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Aunty Dottie Thompson
Merrie Monarch Festival
Hawai'i Naniiloa Hotel
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Aloha e Aunty Dottie!

It's been a long time since I last wrote to you and I am writing to you this time about things that transpired from your last Merrie Monarch Hula Competition meeting that was held on September 12. Quite a few people have since spoken with me and I am concerned for a few reasons. First of all, the rules that were in place for the hula kahiko were put there when many of the hula masters were still alive. I have a vested interest in those rules and the last time anything was really touched was back in 1978 when the rule about using a microphone for the Miss Aloha Hula was looked at. At that time, we met as a committee and nothing else was wrong with the cultural context of the rules; just the technological aspect. Second of all, as a member of the hula community I need to say something about an old adage, "'A'ole i pau ka 'ike i ka hālau ho'okahi" ("Not all knowledge is kept by one school"). In theory, all serious hula people know it. In reality, this saying is nothing but pure rhetoric. A lot has happened to the Hawaiian culture and hula since the overthrow of the kapu system in 1819. My own hula teachers and their teachers are now dead. They need a voice too. Thirdly, some of the hula people affected by the new rules are my own students and there is a silent majority who attended the Merrie Monarch meeting that are not comfortable with a confrontational style of letting one's mind be heard.

Many of the hula people are wondering why elastic will not be an accepted element in the costuming. It is in my opinion, and the opinion of the majority of hula people, that elastic is merely a functional notion in costuming. Drawstring skirts may be the preferred style of some hālau hula but it should not be forced upon those others who do not want to use drawstring skirts. If it is a matter of "man-made" material is a "no-no," then skirting itself has to be made of a 100% natural material such as cotton in lieu of today's cotton blends. On the other extreme end, all skirting must be made out of kapa. . . We all need to be reasonable. If elastic was good enough for the late Iolani Luahine, it's good enough for me.

The list of appropriate adornments is something else to be scrutinized. Again, hālau hula would have their own "appropriate adornments"

as dictated according to geography. Not everyone lived near the geographical zones where availability was accessible. I was told that this "acceptable list" coincides with the kinolau of Laka and that these were suitable kuahu plants. Not everything that was put on that kuahu was worn in leis. I know this for a fact. I was taught by one of my teachers with the kuahu. It was perfectly acceptable to use other lei material not on this list. Many of these materials were from introduced plants. These introduced plant materials were not put onto the kuahu--- just the dancer. Where leis are concerned, the williwili seed was never used as a lei until just recently. Aunty Iolani Lushine wore hala and when asked why she did so she replied, "Hala 'o mea 'ino" ("Let all bad pass me by"). Ask Uncle George Naope, he can tell you. The laua'e lei is also of fairly recent innovation. This was first introduced by Uncle Henry Pa back in the very early 1970's. His own dancers from back then are still very much alive and they can attest to that. Shells that were imported were alright for us to wear. I still can picture Aunty Hoakalei Kamaui and her dancers wearing imported shell lei too. Sometimes substitutes will have to do when the natural, native material is either not available, available in very limited quantities or is priced prohibitively as not to be practical (as in the case of Ni'ihau shells). After all, it is the essence of the dance itself that should take precedence, not the outer trappings. Yes, the costuming and its complements are important but not to the point of discounting everything else. Another concern is the use of feathers in leis. Culturally, the feather lei was reserved for women of ali'i lineage. In the olden days of Hawai'i, feathers were a choice commodity because it took so much time and effort to gather them. They were, in turn, made into adornments for the ali'i (namely, the chiefesses to wear as leis). Today, one phone call to M. Schwartz & Sons in New York and a charge card number will have pounds of it delivered to your door. Feathers and its use should be kept in the spirit of the old practices.

Another newer practice is the wearing of the kihei as sort of a ceremonial garb connected to "true kumu hula." This practice was started by Maiki Aiu Lake when she first had a blue kihei awarded to her first kumu hula graduate. Since then, people started to think that this was an old traditional practice. It is not. In old Hawai'i, every man, woman and child had and wore kihei as an article of dress to shield one from the sun, protect from the cold or to wear against the elements. None of my teachers ever wore it for chanting and none of their teachers did either. Wearing it or not wearing it does not make one any lesser or greater in chanting ability or skill.

In the use of kupe'e for ankle adornments, I was taught that it is appropriate not to use them for hula noho. The seated dances would just crush the ankle adornments and result in a waste of nature, time and effort. After all, the ankle kupe'e would not be a focal point of seated dances.

It was also drilled in that black can never be worn in the hula chants but black was permitted in the modern hula. The modern hula does not have all those restrictions of the traditional/ancient

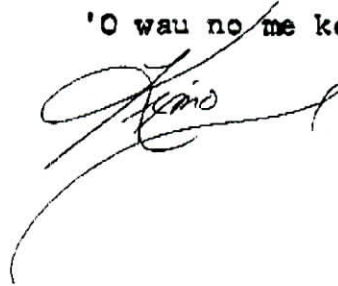
dances. I don't know why this is a part of the rules for the hula 'auana.

Aunty Dottie, these are real concerns and these points are based on not what I feel but rather on what I know. I do know some things about hula but one of the things I don't know is why Aunty Pat Bacon was not looked to among all of these changes. After all, she is 79 years old going on 80 and she did learn hula from the masters as well as the old kapu. A most important practice among the Hawaiians is to defer to the oldest, knowledgeable person when consulting about things dealing with the cultural past. I am sure that among this year's panel of judges, she is the oldest and the most experienced.

I really would like these specks of light shed and shared among the judges and hula people. My hula training and background is quite extensive and as many people know, I am not one to compromise when it comes down to what hula should be. If anyone is in doubt as to what I really know about hula, I invite anyone to come to me and give me the names of the pahu hula beats and their function in connection with the hula pahu. If they can do this, I know that they have learned their hula thoroughly. If they have not, I must remind all of us that "'A'ole i pau ka 'ike i ka hālau ho'okahi" and that an important part of the hula training was to have a part of the tail of the pig as to keep ourselves humble.

Is there another meeting in December? If so, I would like to be a part of that meeting if the agenda would permit for those reasons that I started this letter off with. Please let me know.

'O wau no me ke aloha,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kimo", written in dark ink. The signature is fluid and extends across the width of the text above it.