

Holoua Stender

Holoua Stender teaches classes in Hawaiian chant and dance everyday as part of the regular school curriculum at the Kamehameha Schools. He has been teaching at Kamehameha since 1979.

I was raised by my maternal grandmother and great-grandparents. Together with my paternal grandmother, they spoke Hawaiian to me when I was little. When I attended St. Louis High School, I studied Hawaiian language with John Lake and I continued learning language throughout my years at the University of Hawai'i where I graduated in 1979.

John Lake was a wonderful and an exciting teacher. I took hula from him in 1970 when I was fifteen and enrolled at St. Louis High School. He was a very motivating teacher. He encouraged students to want to learn. He must have had over sixty students that came to the afterschool rehearsals to study chant, music and dance from him. He has a charismatic way of teaching. He used to take us all around the island to learn from different kumu hula. We studied with Aunty Alice Namakelua, Pua Dela Cerna and Aunty Hattie Au. He provided us with many opportunities to learn hula and we performed and watched performances by hula greats, 'Iolani Luahine and Edith Kanaka'ole. We would also sing and dance to earn money for travel.

After high school, I went to the University of Hawai'i where I took hula classes from Ho'oulu Cambra and language from Sarah Nākoa and Larry Kimura. In 1973, I joined "Ka Pā Hula Hawai'i" under John Topolinski.

Kaha'i Topolinski had the greatest influence on my hula career because of the depth of his teaching and because I was with him the longest. He would take chants and analyze them to different levels of meaning inherent in poetic, symbolic and literal translation of the language of the chant. Each dance took a long period to learn because of Kaha'i's care and scholarship. He took each layer of the chant apart and made us study it. Sometimes we would visit Mrs. Mary Kawena Puku'i to ask her questions about different chants and she would unravel the hidden

intricacies of the language which is very important for studying chant and dance. I was fortunate to study with Kaha'i.

In 1977, I left Kaha'i and went to study with Darrell Lupenui. Darrell was a very loving person. I have special memories of him and the way he taught. He would sit on the floor and he would teach us by describing the motions to us. He wouldn't perform the motion but he would tell us what to do and the dances would become so perfect and beautiful. He hardly ever changed things. He had a mental picture of the dance in his head and he described and translated his mental images to teach us. It's like someone who is a genius at creating music. They create the music in their heads. He would explain it to the alaka'i and they would then show us the motion. Darrell Lupenui was an artist, and perhaps a genius in hula. He worked within the parameters of hula and he created art right inside his head.

When Keli'i Tau'a asked me to join his kumu hula class, Darrell was very gracious and released me to go with Keli'i. My entire two years with Keli'i was spent training for graduation. Part of our training for graduation was to compose mele. Keli'i invited renown kumu hula, Manuel Silva, Henry Pa, Kalena Silva and other people to view and participate at our graduation. He wanted them to watch us perform hula to our compositions with our own choreography, working of course within the parameters of his tutelage. The kumu hula came to watch and comment on our creations and our compositions when we performed at the Star of the Sea Hall on the evening following our formal graduation 'uniki ceremony held at Sand Island. Charles Ka'upu and I were fortunate to be trained and graduated as kumu hula by Keli'i Tau'a in 1979.

I teach Hawaiian chant and dance at Kamehameha Schools. We offer beginning and intermediate levels. We also teach select performance groups who study dances for special performances such as the Concert Glee Club or the Song Contest Ho'ike. Students may register for the Hawaiian Chant and Dance I and II class as a part of the regular curriculum. Randie Fong

and Wayne Chang work closely with me to create special dance and performance productions for the schools. Three hundred students show up for our auditions and we'll select maybe forty or fifty of the most talented young men and women performers. Students need not have taken the beginning and intermediate levels to be performers. They must demonstrate exemplary skill in dancing and music to be able to perform.

We teach our students "A'ohe pau ka 'ike i kāu halau," which means, "all knowledge is not found under one roof." We ask students not to change or forget what was taught to them by other kumu hula. We try as much as possible to teach them a new style and enhance their dancing; causing them to strive for greater personal achievement. We are fortunate that most students come to us with experience and we don't want to dampen that experience. We want to give them another hula challenge and teach them to excel in performance.

Students begin class outside on the lanai. They line up at a designated time to chant their oli kāhea. If we feel that the chant is sincere, they will be welcomed inside. At times they may continue chanting for twenty minutes to half an hour. When they walk in, it's perfectly quiet. We practice the basic steps for anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour. After the basics, we break up into three groups and the kumu will teach a different dance.

I consider myself more a language expert than I do a hula expert. I studied hula because of language. I could see the beauty of the poetry and beauty of the Hawaiian language through dance and chant. That's what made me interested in hula, because hula demonstrates the beautiful soul of the Hawaiian language.

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