

LUKA KALEIKI

Born and raised in Papakolea, Luka Kaleiki became interested in the hula at the age of eight. She began to teach at her sister, Louise Kaleiki's, studio in Kalihi at the age of 15.

We Hawaiians have a culture but we don't protect it. We would rather modernize. That's why I admire Joseph Ilalaole, Manuel Silva, and Henry Pa. They had an element that you don't see nowadays. They were very devoted to the hula and not to the audience.

My first teacher was Dorothy Ortiz, and I was trained in modern hula. She was a friend of my sister, Louise, and together they had opened a studio in Papakolea in 1959. When they moved their classes to the old George Naope studio in Kalihi, my sister asked me to help with the teaching load. My sister had been left a book of hulas and I studied the book like people study to go to school. The classes would come, I would put on the record, and that's how we would start.

My first idol was Joseph Kahaulilio but his classes were intermittent, so I learned my basic steps for ancient hula from Manuel Silva. When I turned seventeen I went to Henry Pa and he became the greatest influence on my hula. Henry's teachers included Katie Nakaula, Keaka Kanahale, Joseph Ilalaole, Akoni Maka and Kauluwai Maka Palea. Whenever I needed an ancient number for a big show, I would go to Uncle Henry and in 1962 he graduated me as one of his students.

I do not consider myself a kumu hula but a hula instructor because I didn't go through the rituals. My life in the hula has been a gift from God. I took one year of formal training under my sister and she had no teacher, only the book of hula motions that had been left to her.

I think it's important to take kids who may not be the best dancers and give them the opportunity to dance at big competitions like the Merrie Monarch. The opportunity to travel and to get up on stage and prove they are something is important.

When I was in high school, I was studying to become an opera singer. I took classes at the University but I stopped when my sister needed help with her hula studio. Once I started teaching, I never felt the need to go into anything else. Hula has been my sole support. I simply enjoy the teaching aspect of working with a student and watching that student grow and mature as a person and as a dancer.

I was always on the big side and I was ashamed of that so I never was interested in learning from the kumu hula that were in my family. I think that's the one thing I regret in my life.

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but a hula instructor

I do not consider myself a kumu hula because I didn't go through the rituals. My life in the hula has been a gift from God. ~~because I only had one year of formal training.~~ I took one year of formal training under my sister and she had no teacher, only the book of hula motions that had been left to her.

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