



George Na'ope Receives National Heritage Fellowship

George Na'ope, a kumu hula who lives in Hilo, was recently awarded a National Heritage Fellowship. To honor and preserve our nation's diverse cultural heritage, the National Endowment for the Arts annually awards these one-time-only fellowships to master folk and traditional artists. The fellowships recognize lifetime achievement, artistic excellence, and contributions to our nation's traditional arts heritage. Na'ope was one of 11 recipients of the awards presented in 2006. Each fellowship is for \$20,000.

Na'ope's full name is George Lanakilakekiahiali'i Na'ope, but throughout the Hawaiian Islands he is known simply as "Uncle George." He is revered for his knowledge and mastery of traditional hula and chant. Born on O'ahu and raised in Hilo, Na'ope began his studies of hula at the age of three under the training of his great grandmother, Mary Malia Pukaokalani Na'ope, who lived to be over 100 years old. By the age of 12 he was already performing on recordings of Hawaiian music. Upon graduation from high school, he moved to Honolulu and opened the George Na'ope Hula School.

A lifelong teacher, in 1962 he founded the Merrie Monarch Festival. A landmark turning point in the renaissance of Hawaiian culture, the festival is focused on the traditional chant and dance of the islands. Recognized by the Governor and Hawai'i State Legislature with the designation "Living Golden Treasure," he has welcomed both President Franklin Roosevelt and President John F. Kennedy to Hawai'i, and he more recently represented Hawai'i at the royal wedding of Japan's Emperor Akahito.

In 1982 the NEA established the National Heritage Awards as a way of honoring American folk artists for their contributions to our national cultural mosaic. Modeled after the Japanese "National Living Treasures" concept, the idea began with Bess Lomax Hawes, then director of the Folk Arts Program. Since its inception, over 200 artists have received the Heritage Award.

As a group, these folk and traditional artists reflect the diverse heritage and cultural traditions that transcend their beginnings to become part of our national character. Americans all, they bring age-old customs, crafts and ways of living to the flux of American life, a pluralism that makes us strong and defines us, in the words of Walt Whitman, as "not merely a nation but a teeming nation of nations."

For more information on the national Heritage Fellowships, visit the NEA website, www.arts.gov and click on Lifetime Honors.



Dana Gioia, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, presents the National Heritage Fellowship to kumu hula George Na'ope.