

Keali'inani'aimokuokalani Reichel

Nā Hoku Hanohano award winner, Keali'inani'aimokuokalani Reichel, is an accomplished singer, composer and kumu hula of Hālau Hula o Ka Makani Wili Makaha o Kaua'ula.

In comparison to other people, I started hula late. I was exposed to hula through the Hawaiiiana Club at Lahainaluna High School when I was a freshman. The club was under the direction of a senior named Peter Day. At the time, he was considered to be a child prodigy. He studied under 'Iolani Luahine and Henry Pā when he was about seven years old. He had all this knowledge so he taught 'oli, kahiko and 'auana for the school's Hawaiiiana Club.

I studied with Peter for one year in high school until he graduated. He didn't explain too much about the chants. He just showed us how the mele was danced. I was a bad dancer in high school. I had no rhythm, nothing. The other students used to forget my outfits on purpose when we had performances. When I go to the performance, everybody had their outfits except me. They'd say that they forgot my outfit. Finally after the twelfth or thirteenth time, I caught on that they didn't want me to dance. When you're fourteen years old, that's hard to take so I quit and studied on my own. I practiced everyday in front of the mirror just to perfect my timing.

After a couple of years, Peter saw me dance again for the Hawaiiiana Club and he was impressed. He had just formed his hālau and he wanted me to dance for him and help teach. Peter taught me and I would teach the students when he wasn't there. During that time, I was able to perfect how to teach. I think that's a skill in itself. You can have all this knowledge, but if you don't know how to convey it, there's no sense.

It was an intense several years that I studied under Peter. I learned dozens of dances. ~~They were fine but something was missing.~~ ^{TP 5} When Pua Kanahele came to

Maui to teach Hawaiian language, I jumped at the chance to study with her. I quit all my jobs and I basically plunged into poverty so I could go back to school to study under her.

The first foundation she gave me was language and she stressed the importance of language in hula and chant. The next foundation she gave me was in chanting. Through the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts Apprenticeship Program, I became Pua's apprentice and studied one on one with her in chant styles and techniques. Between these two different foundations, I believe that I have become successful.

Then suddenly, in 1981, Peter moved and left the halau. Within a two-day period, he just up and went. He had all these students who were hungry for more hula and because I was the alaka'i, they asked if I could stay on and continue the training as best I could. At first I told them "no" because I wasn't qualified. But other kumu hula on Maui urged me to continue and said they would be there if I needed help. I didn't want to take over his halau so we decided to make our own identity. We changed the name to Hālau Hula o Ka Makani Wili Makaha o Kaua'ula. Kaua'ula is the name of a valley that is situated right next to Lahainaluna High School. It is famous for a powerful wind that comes out usually after the death of an ali'i. The reasons for choosing that name are that I grew up in the shadow of this valley and we wanted to harness the power within the name and instill that in all of our dancers.

Ever since I started ^{my} ~~this~~ halau, it's been number one in my life. I've lost jobs because I've ~~had to~~ ^{chose} choose ~~between~~ ^{before} halau and work, ^{and} I've been homeless because I couldn't pay my rent. ~~But the halau has always been the number one priority in my life.~~

In our hālau, we stress language. We usually start off with ~~a few~~ language lessons then we start an hour and a half of hula kahiko or hula 'auana. I teach the

kahiko and Uluwehi Guerrero teaches 'auana. The ~~dance~~ classes ~~probably~~ run three to four hours every Sunday afternoon. I don't separate the students by age or sex but by skill and knowledge. Age does not matter as long as they are able to physically and mentally keep up with the class. Once in a while I will separate the men from the women for certain things, but for the most part, everybody learns the same thing.

~~We haven't opened up our halau in three years because we don't like continually having new students who must catch up. Everyday spoken language is very different from hula language. Learning both is really important. First it's important to communicate and think in Hawaiian. And when you can do that on an everyday basis, shifting to a hula language is not difficult. If you are going to teach hula, you've got to be able to speak Hawaiian and understand it. You have to have fluency in the language otherwise it's just a jumble of words and you're just memorizing passages.~~ *out*

I love competitions. Our people were competitive from the ancient times. Hawaiians were competitive in almost every aspect that you can think of. We don't enter competitions all the time because we don't want to make that our one and only goal. But competition brings out an excellence in the dancers that under normal circumstances would not exhibit. One of the main reasons we go to competitions is because we want to make a statement. We want to tell people that this is our halau, this is what we do, this is our foundation and this is us. Whether we place or not isn't important.

Seeking knowledge is the priority and its ongoing. I don't think everybody knows everything. "A'ohe pau ka 'ike i ka hālau ho'okahi" is really true. In our hālau, there are certain things that I'm not knowledgeable in and I recognize that. I don't pretend to know certain kinds of hula. When I feel that my dancers are ready to learn that hula, I send them to another kumu hula who has extensive

knowledge in that hula. That way our students receive as much information as possible from other kumu hula who are willing to help and to share. I'm not going to deny my students a specific branch of knowledge just because I don't know it. It's important that I bring in someone who can fulfill that void.

A hula style is something that you develop over the years. Every person who teaches hula today is almost a direct reflection of their kumu hula. What makes a kumu hula good is that they take the knowledge from their own kumu and take it to a higher level. If they learned from two or three different people, they take the styling and they blend all of those styles together and they come up with their own. It's not done on purpose, it just happens that way. I think that's creativity. You gather all that you've learned and you make it work for yourself and for your students.

I'm not a prolific composer. I compose every so often when I'm moved to do so or stressed out to do so. I usually compose when emotions are running high. It's a good outlet. If you are composing, you need to have that emotional connection to whatever it is you're writing about. If you are writing about love or a broken heart, make sure that you understand what that emotion is. You cannot be writing songs about love if you've never been in love. The emotional aspect of your being gets put into your compositions.

When this music thing happened, it was very much by accident. Although I knew I could hold a tune, I never thought I was a great singer. I was singing in the shower one day and as you know, everybody sounds good in the shower. Some of my friends were over and they said, "Wow, you should do an album." They kept bugging me so after awhile I said if they could get the money together, I'll do an album. I thought I'd nip it in the bud right there because albums are expensive to make. Well, they got most of the money together and I had to do my album. We didn't even put a band together because we didn't think it would be successful. We

just thought some hula people would like it and that would be fine. We just wanted to break even on the expenses.

All of a sudden, it went ballistic. Two months after the album came out, we realized we had to perform. I'm a reluctant performer. I stress out everytime we have to sing at a concert. Chanting is different because you immerse yourself in the composition. I can 'oli in front of a million people and not be nervous but when you're singing, it's different. Looking in the community however and seeing how these compositions and this music affected people, I realized that it was a lot bigger than all of us. We now had an obligation to fulfill.

Some of the students had a hard time for the knowledge to stick. I realized that the students didn't know how to identify with a specific song or chant so I had them memorize the words to understand the chant and the dance better. I learned to do this on my own. I have an easy time remembering the dances even till this day. I can clearly remember dances that were taught to me when I was fourteen. A big part of it was because I had learned how to chant or sing it at the same time I learned the dance.

^{add} ~~The problem became that for~~ for the first time in my life, I saw myself as being financially secure. But, I told myself that this was ^{not} going to last long. This is a fad. At some point, Keali'i Reichel, the singer, will fade away into oblivion. I still believe that. ^{During the past three years,} ~~So, the halau took second place.~~ I relied on the alaka'i to continue and to try and keep the halau together. We've lost a lot of students because of it. Over the last month, I've met with the hālau and I'm recommitting myself. The singing stuff can wait. My hālau is back to number one.