

Hula is the heartbeat o

by Christina Zarobe

Thousands of students have been taught hula by George Lanakilakekiahiali'i Na'ope. But they also learned a lesson in life.

For over a half century Na'ope strived to reach young people through hula and chant and instill a sense of pride and self-esteem. These traits, says this pure Hawaiian, are hallmarks of the Hawaiian culture.

"First of all, they must learn respect and discipline for the kumu hula and not be envious of each other and the other halau," explains Na'ope during an interview last month.

"You must love yourself because if you don't, you won't have love and respect for others. The haoles call this conceited but it's not. It is important that my students know this."

A master of the traditional Hawaiian dance and founder of the Merrie Monarch Hula Festival, Na'ope talks about hula with the same affection a father displays for his child. But he is unyielding in how the dance should be taught — accurately.

As he speaks about hula Na'ope's voice is melodic. His hands, adorned with gold rings, emphasize a point in a graceful punctuation. Although considered a living treasure for his knowledge of the dance, he is amiable and approachable rather than pretentious.

"The hula is now alive again. A lot of these teachers are doing their homework. They are researching and composing and asking lots of questions," explains Na'ope seated comfortably in the Mililani home of his hanai daughter, Iwalani Tseu.

Curled on the floor at Na'ope's feet, Tseu listens intently to his comments. She admires not only Na'ope's talent, she admires the man and the Hawaiian principles he passes on.

"He has shared with me his emotion, his knowledge, his spiritual values, we cry together, we laugh together . . . we share quality time together," says Tseu who has three daughters, Chariya, Tatiana, and Aureana, with her husband Leighton.

A vibrant woman, Tseu recently organized a testimonial luncheon in honor of Na'ope. Held at the Sheraton Waikiki Hotel last month, the event drew 820 well-wishers with another 300 turned away when space ran out. For over seven hours, dancers gave impromptu performances and celebrities entertained.

"It was just beautiful. It was so surprising how many people attended. The food was great, the entertainment was great and everyone left with the aloha spirit," remembers Na'ope.

"But I felt, most of all, Hawaiian," he says.

Letters of congratulation poured in commemorating the occasion from the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts and from an assortment of lawmakers including Gov. John Waihee, and Congressmembers Neil Abercrombie, Patsy Mink, and Daniel Inouye. The Honolulu City Council sent its support while Honolulu Mayor Frank Fasi declared March 1 as Uncle George Na'ope Day.

Visitors included a contingency of 150 from the Big Island where Na'ope makes his home and a group of 25 dancers who flew in from Japan to attend the festivities. One of Na'ope's first students, now a grandmother living in

Monterey, Calif., also made the trip.

Despite the recognition for his past achievements, at the age of 65 Na'ope's illustrious career shows no signs of slowing. Just days before the luncheon he returned from a three-week excursion teaching and performing in Japan.

As a hula consultant traveling throughout the world, Na'ope has found receptive audiences and eager students. "They are very sincere. They want to learn. They are hungry for it."

Na'ope was introduced to the world of hula at the tender age of three by his grandmother, Malia Na'ope. A year later his neighbor and kumu hula, Mary Keli'ikekuewa Ahi'ena Kanaele Fuji'i, took over Na'ope's training. At age 10, he began a decade studying under Joseph 'llala'ole who taught Na'ope the kapu, forbidden, dances.

When he was 13 years old, Na'ope began teaching. A retiring Hilo barber let him use her barbershop and Na'ope took the 50 cents a week he earned to pay for his schooling.

"I love to share what I've learned about my culture. It hurts me when I see people doing a hula that is not Hawaiian," he says. "It's constructive criticism."

He considers himself fortunate to have grown up during an era of the "great masters who took me under their wing and guided me." To this day, Na'ope continues to perform at the Keauhou Beach Hotel in Kona.

"Do it right. That's the main thing. I learned this all for free. They shared with me and that's the Hawaiian way," says Na'ope who is the recipient of the 1991 Pulama Award from the Kalihi-Palama Culture & Arts Society, Inc.

Founder of both the Merrie Monarch Hula Festival, now in its 29th year, and the King Kalakaua Invitational Hula Festival, marking its 12th year, Na'ope was also instrumental in establishing the Queen Lili'uokalani Keiki Hula Competition.

Prior to the inception of the Merrie Monarch Hula Festival, Na'ope had been appointed promoter of activities for the county of Hawai'i. He was given the assignment of creating an event that would draw visitors to the island.

Not surprisingly, hula came to mind. He chose to name the festival after King David Kalakaua, also known as the Merrie Monarch, who had lifted the ban on hula imposed during the reign of Kamehameha II.

While proud of the festivals, Na'ope bristles when they are described as competitions. He partially blames the media for adding to the rivalry by nicknaming the Merrie Monarch Hula Festival, "The Olympics of Hula."

"It was never created to be a competition. I just wanted the halau to share. Competition is a white man's term. It's not Hawaiian," he says. On that point he is adamant.

Na'ope's teaching philosophy has influenced not only his students but his hanai daughter, Iwalani Tseu. For the past 18 years she has been teaching hula and now heads the Iwalani School of Dance.

It was 13 years ago that Tseu attended the Merrie Monarch Hula Festival and met Na'ope for the first time. She had watched the kumu hula on television for years "but so has every other dancer in Hawai'i."



George Na'ope and his hanai daughter, Iwalani Tseu, by artist Stew Mederios and presented to Na'ope.

"But that's actually when the whole magic started between us. He's just unconditional. He gives of himself. He's a true Hawaiian. He's been my inspiration," says Tseu who was given the name Wahine Kapu by Na'ope at the sacred hula mount, Lanikuhonua.

The encouragement has led Tseu to teach with the state Department of Education, Hawaiian Studies in the Leeward district. The program she teaches is "Ho'omaika'i Iho, Inner Beauty and Self-Esteem." Divided into four parts, the program teaches young people about self-esteem; personal grooming; eti-

f Kumu George Na'ope



ani Tseu, admire the koa sculpture made Na'ope.

Photo by Christina Zarobe

quette, manners, and awareness of Hawaiian values; and fashion coordination.

Although Na'ope has spent countless hours studying, performing and teaching hula, he pauses when asked to describe the Hawaiian dance. He slowly takes out and lights another cigarette as he mulls over his answer.

"King Kalakaua said the hula is the language of the heart and, therefore, the heartbeat of the Hawaiian people," says Na'ope.

He leans forward and quietly adds, "The hula is my heartbeat."

29th Annual Merrie Monarch Festival

Sunday, April 19

Coconut Island (Mokuola)

- Emcee — Keoni Fujitani
- 11 a.m. — Something Special
- Noon — Nawai
- 1 p.m. — Alberta & Alvin Kalima
- 2 p.m. — Darlene & J. J. Ahuna
- 3 p.m. — Kamelamela 'Ohana
- 4 p.m. — Kolea (the Kekaulua's)

Monday, April 20

- Waiakea Villas Hotel (E Kipa Mai)
- Noon — Halau Hula O Kahikilaulani

Tuesday, April 21

- Waiakea Villas Hotel (E Kipa Mai)
- Noon — Hula Halau O Hilo Hanakahi

Wednesday, April 22

- Seven Seas Luau House
- 9 a.m.-5 p.m. — Hawaiian Arts & Crafts
Waiakea Villas Hotel (E Kipa Mai)
- 9 a.m.-3 p.m. — Arts & Crafts Fair
- Noon — Hula Halau Na Pua Ui
Edith Kanakaole Tennis Stadium
- 6 p.m. — Hawai'i County Band
- 7 p.m. — Enter Royal Court
- 7:15 p.m. — National Anthem, Hawai'i Pono'i - Hawai'i County Band
- 7:25 p.m. — Pule - Rev. George deCosta
- 7:30 p.m. — Halau O Kekuhi
- 8 p.m. — Bunny Brown & Family in concert
- 9 p.m. — Ta Pahu 'O Kahihi

Thursday, April 23

- Seven Seas Luau House
- 9 a.m.-5 p.m. — Hawaiian Arts & Crafts
Waiakea Villas Hotel (E Kipa Mai)
- 9 a.m.-3 p.m. — Arts & Crafts Fair
- Noon — Na Lima Lele O Na Kupuna
Edith Kanakaole Tennis Stadium
- 6 p.m. — Royal Court enters
- 6:15 p.m. — National Anthem, Hawai'i Pono'i - Hawai'i County Band
- 6:25 p.m. — Pule
- 6:30 p.m. — Miss Aloha Hula Competition

Friday, April 24

- Seven Seas Luau House
- 9 a.m.-5 p.m. — Hawaiian Arts & Crafts
Waiakea Villas Hotel (E Kipa Mai)
- Noon — Halau Hula O Puna
Pier I - Navy Ship
- 11 a.m. — Hula Halau Na Pua Ui
Edith Kanakaole Tennis Stadium
- 6 p.m. — Royal Court enters
- 6:15 p.m. — National Anthem, Hawai'i Pono'i - Carmen Hulu Lindsey
- 6:25 p.m. — Pule
- 6:30 p.m. — Hula Kahiko (kane and wahine) Competition

Saturday, April 25

- Hooheau Park
- 8 a.m.-4 p.m. — Moku O Keawe Cultural Fair
Seven Seas Luau House
- 9 a.m.-4 p.m. — Hawaiian Arts & Crafts
Downtown Hilo
- 10:30 a.m. — Royal Parade
Waiakea Villas Hotel (E Kipa Mai)
- 9 a.m.-3 p.m. — Arts & Crafts Fair
- 12:30 p.m. — Na Pua Me Kealoha
Edith Kanakaole Tennis Stadium
- 5:30 p.m. — Royal Court enters
- 5:45 p.m. — National Anthem, Hawai'i Pono'i,
Carmen Hulu Lindsey
- 5:55 p.m. — Pule
- 6 p.m. — Hula 'Auauna (kane and wahine) Competition
Introduction of Kumu Hula
Presentation of Awards