

Hawai'i:

Cosmopolitan Culture at the Crossroads of the Pacific

Richard S. Kennedy with Lynn Martin

The Hawaiian Islands are at the same time one of the most isolated spots on the globe and one of the most cosmopolitan. Travel guides and most authoritative studies of Hawai'i often gloss over these critical contours of the state's landscape. While isolation is becoming a less useful term to distinguish cultural characteristics in this global village of satellite relays and facsimile communications, the geographic position of Hawai'i in the Pacific basin has shaped the history of the islands from their discovery and first settlement over 1,500 years ago up to the present day. In the past hundred and fifty years, however, the strategic location of the islands has made Hawai'i a crossroads through which the people of the world have passed. Many of these people have settled; together with the indigenous inhabitants they have formed a cosmopolitan culture as complex and rich as any in the world.

Before contact with Western powers in the late 18th century the people of these eight small islands in the vastness of the Pacific Ocean lived within the limitations of their precious land. Specific strategies had to be devised to stay alive and even flourish within such limits. The Hawaiians developed a finely tuned ecological understanding of their land and a system of conflict resolution necessary for living in close quarters. Contact with the West eventually dis-

rupted these direct relationships but this understanding has been kept alive in some of the cultural traditions of the Hawaiian people. In music and dance, the presentation of the *lei* and the reverence felt for the gift of a quilt, we can still discover a respect for the land and *aloha* for one's neighbor. Both values remain as vital expressions of the uniqueness of the state of Hawai'i.

Proverbial sayings, *'ōlelo no'eau*, learned orally and passed down from generation to generation, are important in traditional Hawaiian culture. By far the largest number of these sayings describe *aloha 'āina*, love or respect for the land. A similar concern for the land is rarely found in Western proverbs; this difference of focus is a striking indicator of the intensity of the clash of cultures that occurred once the first Europeans arrived in Hawai'i in the late 18th century.

When Captain Cook landed off the coast of Kaua'i in January of 1778 he was not aware that he had come upon one of the most isolated people on earth, inhabiting the last major island group in the Pacific to be discovered by Europeans. Speaking to the first men who paddled out to his ship he must have guessed that the inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands were closely related to the people of Tahiti he had encountered on

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Women quilt together at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. (Photo by Lynn Martin, courtesy State Foundation on Culture and the Arts Folk Arts Program)

his first two voyages in the Pacific. A century passed before the details of this kinship could be established, but by 1846 scholars were speculating on the linguistic connections between the far-flung peoples of Polynesia; eventually archeological evidence would corroborate this common ancestry.

The people who were to become Polynesians spread out from Indonesia over 5,000 years ago in the first of a series of navigational feats that populated a string of islands stretching more than 5,000 miles across the Pacific Ocean. The people who eventually became Melanesians, Micronesians and Polynesians shared highly developed navigational skills and sophisticated knowledge of currents, stars and ocean swells. Gradually moving to Tonga and Samoa around 1,500 B.C., the Polynesians of the South Pacific developed a distinct culture circumscribed by the ocean and the plants and animals that they carried with them from island to island.

It was not until approximately 100 B.C.

that another major migration of Polynesian people journeyed to islands now called the Society Islands (Tahiti) and Marquesas. From there, the first voyagers embarked on one of the most remarkable journeys in Pacific history: without benefit of navigational instruments, people from the Marquesas traveled north over 2,000 miles of open ocean to land in the Hawaiian Islands sometime around 400 A.D.

The first settlers to Hawai'i brought with them many staples of the diet and culture that distinguish Hawaiians today. On their double-hulled canoes the people of Polynesia were able to transport and preserve taro, breadfruit, coconuts, chickens, and pigs, foods which even today serve as the main components of a *lu'au* (traditional Hawaiian feast). A later migration of Tahitians arrived in Hawai'i in the 12th century and established a strongly hierarchical society that separated men from women and nobles from commoners on the basis of strict *kapu*



Chinese passengers sailed to Hawai'i in 1901 to join thousands of other sugar plantation workers from China, Japan and Portugal. (Photo courtesy Hawai'i State Archives)

(taboos). Nevertheless the society that Cook met in 1778 was one that, for reasons as yet unknown, had been isolated from contact with other Pacific Island cultures for nearly 500 years. The legacy of this isolation was to affect the Hawaiian people during the subsequent decades of immigration and conquest.

Hawaiians today may appear to be more acculturated, and perhaps less concerned with their origins than their Polynesian neighbors to the South, but this implies no inherent weakness in Hawaiian culture. In fact, Hawaiian cultural accommodation over the years can be attributed to the strategic position of the islands in the center of the Pacific and their colonization by European and American powers. The European and American economic invasion of Hawai'i during the first century after contact was unparalleled in the Pacific. During a century of ocean travel, exploration, trade and tourism the most isolated spot on the globe became a popular port of call precisely because the islands were the only landfall within 2,500 miles. Diseases common among Westerners but not among Pacific Islanders reduced a population of more than 250,000 to fewer

than 40,000 by the end of the 19th century. By 1883, a hundred years after Cook's arrival and after the importation of thousands of plantation laborers, the Hawaiians had become a minority in their own land.

It is critical to try to understand how Hawaiians dealt with this massive dislocation. What were the strategies of survival that enabled Hawaiian culture to endure two centuries of contact with outsiders? What are the elements of that tradition that remain and flourish in spite of economic and technological forces far greater than any other Pacific people had encountered?

Aloha 'āina is not a romantic concept arising out of a need to reestablish roots in the soil; it is, rather, an ecological necessity born of people who had no choice but to accommodate themselves to the islands that became their home. Hawaiians had to know and respect the possibilities and limits of their land in order to live. The 6,425 square miles of volcanically formed land could sustain them but would never provide them with space for extensive growth. The traditional *ahupua'a* system of land division developed among the Hawaiians is a careful demarkation of the precious land based on a precise understanding of its ecology. This system took into account the potential of the land to produce food, clothing and shelter and of the sea to provide fish. Except for volcanic activity, the Hawaiian landscape changed little during the 500 years before the arrival of Cook. The ecological change that occurred over the subsequent years has been massive.

Any visitor to Hawai'i today who ventures beyond the confines of Waikiki will recognize the strong identification with the land that pervades the music, dance and crafts of Hawaiians. Even the music heard in Waikiki bears this trademark: its lyrics make constant reference to place. This attachment to place and to home is a quality of many traditional societies, but the degree to which Hawaiians place a cultural importance on origins and on land is remarkable. That this sense of place has endured throughout the century of dislocation that followed contact with non-Hawaiians is a reminder of the stability of this long-lived Polynesian society and its



Newly arrived Japanese workers pose with Portuguese *lunas* (overseers) and housing in the background. (Photo courtesy Hawai'i State Archives)

culture. The continuing focus on *aloha 'āina* in contemporary Hawaiian music takes on a particular poignancy considering how little land remains in Hawaiian hands.

Āpuka 'Āina: The Desire for Land

Captain Cook arrived in Hawai'i in the vanguard of a world-wide economic revolution that soon encompassed and eventually dominated these strategic islands. The opening of the western coast of the Americas to trade with Asia and the interest that Europe and the United States took in the products and markets of these new lands set the scene for an inevitable confrontation between European and Polynesian values. The first of many waves of visitors to the islands included whalers and merchants who treated Hawai'i as a rest and relaxation stop as well as their refueling depot. Hawaiians had little resistance to diseases borne by the visitors or to the technologies of the Industrial Revolution. Some retreated but many embraced the newcomers wholeheartedly.

Other visitors came to Hawai'i, too, in the early 19th century. Unlike whalers who for the most part remained in the port towns, Christian missionaries who arrived in 1820 from New England stepped more deeply and much more profoundly into Hawaiian society. Within decades many Hawaiians had converted to the new religion. Many

early apostles of the New England churches lived simply and worked for the gradual but inevitable acculturation of the Hawaiian people into the world community. Certainly they were the first to introduce Hawaiians to European medicine, education and technology. While this introduction did enable tremendous economic development for the kingdom in the 19th century, it also served to destroy many of the indigenous systems that provided a cultural identity for the Hawaiian people.

The early 19th century American world view was that of an unsure power only recently independent. The spirit of manifest destiny and conquest was newly found and the country had little experience with cultural compromise. Within decades dance, music, religion, and even the clothes and buildings of Hawaiians were for the most part condemned, dismissed and gradually replaced with creations of rural 19th century New England. The *bula*, for example, was deemed licentious and banned. The worship of the Hawaiian gods was condemned outright. Clothes made of bark cloth (*kapa*) and houses made from local grasses were eventually displaced by Victorian dress and frame houses. Chants, too, were dismissed as pagan and replaced by *hīmeni* (hymn) singing. Such transformation occurred within decades.

Hole Hole Bushi

*Kane wa kachiken
Wasba horeboreyo
Ase to namidano
Tomokasegi*

My husband cuts the cane stalks
And I trim the leaves
With sweat and tears we both work
For our means

*Kaeranu mono wa
Ikkai Nikai de
Sue wa Hawai'i de
Poi no koe*

Those who came on First and Second ships
And still don't go back home to Japan
Will become fertilizer at the end
For the poi plants

*"Okure koure" wa
kuni kara tegami
Nan de okurayo
Kono zama de*

"Send us money, send us money!"
Is the usual note from home
But how can I do it
In this plight?

*Ryoko-menjo no
Uragaki mita ga
Mabu o suruna to
Kaicha nai*

Though I checked what's written
On my passport
It doesn't say a word that I can't have
A secret lover

Hole Hole Bushi were short songs sung by immigrant Japanese laborers in the fields. In the songs the workers spoke of the conditions of plantation life, often incorporating Japanese, Hawaiian and English words. From Dorothy Ochiai Hazama and Jane Okamoto Komeiji, *Okage Same De: The Japanese in Hawai'i*, (Honolulu: Bess, 1986) p. 38.

Inside the frame house, however, there remained a different attitude toward the things introduced from the outside, an attitude grounded in Hawaiian values. Hawaiian quilts provide one example of the process of cultural adaptation that has continued over the past 150 years. Missionary women included homemaking skills in the education of Hawaiian women; some such as quilting corresponded to long-standing indigenous practices. For centuries, the Hawaiians had made bed covers that consisted of layers of pounded mulberry bark (*kapa*) stitched together and printed with dyed patterns on the top layer. It is unclear when the first distinctly Hawaiian patterns appeared on quilts but their unique and explosively bright designs are unmistakable today. More important, however, is the sentiment that accompanies the quilt, reflecting a heritage that does not originate in New England. For example, quilt patterns are sometimes said to come to the quilter in dreams and the

power of these designs is said to reflect the spirit of the craftsperson. A pattern is named and the meaning of that name often remains the secret of the quilter.

In Hawaiian tradition, the quilt is not left on the bed but is stored until needed, much like the *kapa* covers produced earlier. So, too, one would not sit upon a quilt. As National Heritage Fellow Meali'i Kalama has said, "Many people feel having a quilt is a wonderful thing. It is so. Sometimes people just put it on the bed and climb on the bed. We never do that in a Hawaiian home. We never sit on our quilts and so if you ever receive a quilt you take good care of it. It is a rare gift." This attitude remains a part of the identity of many Hawaiians. But there was more than identity at stake in the fragile ecology of these Pacific islands.

Ho'ololi 'Āina: Transformation of the Land

Two economic institutions crucial to the

development of the multi-ethnic society of today were established in Hawai'i in the early 19th century. In order to tame the cattle that had been a gift to King Kamehameha from George Vancouver, Spanish *vaqueros* were brought from Mexico in the 1830s to work on the first Hawaiian ranches. Eventually a ranching industry would develop throughout the islands to feed the growing population and eventually to export beef to the mainland. The clearing of forests necessary for this industry radically altered the upland ecology of Hawai'i. More profound changes to the fabric of the islands, however, came with the development of the sugar cane industry, commencing on Kaua'i in 1835.

At first Hawaiians were employed on plantations to plant and harvest the cane. As disease decimated the Hawaiian population and the labor supply was found to be inadequate for the thriving industry, other sources of labor were considered by the plantation owners. The first new source of labor, the Chinese, arrived in Hawai'i in the 1850s. They joined a small community of Chinese who had come to Hawai'i earlier to make their fortunes as merchants. This first group of Chinese entrepreneurs was already an integral part of the growing Hawaiian economy of the early 19th century. In fact, it is said that the first sugar cane processing was probably done by Wong Tze Chun on Lana'i in 1802. By 1880, 85% of Hawaii's restaurant licenses were in the hands of Chinese businessmen. Much larger numbers of Chinese arrived in Hawai'i in the 1870s, especially with the expansion of the sugar industry that followed the lifting of American tariffs on Hawaiian sugar in 1876.

1876 was a pivotal year in Hawaiian-American relations. For Americans it marked the centennial of their revolution but for Hawaiians it represented the beginning of a very different economic, social and political revolution. Plantations would irreparably alter the natural and human landscape of Hawai'i and some planters themselves would eventually work to depose the Hawaiian monarch. Over the next decade, King David Kalākaua would live in splendor supported by taxes levied on some of the

massive profits made in the sugar trade. Within two years of his death in 1891 his family's rule was over. In 1881, however, while his elaborate palace 'Iolani was being built, Kalakaua became the first monarch to circumnavigate the globe, ostensibly in search of laborers for the new plantations that were being established across his kingdom. He brought back treasures for his new palace as well as a few agreements regarding the immigration of plantation laborers. The Chinese who had been brought to Hawai'i over several decades were joined by several boat loads of Portuguese from the Azores and Madeira, who were hired in part to work as *lunas* or overseers for the Asian laborers.

The planters, looking for new sources of labor and ever afraid of labor unrest, decided to bring in large numbers of Japanese workers in the 1880s. By the time the United States had annexed the islands in 1898, Japanese represented the largest segment of the islands' population. Annexation not only continued to alter the political and economic structure of the islands but also served to diversify further the social fabric by facilitating immigration from other areas. For example, Puerto Ricans beginning in 1900 and Filipinos beginning in 1907 joined the ranks of plantation workers who had been enticed to Hawai'i by scouts who traveled to these two other new American territories, luring workers with the promise of higher wages. Spaniards, Okinawans and Koreans also came in this last wave of imported labor and joined a work force that had become as complex as was the late 19th century industrial force on the east coast of the United States.

For nearly a century sugar was the major industry and economic force in the islands. In fact, until the end of World War II, the sugar plantation and later the pineapple plantation remained the central economic and social institutions that defined and molded the history of Hawai'i. Even today a majority of people in Hawai'i can trace one or more of their ancestors to the plantations which became another source of traditional culture in Hawai'i. On the plantation Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, Puerto

Nā wai ho'i ka'ole o ke akamai he alanui i ma'a ka bele 'ia e o'u mau mākua?

Who could not help but be wise on a road that has been well traveled by my forefathers?

(said by King Kamehameha II when praised for his intelligence)

Ricans, Portuguese and others learned to co-exist and to work together, although their camps were usually separated. They brought with them what they could carry of their own respective cultures and eventually adapted it to life on the Hawaiian plantations. Though life was extremely difficult with little opportunity for enjoyment, some time was always found for relaxation. Through seasonal celebrations such as the Japanese *O-bon* or the Portuguese Feast of the Three Kings, immigrant laborers maintained an identity in spite of the harsh challenges of relocation. Such celebrations, with their dances and other festivities, continue today, marking the vitality of these former immigrant communities.

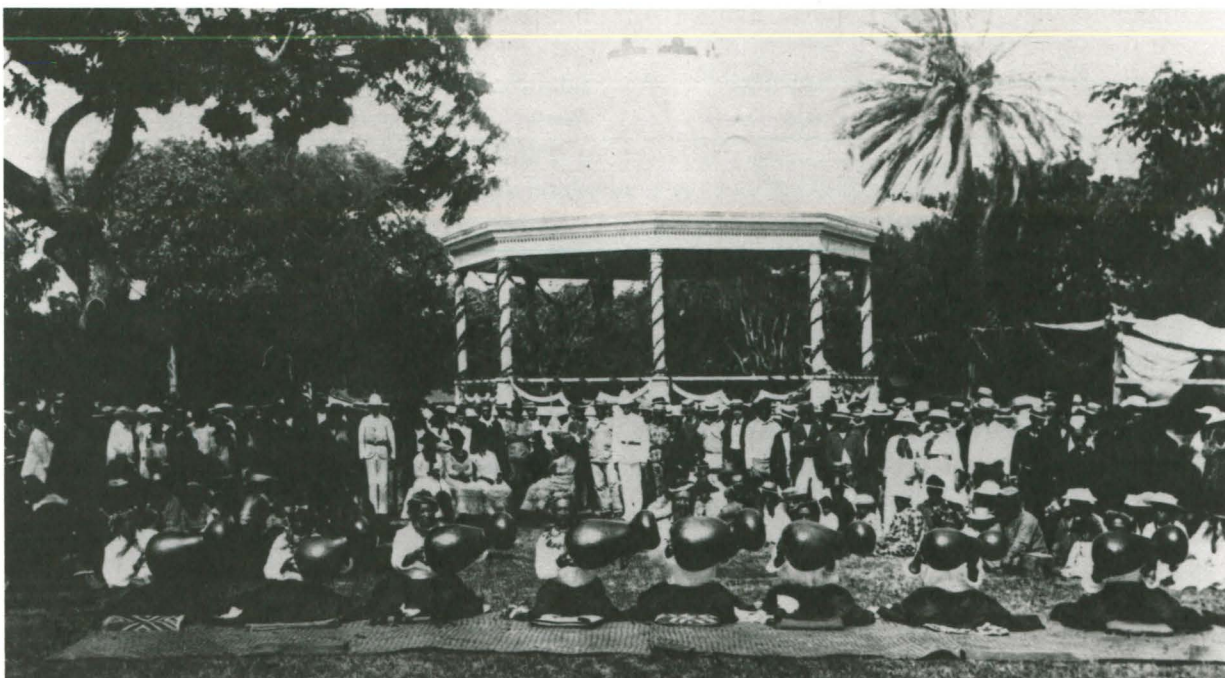
There were many differences between the experiences of workers who immigrated to Hawai'i and those who went to other parts of the United States. One obvious distinction lay in the rural nature of plantation work as compared to the industrial work required of laborers in factories of the urban Northeast. Nevertheless, the response of Hawai'i to its ethnic complexity was markedly different from that of its mainland neighbor. Not only did the rural plantation structure allow for more interaction and sharing among the different cultural and ethnic groups when compared to the urban residential ghettos of the mainland, but there was also a solidly Polynesian cultural base that still infused Hawaiian society in the 19th century. The values of this society encouraged acceptance and the warmth of spirit that is referred to as *aloha*.

The first half of the 20th century was a period during which the dozen or more ethnic groups in Hawai'i had to find a way to live together. The isolation that defined the development of early Polynesian society also limited the options of later immigrants. Return to the Azores, Puerto Rico or Southern China was difficult even in the early 20th century, so those who came as sojourners

instead became settlers. Inter-marriage between Hawaiians and these new immigrants helped change the heritage of the entire population.

Ethnic intermarriage in Hawai'i began with liaisons between Hawaiians and the first Chinese and American immigrants to the islands. Many early plantation workers were not able to bring wives and further intermarriage, especially in the 20th century, was commonplace. These marriages brought the cultures of Asia, the Pacific and Europe into intimate contact. With the migration of plantation workers to the cities and the breakdown of plantation life, people in most communities have continued to intermarry at an extraordinary rate. In recent years, in fact, it has been difficult for censuses to calculate the size of Hawaii's ethnic communities because many people have such a mixed ancestry that they are unable to select a single ethnicity. If you ask someone, whether a secretary in an office, a *laubala* hat weaver, or a construction worker, what his or her ethnicity is they will likely reply, "Well...my mom was half-Hawaiian and half-Chinese. My dad was Puerto Rican, Spanish and Irish...I'm a little bit of everything...kind of chop suey."

In the wake of this massive dislocation of people from their cultures as well as from their land, and in light of the ethnic mix that has resulted, it would seem that little would be left of Hawaiian or even Japanese or Portuguese identity in late 20th century Hawai'i. On the surface this is true. Especially since World War II and statehood in 1959, mass media, tourism (five million visitors a year) and the strategic position that Hawai'i holds in the Pacific have made it difficult for the islands to remain isolated from either mainland. However, even the casual visitor to the islands will observe that the people of Hawai'i have learned to live with each other while retaining attitudes and (especially in the past two decades) revitalizing institutions



Hula dancers perform at King Kalākaua's Jubilee *lu'au* in 1886. This public event, calculated to shock the missionary families who had condemned the dance two generations before, symbolized the King's support for Hawaiian traditions. (Photo courtesy Bishop Museum)



Hula dancers perform at the 1987 Merrie Monarch Festival held in Hilo. The festival, begun in 1964 as a tourist event, was named in honor of King Kalākaua who publically revived the art of *bula* in the 1880s. By the 1970s it had become a competitive event and focal point for the growing Hawaiian Renaissance. (Photo by Lynn Martin, courtesy State Foundation on Culture and the Arts Folk Arts Program)

and traditions that reflect their ethnic identities. At the same time, cultural borrowing in Hawai'i has been extensive and the state's rich cultural mix is a source of pride for all its citizens.

Lu'au, Lei and Plate Lunch: Local Culture in Hawai'i

Hawai'i is both geographically and culturally at the crossroads of the Pacific. In this multi-ethnic society music, crafts and food all provide important windows into the process of acculturation that has occurred in Hawai'i. The acculturated traditions that make up what people in Hawai'i refer to as "local" are the result of adaptation to ever-changing circumstances. At the same time Hawaii's ethnic communities have retained and developed their individual identities which are expressed in the vitality of their traditions.

In the two centuries since contact with Western culture native Hawaiian traditions have been subject to tremendous pressures. Some ancient artistic expressions dwindled completely, while others continued. These losses were the result of a combination of factors including the loss of a functional or ceremonial role for many goods or services. For example, wood calabashes and *kapa* cloth were supplanted by metal containers and fabric.

The loss of art forms such as *kapa*, twined basketry from the roots of the 'ie'ie plant, cordage of natural fibers, feather capes, and wooden images is heightened when one considers that the early Hawaiians had achieved a level of artistic creativity and technical craftsmanship in these areas unsurpassed in the rest of Polynesia. With impetus from the "Hawaiian Renaissance" in the 1970s a few dedicated artists are now working to revive some of the "lost arts" of Hawai'i. With little context for use within contemporary lifestyles, they are usually sold or displayed as one-of-a-kind pieces for museums, private collectors, and galleries.

The temptation to mourn the past has for the most part given way to a practical desire to accommodate, to adapt, to incorporate what is meaningful and beautiful from the many groups that came to Hawai'i during

the plantation era. Hawaiian music and dance, maritime arts, stone work, herbal healing, *lei* making, foodways, quilting, *laubala* hat weaving and coconut basketry are among those art forms that have Polynesian origins and have been affected by other cultures. Aspects of Chinese, Japanese, Okinawan, Filipino, Portuguese, Puerto Rican, Korean and Pacific Island traditions have also survived the tests of time and reflect the pride with which these groups have maintained the salient aspects of their cultural heritages. It is this amazing array of influences that gives Hawai'i its unmistakable cosmopolitan outlook, shared by every level of the community - from politicians to farmers.

The cosmopolitan nature of Hawai'i is wonderfully reflected in the *lei*, in Hawaiian music and dance, and in the food traditions of the *lu'au* and plate lunch. In these traditions, among others, the people of Hawai'i transcend biases separating ethnic groups. Together, they enjoy traditions that are suffused by the "host" culture of the native Hawaiians and are shaped by the adaptability of the islands' people.

Today, music and dance are probably the most familiar elements of Hawaiian culture and have become symbols of this identity, both nationally and internationally. Some visitors to the islands may consult their guide books and maps, seeking to explore a remote *heiau* (ancient stone platform used for religious practices); fewer still may search out a traditional herbal healer. But, most experience some form of Hawaiian music and dance, whether it be in the airport lobby, a hotel dinner show, or a special performance at the Bishop Museum. The music and dance in the Waikiki showrooms bear only a slight resemblance to their ancient past.

Prior to the mid-1800s when Christian morality, missionary style hymn singing, and Western stringed instruments were introduced, *mele* (chant) was the basic form of musical and poetic expression. The older style of *bula* is now referred to as *bula kabiko* (ancient hula) and is done to chants accompanied by various percussion instruments, usually the *pahu* (ceremonial drum)



In the early 1900s *lei* sellers await the arrival of passengers on Steamer Day. *Lei* have always been a symbol of esteem in Hawai'i. (Photo courtesy Hawai'i State Archives)



In 1989 *lei* makers sell their flowers at the Honolulu International Airport. (Photo by Lynn Martin, courtesy State Foundation on Culture and the Arts Folk Arts Program)



At the turn of the century people gather at a *lu'au* in Honaunau on the Big Island for a traditional meal focused on large calabashes of *poi*. (Photo by Alonzo Gartley, courtesy Bishop Museum)

or the *ipu beke* (double gourd).

When missionaries arrived in the mid-1800s they disapproved of the bold and what they considered “licentious” nature of the *bula* and its ties to ancient gods. Thus, they discouraged it and managed virtually to ban it from public performance for at least fifty years. Fortunately, some of Hawaii’s monarchs saw that the *bula* was integral to a Hawaiian sense of pride and identity. King David Kalākaua, often referred to as the “Merrie Monarch” because of his love of music, dance and merriment, is credited with much support for the *bula*. As a public statement, he invited dancers from around the islands to perform at his coronation in 1883 and the Jubilee Celebration of his 50th birthday in 1886.

In the late-1880s and around the turn of the century, *bula* began to evolve into what can be considered the folk dance of Hawai’i today, *bula 'auana*. The introduction of the

guitar by the Spanish-Mexican *vaqueros* (cowboys) and the *'ukulele* (developed from the Portuguese *braguinha*) dramatically affected this transition. Western melodies introduced in the form of church hymns (*bīmeni*) influenced Hawaiian *mele* to take on a more lyrical structure; these songs incorporated the new stringed instruments and provided the accompaniment for *bula 'auana*. Composers abounded, from the royal family to taro farmers, and their songs celebrated places, people and events.

Hula ku'i (*bula* that is put together) formed the bridge to the modern hula or *bula 'auana* (*bula* that wanders). *Hula 'auana* is less formal and structured in movement; the dancer interacts more with the audience, while still concentrating on telling his or her story with body, hands and song. This is the type of dance that one is likely to enjoy at a party or local bar, where a dancer might spontaneously join the



Friends gather on O'ahu for a *lu'au* to share food and listen to local music. (Photo by Norman Shapiro)

Hawaiian musicians for a dance, whether dressed in a lace-trimmed *mu'u mu'u* (long dress) or a pair of blue jeans.

From the 1920s to the 1950s Hawaiian music was affected strongly by its popularity on the mainland. Even earlier, at the turn of the century, when the first travelers came to the islands, the "tourist industry" began to employ musicians, inevitably altering the style and context of traditional music. *Hapa haole* (half Hawaiian - half English) tunes were composed that, though reflecting some aspects of the tradition, were part of a more commercialized popular expression of it. Today, a local recording industry flourishes alongside hotel entertainers, while urban and rural folk music persists in song and highlights slack-key guitar.

Hawaiian music and dance bring together people of a variety of ethnic backgrounds and ages to share in the enjoyment of good feelings for each other and their home. The

discipline and reverence that are part of the training in a *balau bula* (school for ancient *bula*) weave into the community a profound strength and cohesion. Thus, it is quite possible to hear Chinese-Hawaiian, Portuguese-English or Filipino parents proudly exclaim that their daughter danced at the Merrie Monarch *bula* competition. All communities in Hawai'i participate together in this Polynesian dance tradition.

Making and giving floral *lei* is another tradition that reflects Hawaii's cosmopolitan nature. *Lei* are known throughout Polynesia. Early Hawaiians fashioned their *lei* from durable materials such as shells, seeds, bones and feathers as well as from ephemeral materials such as leaves, ferns and flowers. The ecology of what is called "pre-contact" Hawai'i was radically different from what is seen today. Very few flowers and plants now found in the islands were growing at that time. Early Hawaiians fashioned



More than 100 descendents including six generations of relatives joined Chong Ho Loy How on her 100th birthday. Her daughter Margaret Aki, granddaughter Yuk Ching Nakashima, great-granddaughter Karlene Graylin, great-great-granddaughter Coreen Uilani Kauhi and great-great-great-grandson Justin Kauhi represent the Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiian and English heritage of their family. (Photo by Jimmy Chong)

their *lei* from plants such as the pandanus fruit, blossoms of the golden *ilima*, and leaves and outer bark of the *maile* vine. Braided, twisted or strung *lei* were often worn around the neck, head, wrist and ankle. Over the last 150 years many flowers have been introduced, including orchids, carnations, and plumeria, but the techniques of fashioning them into *lei* have remained typically Hawaiian.

In early Hawai'i the *lei* was symbolic of regard and esteem for gods, loved ones, and oneself. Thus, important life passages prompt a multitude of remarkably diverse and spectacular *lei*. Even the Hawai'i state legislature opens with representatives, senators and members of the public garlanded with thousands of *lei*. *Lei* are also given for more informal occasions—when visiting a friend, to make an apology, or to express in gesture the warmth of friendship. Regardless of the occasion, the *lei* is a symbol of a feeling and therefore it is not so important

that the *lei* last but that the moment of giving and caring be enjoyed for what it is. As *lei*-maker Marie McDonald has said about the *lei*, "Anyone who has been born or has grown up or has come to live in Hawai'i is influenced by the *lei*...It will survive any and all cultural change, for there will always be people who will enjoy and need its beauty to express regard for others and self."

Food is the substance of living and as such plays a major role in any traditional culture. Hawai'i is no exception and the delight in one another's food traditions shared by people in Hawai'i is yet another facet of cosmopolitan Hawai'i. In the feast of the *lu'au* and in the everyday "plate lunch," Hawaii's cultural and ethnic groups come together to dazzle one another's taste buds and enjoy their cultural differences.

The *lu'au* of today's Hawai'i is an outgrowth of feasting around a Hawaiian earthen pit oven - the *imu*, which is a traditional way of cooking throughout Polynesia. In pre-contact Hawai'i men and women ate separately; today the *lu'au* is a celebration that brings together the nuclear family, the extended family and often the larger "family" of the community. The word *lu'au* didn't appear until the mid-19th century and actually refers to the tops of the young taro leaves that are sometimes cooked with fish and chicken in coconut milk as one component of a Hawaiian feast. The meal that is now presented at a *lu'au* offers Hawaiian foods such as *kalua* pig (pig cooked in the *imu* and then shredded), fish, *opihiki* (raw limpets), *lu'au* stew (taro leaves, coconut milk and usually pieces of octopus or squid) and, of course, the Hawaiian staple, *poi* (a pounded custard-like starch made from cooked taro). Characteristically, there is also an amazing array of ethnic foods including chicken long rice introduced by Chinese, *sushi* by Japanese, chicken *adobo* by Filipinos, and macaroni salad by U.S. mainlanders. Other more exotic items considered to be Hawaiian include *lomi-lomi* salmon (whose origins can be traced to the whalers who came from the Pacific Northwest), *lau lau* (taro leaves wrapped around fish, pork or other meat and steamed or cooked in the *imu*), *haupia* (a coconut milk custard) and

kulolo (a taro, coconut milk and molasses dessert).

"Local" *lu'au* are huge undertakings that may feed anywhere from one to five hundred people; they are held by a family to mark an event of great importance such as a marriage, a 50th wedding anniversary, and especially the first birthday of a baby—called a "first year baby *lu'au*." This local gathering bears only slight resemblance to the *lu'au* many visitors experience as part of their hotel package. Hotel *lu'au* usually feature only a few of the traditional food items sprinkled among foods more appealing to the mainland palate and a Polynesian review floor show, more often than not made up of Tahitian *tamure* dancing and a Samoan fire dancer.

"Plate lunch" or what is sometimes called "mixed plate" is more an everyday kind of meal and also demonstrates Hawaii's cultural diversity expressed in food. Lunch wagons park on many corners, patronized by people from all walks of life. The plate usually consists of two scoops of rice, some macaroni salad and a meat or fish dish from one of Hawaii's ethnic communities. *Bento* is another popular everyday lunch and its Japanese origin does not preclude all sorts of other things appearing on the bed of rice that forms the base. Both meals represent some of the same processes of cultural adaptation as do Hawaiian music or the modern *lu'au*. The meal is a successful combination of cuisines that, much like Hawaiian culture as a whole, is inclusive in spirit.

Hawaii is a complex state that is home to an incredible array of ethnic groups and cultures. Each of these groups has maintained its unique identity and at the same time blended to create "local" traditions that are expressive of the community as a whole. However, increasing pressures from foreign investment and mass media are today further disenfranchising native Hawaiians and threatening the stability of several generations of other cultures in the islands. Hawaii's characteristic attitude of tolerance and acceptance, molded in part by centuries of isolation, may be compromised by such pressures. These attitudes and Hawaii's

fragile artistic traditions are inextricably tied together. Preserving these arts is crucial, for a community's psychic well-being is only as strong as its commitment to protecting its traditions.

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