



DEBORAH BOOKER • The Honolulu Advertiser

Yolanda Yacavone and Haunani Ching, mother of kumu hula Sonny Ching, prepare a massive amount of salad dressing at Sonny Ching's home on Diamond Head. Food and festivities celebrating the 15th anniversary of Ching's hālau are on the bill at a fund-raising event Sunday in Ke'ehi Lagoon Park.

# Kumu hula weighs Merrie Monarch return

By Vicki Viotti

ADVERTISER STAFF WRITER

Sonny Ching had decided that, for his 15th anniversary year as a kumu hula, he would concentrate on teaching and cut back on competition. As it turns out, he learned something — ironically, while watching the just-completed Merrie Monarch Festival hula competition.

His hālau was sitting out that contest, 25 of them sitting with him in the bleachers. And yet Ching saw them out there, reflected in the costuming touches, the choreography, the interplay between the ho'opa'a (chanter) and dancers, the style that other hālau seemed to have borrowed for the night.

"It was interesting to see the impression we have made in a hula performance," said Ching, whose Hālau Nā Mamo O Pu'uana'hulu has always finished at or near the top in that prestigious competition. "We have seen

## Family Fair

Celebrating 15 years of Hālau Nā Mamo O Pu'uana'hulu

10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday

Disabled American Veterans Hall, Ke'ehi Lagoon Park

Entertainers include Colón, Sean Na'auao & The Poi Pounders, Weldon Kekauoha, Nohelani Cypriano

\$5; tickets available at the door, from hālau members or online: [www.sonnynching.com](http://www.sonnynching.com)

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this happening over the past years. We even saw groups dressed in exactly the same costumes we've worn, same selection of lace and material."



SONNY CHING

Kawaikapuokalani Hewett), and he knows imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, the "borrowing" really bothered him at the time.

So it's tempting to commit now to return to the Merrie Monarch next year, but Ching is still not sure his anniversary-year plans will permit it. This week, those plans focus on preparations for Sunday's sixth annual Family Fair, a fund-raiser for the King Kamehameha and Hula 'Oni E competitions.

But there are other challenges as

well, with hardly a bare spot on the calendar. This month Ching travels to Guam for workshops and to judge a competition; June is the Kamehameha hula contest; July includes judging a Las Vegas competition and workshops in Japan; in August he'll join hula masters Edith McKinzie and George Holokai for workshops in Las Vegas and San Francisco. August will end with the Hālau Lā 'Ohana, a two-day event (Aug. 24-25) that includes a concert and "family day."

And that only takes him through the summer. The remainder of the year will be as daunting, a schedule that's developed gradually from the earliest days, when hālau meant simply the classes at Paki Park.

The real question mark hangs over November, when the hālau has a chance to appear at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. It's one of the doors that opened, Ching said, when the group performed last June at

New York's Carnegie Hall.

Ching said the Kennedy invitation extends into 2002, so if the date can be scheduled for next year, the hālau can instead spend the fall beginning preparations for a return to the Merrie Monarch.

The workshops are giving him a chance to learn as well as teach: He's itching to attend McKinzie's and Holokai's workshops. Still, competition provides its own brand of education, too.

"I like to use competition for short-term goals, to improve their dance ... and to strengthen their desire to do hula the best way they can," he said. "That brings honor to hula, to the culture, to all of Hawai'i."

So if the schedule permits, the hālau would love to return to the Merrie Monarch. But the kumu's waiting for the sign.

"If it's good for us to go back," he said with a smile, "I will get that message."