



# Biography Hawai'i: Five Lives

*A Series of Public Remembrances*



## MAIKI AIU LAKE KUMU HULA AND PRESERVER OF HAWAIIAN CULTURE

*by Puakea Nogelmeier*

Maiki Aiu Lake played an influential role in revitalizing participation and interest in the hula during the last half of the twentieth century, part of a cultural renewal referred to today as the Hawaiian renaissance. As she began her career as a *kumu hula*, or dance master, modern forms of the hula enjoyed great visibility, especially in the tourist industry in Hawai'i and abroad. At the same time, the more historical forms and aspects of the hula traditions were diminishing, taught and performed in a private fashion, mostly perpetuated along family lines and among small groups of selected students. At mid-century, the older forms of the art were languishing, but Maiki's career exemplifies how the history of the hula has been one of continuity and change.

The hula, or native dance form, is said to have its origins on the temple as part of religious observances and offerings to the gods. Certain gods and goddesses are directly related to the hula, such as Laka, Kapo, Lauka'ie'ie, and the four Maile sisters, but dances were dedicated to and performed in honor of all of the major gods in the Hawaiian pantheon, as well as for the ruling chiefs, royal family members, and historical or legendary figures.

By the time foreign observers and Hawaiian writers documented their insights about the hula, the dance was recognized as a social norm, performed by chiefs and common people alike. Many styles of the dance developed, some of them unique to a particular island or region, others spanning the archipelago. Performances were held in formal or ritual contexts, as informal entertainment, or as pleasant pastime. After 1820, widespread acceptance of Christianity brought disdain



upon the hula, as on most ancient practices, and for the rest of the century the dance was often reviled by foreigners and Hawaiian converts alike, considered to be a heathen practice or a frivolous waste of time.

In spite of criticism and even efforts to legally punish practitioners of the hula, kumu hula, or masters of the dance, persisted in teaching, and students continued to seek out training. Ritual graduations, public performances, and private entertainments were held throughout the islands during the remainder of the nineteenth century, but caution and discretion often guided such events, in light of widespread disapproval.

Each of the Hawaiian monarchs supported the hula after their own fashion, as was the case with many traditional arts. Kauikeaouli Kamehameha III had his own group, the *Hulumanu*, with whom he practiced chanting and dance, and Queen Emma, wife of King Kamehameha IV, had dancers from various islands who regularly performed at her request. Queen Emma's journey to Kaua'i in 1871 inspired over one hundred *mele* (chants) to be composed and danced in her honor.

King Kalākaua, elected in 1874, was not the first monarch to foster Hawaiian dance, but he was an ardent supporter of many traditional arts,

and certainly the most powerful proponent of the hula in his era. He is quoted as saying "the Hula is the heartbeat of the Hawaiian people." At his insistence, and despite criticism and even lawsuits, hula became an important part of every royal event, and groups of dancers were brought from other islands to perform at festivities, such as the coronation and his jubilee. Kalākaua, his sister and successor Lili'uokalani, and their siblings were renowned composers of *mele* for both the traditional style of hula and for the newly evolving *hula ku'i*, or modern Hawaiian dance.

While the hula was somewhat obscured by the social and political turmoil following the seizure of the kingdom and eventual dominion as a U.S. territory, modern adaptations of the dance emerged most widely into the public sphere in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Places like Lālanī Village in Waikīkī presented older forms of the dance and chant, but it was the more showy modern form that came to be widely marketed. *Hula ku'i*, or *hula 'auana*, as it came to be called, was set to music, incorporated new, often English, lyrics, used stage costuming, and appeared in a new setting, mostly fostered by and for the growing tourist industry. Those comparing this modern hula to the older forms known during the monarchy period saw little resemblance between the two, even with the shared structure of the dance, the footwork, body motion, and gesture.

Dancers with traditional backgrounds often worked as professionals in the modern hula of the tourist realm, but many of the dancers had no such formal training, learning dance routines only for stage presentation. Professional hula studios flourished to teach modern hula in a variety of styles, but most offered little or no training in the older forms of the dance. The traditional hula continued to be taught and performed in a more private sphere, led by traditional experts and offering instruction to small groups, mostly made up of family members and selected students.

Maiki began her hula career in this setting, a young woman with a traditional hula background working as a professional dancer. She had trained in the old disciplines of the dance under Lōkālīa Montgomery, and graduated as *'ōlapa*, dancer, in 1946. While continuing formal training with Lōkālīa, she also sought the knowledge of other dance masters, graduating again under Lōkālīa two years later as kumu hula. In the late 1940s, while finishing her ritual training and at the same time dancing for the stage in night clubs and shows, Maiki opened her own hula studio.

Margaret Aiu's Hula Studio began in 1948, and while modern hula was her bread and butter, as it was for most professional hula teachers of the time, Maiki always included some of what was being called *hula kahiko*, or traditional style hula, in her classes. She continued to learn from experts in the traditional dance styles, and within a few years her teachers allowed her to call the school a *hālau*, the ancient term for a formal learning center of Hawaiian dance. Hālau Hula O Maiki opened in 1952, appearing as the first hula school so named since the turn of the century.

While Maiki Aiu Lake was not the only kumu hula of her era bridging the traditional and modern worlds of hula, her teaching career produced hundreds and hundreds of devoted students spanning generations, and the characteristics of her hālau established a new legacy in the teaching and perpetuation of the dance. She held regular, ongoing classes for dancers at all levels, from young to old and from beginner to advanced, with hundreds of students enrolled at any time in different classes. She welcomed any who were interested in the dance, regardless of age, race, background, or ability, encouraging each student to experience "the art of Hawaiian dance, expressing all that we see, hear, smell, touch, taste and feel."

Learning from and relying upon older hula experts became a trademark of Maiki throughout her life, and either in person or through vignettes, she brought a range of respected elders and their styles into the hula classroom. The instructional method she used required her dance students to also learn the words and meanings of each chant and dance, to keep ongoing notebooks, and to be tested regularly on all of their hula knowledge. Her students learned many of the associated arts, like lei-making, mat weaving, and the crafting of instruments and costumes, as well as the rituals of collecting forest greens, of dressing for the dance, and of ceremonial graduation.

After twenty years of teaching in her hālau, Maiki advertised a special class for kumu hula in 1972, apparently the first time such an opportunity had been offered publicly. Some were critical about the appropriateness of such an open invitation, but the kumu class attracted a large group of high-caliber students, intensely dedicated to the hula and motivated to undergo the rigors of traditional training. The *Papa Lehua*, with a graduating class of twenty-six, was the first of many groups of kumu to eventually emerge from Maiki's "hula university," as some called it. Every subsequent kumu class, each named for one of the plant forms in the hula, produced more new kumu hula, all having been trained in the art of the dance and in Maiki's particular style of instruction.

As her graduating students began to establish their own new hālau throughout the islands and elsewhere, Hawai'i was undergoing a renaissance of interest in every aspect of Hawaiian culture. The hula embodied that interest, with both traditional and modern hula gaining new popularity and visibility. Hula classes and performances were more numerous and more popular than ever before. Hula competitions sprang up throughout the islands, in mainland states, and even in foreign countries like Japan and Mexico.

The hula also became a port of entry for a new wave of students who, through the dance and especially through the broader cultural training and exposure fostered by Maiki and her peers, were introduced to other aspects of the culture. The surge of interest in the hula traditions sparked broad appreciation and encouraged renewed participation in such fields as Hawaiian language, music, decorative arts, history and legend, healing arts, foodways, martial arts, and more.

Throughout her life, Maiki Aiu Lake was a dynamic force in the hula, and her influence helped shape the course of the Hawaiian renaissance that still reverberates throughout the islands almost two decades after she passed away in 1984. Her legacy is seen in many of the hālau and dance schools in existence today, as well as in the myriad other Hawaiian cultural traditions that have been revitalized in the last few decades. Although this renewal has extended far beyond the scope of the hula, it echoes what Maiki often stated as her own basic philosophy, "Hula is life."



# An Aunti Maiki Timeline

- 1925 Born in Honolulu, raised by hānai parent William Kealoha
- 1937 Lives with her mother, and attends St. Francis School
- 1939 Begins dancing professionally for Pua Almeida
- 1946 After years of studying traditional hula with Lōkālāia Montgomery, goes through an *'ūniki*, or graduation, as an *'ōlapa*, or accomplished dancer
- 1947 Marries Boniface Aiu
- 1948 *'Ūniki* as a kumu hula
- 1952 Receives permission to change the name of her school from Margaret Aiu's Hula Studio to Hālau Hula O Maiki
- 1950s Develops her teaching philosophy and style with the support of important cultural authorities, including Mary Kawena Pukui and Vicky I'i Rodrigues
- 1960s Becomes a major cultural resource
- 1972 Marries Kahuanu Lake
- 1972–73 *'Ūniki* for her first master class, Papa Lehua
- 1975 *'Ūniki* for Papa 'Ilima
- 1978 Opening of Hālau Hawai'i
- 1979 *'Ūniki* for Papa Kukui and Papa Hau
- 1982 *'Ūniki* for Papa Hala
- 1983 *'Ūniki* for Papa Laua'e
- 1984 Over 3,000 attend her funeral at Kawaiaha'o Church



Clockwise from top: "Snookie," the St. Francis student, 1942; Early days as a performer (Maiki, far left, with Healani Choy, Clorinda Freitas, and Nona Belle Teves); At her *'ūniki* as kumu hula; At the home of her teacher, Lōkālāia Montgomery (far left, second row; Maiki is second row, middle); With Jolly Arnold, Mary Bierne, and Audrey Ho Vance, at the home of Lōkālāia Montgomery; With her dancers (Maiki front), costumed for the mid-1950s *Polynesian Ballet*; In the early 1980s.

# The 'Ūniki of Māiki Aiu Lake's Papa Lehua

by *Kalena Silva*

A *kumu hula* (hula teacher) and visionary, Māiki Aiu Lake held 'ūniki (graduation) ceremonies in 1973 conferring the rank of *kumu hula* upon twenty-six students as a culmination of their training in her dance school, Hālau Hula O Māiki. At the time, few teachers of traditional Hawaiian chant and dance were active in the field. Even fewer had received training in a hālau environment where traditional hula teachings, beliefs, and practices are imparted in addition to the chant and dance.

After our graduation in 1973, some of my hula brothers and sisters established their own dance schools, several of which have risen in prominence and exert a great influence on traditional chant and dance training today. I describe below my participation in the first 'ūniki of 1972, and other events leading up to and including the 1973 'ūniki, which embodied important aspects of hula ritual that continue to be observed thirty years later.

## PREPARATION PRIOR TO THE FIRST 'ŪNIKI OF 1972

In early April 1971, approximately forty students began studying hula kahiko (traditional hula) with Māiki. In late August of that year, I joined the group, which had decreased in size to approximately thirty students. Our class consisted of a select group of the hālau's most talented students. At least half were, like myself, new in the hālau, but had previously studied with other hula teachers. The rest had been hālau students for some years.

In early summer 1972, after more than a year of training, Māiki announced that preparation for the 'ūniki was to begin. Although a definite date for the graduation was not immediately announced, training was intensified through longer, more frequent sessions, and students were instructed in beliefs and practices associated with the 'ūniki. Māiki named the three titles that we were working to attain during our hula training: 'ōlapa (dancer), ho'opa'a (chanter-instrumentalist), and the highest title, *kumu hula*. Until the night before the day of the public part of the 'ūniki, Māiki gave no indication as to what titles might be conferred.

## THE FIRST 'ŪNIKI OF 1972

Early in the evening of August 26, 1972, students of our class brought performance attire and instruments and met Māiki at Ulu Mau Village, a cluster of traditional grass houses built on an isolated, sloping, coastal promontory at He'eia, O'ahu. This meeting preceded the public part of the 'ūniki to be held the following evening. We were soon joined by the late Aunti Alice Nāmakelua—a *kupuna* (elder) then in her early eighties—who was to be Māiki's advisor in the procedures of the 'ūniki.

After storing our belongings in a large pavilion, we gathered around Māiki and Aunti Alice on the lawn between a rectangular earth mound that was to be the performing area and the pavilion. Aunti Alice opened with a prayer praising God, confirming his presence among us, and acknowledging his power and ability to put aside all that might obstruct our paths.

Māiki then gave instructions concerning some of the activities to take place that night. We were to rehearse all of the *mele* (chants) and hula to be performed for family and friends the following evening. We were to maintain the fast started that morning until the rehearsal was over, at which time Māiki would provide some food. Finally, we were to remain in the village until daybreak the next day.

The rehearsal began just as the last rays of sunlight could be seen over the ocean horizon, and continued until a short break was taken four or five hours later. After the break, Māiki asked us to sit



From the first 'ūniki class, students Evangeline Wong and Momi Kepilino.



in a circle on the performing mound. After all were seated, Māiki handed a large bowl of dried shrimp to Lahela Ka'aihue, the youngest female student. At Māiki's direction, Lahela stood, and moving clockwise inside the circle, offered some shrimp to each of us.

After all of us had taken some shrimp, Māiki handed a large bowl of poi to Momi Kepilino, the oldest female student, and instructed her to follow the same procedure. Some time after, a breach (not by Momi) in the procedure occurred, which I will not detail here. A painful expression spread across Māiki's face, but without a word, she directed that the bowl of poi continue to be offered to students. Later, Māiki explained that the meal was meant not only to end our fast and to provide necessary sustenance, but it was also meant to be a test. She watched very closely the manner in which we accepted, grasped, and ate the food offered us as one means of determining our ability to accept and handle the title she might confer upon us. Māiki explained

that the breach broke the continuity of the procedure. So much so, evidently, that other tests she had planned to give after the meal were not given.

After the ritual meal, Māiki gave each student a piece of blue fabric to be worn as a *pā'ū* (skirt) while chanting and drumming. The *pā'ū* signified that we were all to be conferred with the title of *ho'opa'a* and, consequently, also the title of *ōlapa*. Use of the color blue was significant because the title of *ho'opa'a*, like a traditional blue vegetable dye, was difficult to obtain, and therefore highly prized. Māiki then called one student, Ho'oulu Cambra, to her side and gave her a blue *kīhei* (garment tied over the left shoulder) signifying her attainment of the title of *kumu hula*. Ho'oulu's was the only *kīhei* given that night.

Māiki then instructed the oldest (Imaikalani I) and the youngest (myself) male students to pick twenty-six leaf buds from twenty-six of the ti plants at the village. After they were gathered and brought back to the group, the buds were passed out, one to each student. Māiki explained that just as a ti leaf bud is always in the process of unfolding to maturity, so a student's knowledge of the many aspects of the hula should be ever maturing, ever deepening, and ever broadening.

At approximately 2:00 a.m., Māiki suggested that everyone get some sleep, and asked Aunti Alice to say a prayer, which she did. Although a light rain had fallen earlier, it was now clear and comfortably cool. Everyone (including Māiki and Aunti Alice) spread out mats on the pavilion floor and lay down to sleep.

Most of us were up by 7:00 a.m. the next morning and were allowed to return home to freshen up for the *ūniki* later that day. I returned to the village in the early afternoon, and joined fellow students, Māiki, and other hālau members in preparing the table settings and decorations in a flat area on the slope above the performing mound, where the evening's feast for relatives and friends was to be held.

At about 3:30 p.m. Māiki asked our class to leave the preparation of the feast to other members of the hālau, and to meet on the performing mound for a blessing upon the evening's activities by the Reverend Abraham Akaka. After the blessing, we gathered behind the mound out of the view of relatives and friends who had been gathering outside the village and who were now being shown to their tables. Ropes had been set up to guide them directly to the feast and to discourage anyone from walking down to the performing mound to visit with us. Visiting wasn't permitted until after our performance took place after the feast.

While the feast was in progress, we ate ritual and non-ritual food. The ritual food was served first: a baked *pua'a hiwa*—a completely black suckling pig without any spots or blemishes. All students ate a portion (even if only very small) of the snout, tail, ear-tips, feet, and brain—each with symbolic meaning. The non-ritual food was then served, and included raw fish, raw lobster mixed with *wana* (sea urchin), *ōpihi* (limpets), non-ritual *kālua* (baked) pig, chicken with *lū'au* (taro tops), poi, and fruit juices, among others. No alcoholic beverages were served.

The performance was preceded at about 7:30 p.m. by a prayer by Aunti Alice, who called upon God to bless, strengthen, and inspire us. The beginning of the performance was then announced by Likeke Bell, a cousin of Māiki's, who blew a conch shell. I then entered the performance area, chanting an original *mele*, and was followed by Sarah Quick (now Sarah Keahi), who also chanted an original *mele*. Then, as Momi Kepilino (the student who had studied longest in the hālau) entered chanting a *mele* to Laka, goddess of the hula, all others silently filed onto the performance area, cradling their performance attire in their arms. We all then knelt in front of our pre-set

instruments facing the audience, laid our performance attire on the ground, and began the dressing ritual. Māiki explained this ritual to the audience as we chanted several *mele*, each associated with the donning of a specific item of performance attire.

When completely dressed, we performed the usual three *pale* of a complete hula program. The first honored several deities; the second, Hawaiian royalty; and the third contained hula about other topics, including two *mele ma'i* (procreation dances), one by the female and the other by the male graduates.

Māiki then asked Ho'oulu, who had been given the blue *kīhei* the night before, to dance while the rest of us chanted and drummed as Ho'oulu danced a set of three *mele hula pahu* (drum dances). After the set, Māiki spoke about Ho'oulu, her hard work and the importance of her achievement that evening. Māiki then thanked the many people who had helped with the *'ūniki* preparations, and invited relatives and friends to visit with the students, who were subsequently heaped with hugs, kisses, leis, and other gifts.

### THE SECOND 'ŪNIKI OF 1973

After the first *'ūniki* in 1972, those of us who had not attained the rank of *kumu hula* continued training with Māiki. Early in the summer of 1973, she announced that, as a part of a major concert she was planning for late summer that year, we would be graduated as *kumu hula*. The late Uncle Manuel Silva, Māiki's *kupuna* advisor for this *'ūniki*, attended several rehearsals and offered Māiki advice regarding our performing.

Prior to the *'ūniki*, Māiki informed us that we would be known as the *lehua* class, and urged that, when performing, we use *lehua* leaf buds and flowers in our leis, wristlets, and anklets. She explained that the *lehua* is the first plant to grow on a fresh lava flow, and is a symbol of our joining Ho'oulu Cambra to become Māiki's first students to graduate with the title of *kumu hula*.

The *'ūniki* was held at the Honolulu International Concert Hall (now the Neal S. Blaisdell Concert Hall) in August 1973. This *'ūniki* was different from the first in several important ways. We did not meet on the evening prior to the public performance. No ritual food was served, although *lū'au*, *'ama'ama* (young mullet), and *hua moa* (chicken eggs)—each with symbolic meaning—were wrapped in ti leaves and roasted over hot coals on stage during the performance. The performance was much shorter in length than the *'ūniki* performance the year before, and was a part of a concert in which other hālau members—then approximately two hundred students—also performed modern hula. Although this *'ūniki* was not accompanied by as much ritual as the first, it was nonetheless significant because, at its conclusion, Māiki gave blue *kīhei* to the graduates, who were now deemed qualified to teach others what they had learned in the hālau.



From left: Keli'i Taua, Kalena Silva, Robert Cazimero, and John Kaha'i Topolinski.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ON MAIKI AND THE HULA

Ariyoshi, Rita. *Hula is Life: The Story of Hālau Hula O Maiki*. Ed. Lee Puakeala Mann. Honolulu: Maiki Aiu Building Corporation, 1998.

Kaeppler, Adrienne L. *Hula Pahu: Hawaiian Drum Dances*. Vol. 1: *Ha'a and Hula Pahu: Sacred Movements*. Bishop Museum Bulletin in Anthropology 3. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1993.

*Nānā I Na Loea Hula: Look to the Hula Resources*. Vol. 1. Photographs by Shuzo Uemoto. Ed. Wendell Silva and Alan Suemori. Honolulu: Kalihi-Palama Culture and Arts Society, 1984.

*Nānā I Na Loea Hula: Look to the Hula Resources*. Vol. 2. Photographs by Shuzo Uemoto. Ed. Han M. Itagaki and Lovina Lependu. Honolulu: Kalihi-Palama Culture and Arts Society, 1987.

Stillman, Amy Ku'uleialoha. *Sacred Hula: The Historical Hula 'Ala'apapa*. Bishop Museum Bulletin in Anthropology 8. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1998.

Tatar Elizabeth. *Hula Pahu: Hawaiian Drum Dances*. Vol. 2: *The Pahu: Sounds of Power*. Bishop Museum Bulletin in Anthropology 3. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1993.



## CONTRIBUTORS

**Coline Aiu** is Kumu Hula of Hālau Hula O Maiki.

**Karen Aiu** is Director of Hālau Hawai'i Learning Center.

**Joy Chong-Stannard** is Executive Producer and Director at Hawai'i Public Television, and Director and Coproducer of the *Biography Hawai'i: Maiki Aiu Lake* documentary.

**Craig Howes** is Director of the Center for Biographical Research, University of Hawai'i-Mānoa, and Coproducer of the *Biography Hawai'i: Maiki Aiu Lake* documentary.

**Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl** is a playwright, actor, and recipient of the Hawai'i Award for Literature, and Writer and Coproducer of the *Biography Hawai'i: Maiki Aiu Lake* documentary.

**Puakea Nogelmeier** is Assistant Professor of Hawaiian Language, University of Hawai'i-Mānoa, and Consulting Scholar for *Biography Hawai'i: Maiki Aiu Lake*.

**Kalena Silva**, member of the Papa Lehua class of Hālau Hula O Maiki, is Director of Ka Haka 'Ula Ke'elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, University of Hawai'i-Hilo, and Consulting Scholar for *Biography Hawai'i: Maiki Aiu Lake*.

## Biography Hawai'i: Documentary Lives and Public Events

*Biography Hawai'i* is a television documentary series that focuses on residents whose lives have had a lasting impact on these islands. Featuring people from different ethnic groups and walks of life, but with an emphasis on Hawaiian subjects, *Biography Hawai'i* appeals to a statewide and national audience through the informative and engaging format of visual biography. The first six subjects will be Maiki Aiu Lake, Princess Ruth Ke'elikōlani, Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole, Harriet Bouslog, Koji Ariyoshi, and Sanford B. Dole. The primary sponsoring organizations for the series are Hawai'i Public Television and the Center for Biographical Research of the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa.

*Biography Hawai'i:  
Five Lives* is brought  
to you with funding  
from the



HAWAI'I COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES

Cosponsored by the Center for Biographical Research and the King Kamehameha V Judiciary History Center, *Biography Hawai'i: Five Lives* is a related series of life history presentations featuring discussions and commentary enhanced by readings, performance, and audiovisual material. These events commemorate people from diverse backgrounds, time periods, and cultural positions who have had lasting impacts on Hawai'i's history, culture, and society. Pre-performance displays and informational guides with bibliographies complement the public events.

For more information about either program, contact the Center for Biographical Research, 1800 East-West Road, Henke Hall 325, University of Hawai'i-Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822; telephone/fax: 808 956-3774; [biograph@hawaii.edu](mailto:biograph@hawaii.edu).