Na Makua Mahalo ia. Mormon Influences on Hawaiian Music and Dance

by Richard Stagner

When the Na Makua Mahalo ia awards were first envisioned, it was intended that their scope would remain limited to basically LDS people who had distinguished themselves in the performing arts. For various reasons it has not been possible to retain this earlier restricted focus of the awards. As a result, even though recipients tend to be mainly drawn from LDS ranks, church membership is not the prime criterion for selection. Rather, recipients are judged on the depth and quality of the contributions they have made to the Hawaiian Cultural Community. An examination of the two sets of recipients might better illustrate the criteria of the awards.

Na Makua Mahalo ia, I, March 20, 1980:

Bill Alilioa Isaacson, born in Kohala, Hawaii, to a long-time Hawaiian family; falsetto singer, hula instructor, composer, and still active performer. His hula troupes helped to raise money for the building of the Honolulu Tabernacle, and performed at the dedication of the Church College of Hawaii in 1958.

Jolani Lushine: dancer, chanter, teacher and popular exponent of the ancient hula forms, although she was also a great comic hula dancer. Her family, the Makaua clan, are still very active in the church and she remained friendly and supportive of the church all her life. She died in November 1978.

Alvin Kaleolani Isaacs: a prolific composer of Hawaiian music, including hulas, songs, chants and comic hulas. He has also written serious music such as anthems, hymns, movie scores and cantatas. His children and grandchildren continue to carry on his musical traditions. Additionally, he has been very active as a Church member, having served in a number of church positions including his stake high council.

Edith Kanakaole: chanter, musician, kumu hula, author, translator, composer and dancer. Winner of the two Na Koku Hanohano awards, the State of Hawaii Order of Distinction, the 1979 Brigham Young University - Hawaii Campus Distinguished Service Award, and the Order of Ke Alii Pauahi from the Kamehameha Schools. Traditional LDS funeral services were held for her in September, 1979.

John Kanaloa Almeida: called the "Dean of Hawaiian Composers" for his thousands of Hawaiian compositions, although he is pure Portuguese. Many of his songs are now classics, probably the most popular being "Iesu Me Ke Kekanaka Waialii." He has been blind since the age of ten, but was very helpful in raising money for the Church through luaus and hula shows throughout the 1930's and 1940's. He is presently eighty-six years old.

Alice Namakelua: Auntie is 90 years young and is remarkably spry and active. In her days she was a singer, dancer, translator, composer, lecturer, genealogist and slack-key guitar artist. She had a best-selling album when she was eighty-two years old, and still attends church functions as best as she can. She studied Hawaiian music for a period of time under the tutelage of Hawaii's last Queen, Liliuokalani.

Dr. Mary Kawena Pukulia: author, historian, lexicographer, lecturer, hula and chant instructor, genealogist, lyricist, composer, and dancer. She holds two honorary doctorates, and has received numerous awards throughout the state. In 1981 she was nominated for the Nobel prize in Literature. Her two kanai daughters, Pat and Pete, were great kumu hula in their own right. Kawena is presently in Honolulu Convalescent Home. Her husband, Napoleon, was raised in Loeapa, the Hawaiian community in Utah, and she was married by Judge Abraham Fernandes, the man who baptized Liliuokalani.

The 1982 Na Makua Mahalo ia recipients were:

Alfred Apaka, Sr.: A five-term Hawaii legislator, Brother Apaka was a very long-time fixture on the Hawaiian musical scene. His baritone voice carried the Hawaiian musical message worldwide in the 1930's and 1940's. Although now in his eighties, he still sings on occasion. His late son, Alfred, Jr., was a popular and beloved musician and singer in his own right.

Solomon Bright, Sr.: Uncle Sol is still a very spry and active septuagenarian. His family have been musicians for many years, and through Uncle Sol's presidency of the Hawaii Musician's Union, a number of Mormon musicians and singing groups got their start. His composition, "Hawaiian Cowboy," and his rendition of Liliuokalani basso profundo composition, "Wii Wi Wi Walli Walli" are considered true Hawaiian classics.
Andy Cummings: Andy Cummings can't remember a time when he hasn't been playing his ukulele and singing a song. His tenor voice has been heard worldwide, particularly through his affiliation with the airlines industry. His LDS roots go back to the old Lanakila and Wa'aloliwim wards. His composition, "Waiiki," is considered a Hawaiian classic.

Eleanor Hiram Hoke: She is probably the last of the temple-trained hula kapu dancers. Aunty Eleanor was trained at a hula helau located close to where the Kullima Hotel now stands. She was taught by her two tutu's, Keakaokala Kanahele and Luka Pele, who gave up the dance after they taught the young Eleanor. Having been raised in Lai, Aunty Eleanor still has many relatives living there.

Lena Guerrero: Aunty Lena and her family have been mainstays in the Church for years and years. She still goes to the temple whenever her health permits. Her Hawaiian music and hula traditions go way, way deep and many of her former students and protege's are now major kumu hula and performers. She was recognized by the Hawaii Legislature in 1982 for her many contributions and accomplishments.

Sarah Kaillkea: Aunty Sarah is a Lai girl who for many years lived on Kauai where she and her husband have been taking care of the Menehune Gardens in Lawiliwi. She is regarded highly among hula scholars for her knowledge of the Menehune dances of Kauai, which are among the oldest dances in the Hawaiian repertoire.

Theodore Kelsey: He is not a member of the Church, but this man has nonetheless had close dealings with church members and church families, particularly the Kakahua and Paishon families of Kauai and Nanakuli. A Hawaii-born Naole, he learned Hawaiian by talking to older Hawaiian people outside his father's store in Hilo. He later spent much time with many Hawaiian chanters such as Kukuiwaiwai Pele and others brought to the La'iai Village in Hauiki by George Mossman. In his nineties now, he is still translating and collecting old Hawaiian chants.

Sally Moonikea Wood Maluau: Aunty Sally was, for fourteen years, the Hawaiian section dance instructor at the Polynesian Cultural Center. Prior to that she had a hula studio of her own for over forty years. She was raised in Kahana Valley and had as her instructors, Lucy Logan Munson, Pua Na'aeo, Lokalia Montgomery, Keakaokala Kanahele, and

Kawena Punui. A strict disciplinarian and articulate speaker of the Hawaiian language, her style of hula is the more traditional, slow, stately and dignified form with understated body motion and movement. She and her husband, George, are now on an LDS mission in San Diego, California.

Harriet Ne: Also not a member of the Church, Aunty Harriet nevertheless has had a very close kinship with the church and its members. When people talk about the island of Molokai, the three kupuna most often mentioned are the late Aunty Mary Lee, Aunty Clara Ku, both LDS, and Aunty Harriet. Aunty Harriet was raised in the Poli'ikulu valley of Molokai where, among other things, she was taught the hula by the great hula master, Ka'oo. The dances of Poli'ikulu are known for their great mysticism and metaphysical power and Aunty Harriet, through her students, has tried to retain those forms and traditions.

Sarah Pule: A long-time very active member of the Church, Aunty Sarah has been known for her poet's gift and musician's ear. Her husband, Akoli, for many years, represented his district in the state legislature even though his community calling was that of a park custodian. Her home area of Kohala has had an influence on her community calling. She is regarded highly among hula scholars for her knowledge of the Menehune dances of Kauai, which are among the oldest dances in the Hawaiian repertoire.

Emma Kapiolani Farden Sharpe: Aunty Emma is also not a member of the LDS Church, but has performed for and in behalf of the Church and its functions for years on the island of Maui. A public school teacher, for many years, and a member of the famous Farden family of Maui singers, dancers and composers, Aunty Emma learned her hula from the kumu hula, Kuhi Lii, who came out of retirement in his seventies to teach her. She also studied with Joseph Ilia'ole and Kawena Punui.

Kau'i Zuttermeister: Aunty Kaui learned her hula from her uncle, Sam Pua Ha'aeo, who was a policeman, LDS branch president, and kumu hula. Pua Ha'aeo taught hula in his later life and only to three full-time students of which Kaui was one. Through the years, Aunty Kaui has
attempted to retain the traditions, form and style of her uncle while adding her own nuances, interpretations and touches. As a result, her dances are characterized by a smoothy flowing grace and rhythm that tends to understate the physical demands of her hula form. She has also composed a classic mele hula, "Na Pua Kā Ilima," which is included in the repertoire of all serious hula dancers. Through her daughter, Noenoe, and her granddaughter, Hauoli, her traditions continue to be perpetuated.

Thus, this review, cursory though it has been, hopefully gives further emphasis to the claim for Laili, and the Church, as being an important influence on the creation and development of Hawaiian music. We have left a number of people out, Napua Stevens Poire, Vicki Ilima Rodrigues and Genoa Keawe, for example. But then, there will be other times, and other awards. Perhaps it might be well to remember these words of Kamehameha I. "E Oni Wale Nō 'Oukou i Kuu Pono 'A'ole E Pau," (Move forward with my unfinished vision.)