOOK UP TO?) Well, to be honest with you, I haven't been exposed to all these other teachers' teachings. My uncle had, and I just stayed with my uncle all the way. . . .

(BESIDE HULA, ARE YOU INVOLVED IN OTHER THINGS CULTURAL?) Just in my language class. (BUT YOU DO TAHITIAN TOO, RIGHT?) Yes. (AND YOU TEACH THAT AT HOME?) Yes. Maori, Tongan, Figian. (ALL POLYNESIAN?)

All polynesian, as well as hula. (ALL WITH CHILDREN?) With the whole thing. One for my keikis to my boys to my men, the drumming, and to my young ladies. (WHEN THEY COME INTO YOUR HALAU THEY DO THE WHOLE THING?) Now, no. My basic in my halau is my hula: my auana and my kahiko and my oli, and anything that has to do with Hawaiiana first. The last 15 minutes of each class I drum. If I don't drum, I do aparima. And then maybe the next day I'll do Maori. Fifteen minutes of each at the end of the class. All you see is my hula first.

(DID YOU EVER SERVE AS A JUDGE?) Yea. I was going to serve with "Ia 'Oe E Ka La". I worked with those two. Ehu asked me, but she had passed on, so I'm not going to be a judge.

(WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WORKSHOPS IN HULA?) It's fine. I like doing a workshops. The only problem is that I don't think the workshops should be done here. It's the ones over there that need the workshops. If they are into hula here, that's their workshop by itself, unless the teacher wants them to go out and learn something else. But I feel that that's what the teacher is there for - she's supposed to teach them. And there should be a workshop for the teachers, and then the teachers go out and teach their students, not the students go learn from somebody and try to pick up from somebody else. (FOR YOURSELF, IF THEY DO WORKSHOPS FOR HULA

TEACHERS, DO YOU THINK THAT'S GOOD?) (WHAT KIND OF WORKSHOPS?)

What that I might not have learned. Sometimes you want to find out what it's like to dance, not another style, but someone else's teaching, just to experience what it's like. I've never experienced that. I've only been with one teacher in all my life. I never believed in jumping around. (IT'S GOOD TO FIND OUT WHAT JUDGES ARE LOOKING FOR.) Yes. But then they're already given a piece of paper for what they're looking for: posture, presence, and such. But sometimes you need to know more the inside. For one thing, there's one that I want to know is what they call expressions.

What is the expression in auana? What is the expression in kahiko?

Because you're expressing both. But one is not smile and one is. You've got to put your eyes with your hands, just the face. I never knew this. When we were taught kahiko, no smile, so we didn't have to express. I always knew what auana was, though. . . . I was taught never to smile. Solemn. It is tradition, I guess. They come out there smiling like nobody's business. I don't know what I'm doing. I get confused. That's what the judges should clean up, really clean up; tell us what it is. But then they have to figure out by trial and error.