

## THE POWER OF HULA @ LA MAMA MOVES

Posted by [mdonohue](#) on June 21, 2010 · [Leave a Comment](#)

Hula is the soul of Hawaii expressed through dance, reflecting central ideas and historic or mythic events in tales told through hand gestures, chants and/or songs. Though once a form of worship, it has survived both the Protestant missionaries who banned it in 1800s and Hollywood's ridiculous bastardization, and remains a rich, vibrant tradition. After remaining largely hidden until 1883 when King Kalakaua proclaimed hula as *"the language of the heart and therefore the heartbeat of the Hawaiian people,"* it enjoyed a resurgence that, later, struggled through the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when major tourist attractions and pop-culture depictions threatened to eradicate the form's true essence with grass skirts and coconut bras.

However, since the 1970s, Hula has enjoyed another period of growth with the instrumental help of the regal and generous Kumu Hula (master teacher), Robert Uluwehi Cazimero, who opened the touching and impressive closing program, *The Power of Hula*, in the Ellen Stewart Theater for the LaMama Moves Dance Festival. He welcomed the packed-to-the-rafters crowd with a chant and then opened the second act with a song and dance dedicated to La Mama's Co-Artistic Director and La Mama Moves Co-curator, Mia Yoo. Both Cazimero and fellow Kumu Hula Vicky Holt Takamine expressed deep gratitude for Mia's support in bringing them to LaMama. This is an impressive feat, for though we may have our first "Hawaiian" President, and it requires no passport to get there, Hawaii is a vastly different state with cultural mores highly divergent from the mainland's. While Yoo and co-curator Nicky Paraiso have worked very diligently with the festival to turn LaMama into a destination for dance in NYC, I was struck that Yoo is effectively continuing LaMama's greatest tradition of giving some of the best artists from far away shores a proper home in New York City.

The program included dynamic performances from Takamine's son and fellow Kumu Hula Jeff Kanekaiwilani Takamamine who worked both his hips and the crowd with finesse. There were several dances from the New York City based Na Lehua Melemele hui, or group, directed by Lisette Kaualea Flanary, a noted filmmaker whose *"American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawai'i"* is standard viewing in my Dance and Culture classes. Keo Woolford, whose one-man show *"I-Land"* blending hula, hip hop and storytelling has been presented at several venues around NYC performed a few delightful dances, including the witty *"Tewe Tewe"* that used the o'opu or goby fish as a metaphor for lovemaking.

Rules regarding the study and performance of hula dance can be very strict and students of a halau hula (hula school) are required to respect them. So, the study of hula outside of Hawaii can be difficult and teachers hard to find. Somehow, though, Vicky Holt Takamine has managed to offer a New York version of her Pua Ali'i 'Ilima and after mentioning that they had spent the previous day chanting, singing and dancing beside Ellen Stewart's bed for her, brought out a company of local dancers, led in song by the lovely Marina Celandier, that included LaMama's marketing director, Kiku Sakai and Ford Foundation Program Officer/Director/Dramaturg extraordinaire, Roberta Uno. This unexpected surprise, as well as Flanary's diverse group of practitioners, was an inspiration that led me to visions of a movement pursuit that can easily endure for decades.



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