



AMERICAN ALOHA

Hula Beyond Hawai'i



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SHORT SYNOPSIS

For Hawaiians, the hula is not just a dance, but a way of life. Yet while most Americans know only the stereotypes of 'grass skirt girls' from old Hollywood movies and tourist kitsch, the revival of the ancient art of hula tells of the rich history and spirituality of Hawai'i. *American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawai'i* discovers a renaissance of Hawaiian culture through music, language and dance as it continues to grow in California. Following three *kumu hula*, or master hula teachers, the film celebrates the perpetuation of a culture—from the very traditional to the contemporary—as it evolves on distant shores. With more Native Hawaiians living on the U.S. mainland than on the islands, the hula is a living tradition that connects generations far from home to their heritage. Revealing the challenges of cultural survival through the struggles of Hawai'i's past, *American Aloha* is a proud reminder of the power of reclaiming tradition for communities creating a home away from home.



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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Few American icons are as well known for their popular kitsch as the hula dance. From old Hollywood movies to entertainment for tourists, the hip swaying girls in grass skirts and colorful lei have long masked an ancient cultural tradition. Now, after years of being shadowed by stereotypes, the hula is experiencing a rebirth that celebrates Hawaiian culture as it continues to grow on distant shores. *American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawai'i* shares the stories of Hawaiians on the mainland who are challenging misconceptions to redefine the evocative storytelling art of the hula through music, language and dance.

Not long ago, the cultural landscape of Hawai'i was threatened with extinction as it struggled to survive the drastic effects of Western contact. As the population was decimated by foreign disease, many of the ancient cultural traditions were in danger of disappearing—especially the hula. Denounced as a 'heathen' practice with the arrival of American missionaries, the hula was soon outlawed and went underground for generations. Hawaiians were discouraged from being proud of their ancestry and soon even the language was banned. Nearly lost after decades of assimilation following the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom, the hula dance emerged as a symbol of fierce ethnic pride during the Hawaiian renaissance that swept the islands in the 1970's.

American Aloha shows the survival of the hula as a renaissance continues to grow beyond the islands. With the cost of living in Hawai'i estimated at 27% higher than the continental United States, large numbers of Hawaiians have left to pursue professional and educational opportunities. Today, with more Native Hawaiians living on the U.S. mainland than on the islands, the hula has traveled with them. From the suburbs of Los Angeles to the San Francisco Bay Area, the largest Hawaiian communities have settled in California and the hula remains an important connection to their home and heritage.

Sounding a universal note of cultural renewal and adaptation, *American Aloha* takes us on a journey through the practices and philosophies of some of the masters at the forefront of reclaiming the artistry and meaning of traditional hula. Focusing on the work of three *kumu hula*, or master hula teachers, the film explores hula as a way of life—even for those who no longer live on the islands. From the traditional to the contemporary, the three teachers represent very different—and sometimes controversial—approaches to preserving the integrity of the ancient hula while carrying the art form into the future.

The film features *kumu hula* Sissy Kaio, Mark Ho'omalulu, and Patrick Makuakane who have been teaching hula in California for over twenty years. From Sissy's traditional dancing, to Mark's cutting-edge music, and Patrick's innovative choreography, the *kumu hula* struggle to perpetuate Hawaiian culture for future generations. With a growing number of *hula halau*, or schools of dance, across America and even abroad, *American Aloha* reveals the power of reclaiming tradition for communities creating a home away from home.



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FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES



LISETTE MARIE FLANARY is a writer, filmmaker, and hula dancer based in New York City. She has produced numerous independent films in the US and internationally including the Student Academy Award-winning 35mm short, *Homeland*, shot on location in El Salvador. Her credits also include writing and directing her own short film,

KILL KIMONO, which toured in Asian American film festivals around the country. Lisette, whose mother is from Hawai'i and spent many summers on the islands while growing up, is a hula dancer and board member of the Hawai'i Cultural Foundation. After receiving her BFA in film and television from New York University in 1995, she co-founded bluestocking films, inc. and also taught screenwriting. In 2000, she earned her masters degree in creative writing at New School University. Lisette is currently developing a film about legendary Hawaiian entertainer and kumu hula, Robert Cazimero.



EVANN SIEBENS specializes in making films about dance. A former dancer with the National Ballet of Canada and the Bonn Ballet in Germany, Evann has filmed dancers such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Bill T. Jones, and Lucinda Childs. Evann is a graduate of New York University and co-founder of bluestocking films, inc. She has

been the videographer for numerous documentaries on dance including 'State of Darkness' and 'From the Horses Mouth'. Her short films, *POTHEAD* and *do not call it fixity...* have screened at film festivals and on arts networks worldwide. Evann co-directed 'The Breach', a dance film series for DV Republic, and was commissioned to direct a documentary on the José Limón Dance Company in 2000. She recently completed a net.dance project entitled *PORTAL* and a dance media installation with Ballet Frankfurt in Germany.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS

For Hawaiians, the hula is not just a dance, but a way of life. *American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawai'i* takes a look beyond popular stereotypes to discover a renaissance of Hawaiian culture as it continues in California. Following three master hula teachers, the film celebrates the perpetuation of a culture—from the traditional to the contemporary—as it evolves on distant shores.



Co-Directors and Co-Producers of bluestocking films.
Left: Evann Siebens; right: Lisette Marie Flanary.



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PRODUCTION NOTES

American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawai'i brought first time feature directors Lisette Marie Flanary and Evann Siebens together in a unique collaboration that began when they created the production company bluestocking films in 1998. Combining Evann's expertise in making films about dance and Lisette's cultural connection to Hawai'i, the team began a journey documenting the Hawaiian community in California that took over five years to complete. The result is a film that explores a cultural community and yet also brings the beauty of dance to the forefront—a true hybrid.

This is the first documentary to give a voice to the large and vibrant community of Hawaiians living on the mainland. *American Aloha* is a strong testament to the growing sense of empowerment felt by the Hawaiian community on the mainland that has often been judged by the islander community as 'second-rate' or 'not as authentic'. This film will not only inspire a deeper understanding of Hawaiian culture for a wide audience, but will also speak to numerous communities who are trying to maintain their traditions far from home.

Filmmaker's Statement from Evann Siebens



"As a professional dancer who had no ties to Hawai'i, my initial interest was in the beauty of the dance. Impressed by the lyrical movement coupled with the rigor and structure of a unified group, I wanted to visually capture the poetic grace of the hula. I was also intrigued by the concept of telling stories through dance by 'talking' with one's hands. Yet the main attraction for me was the concept of dance as the catalyst for a community. This was the first time I had come across a group of people—men and women, young and old, from many different cultural backgrounds—who were brought together through dance. The openness of the Hawaiian community allowed me not only to feel embraced, but to experience dance as a metaphor for culture in a way that I didn't in my community while growing up. This film is the result of a lot of hard work, dedication, eating, dancing, playing music and just 'talking story'. It's for people who are Hawaiian-at-heart wherever they live."

Filmmaker's Statement from Lisette Marie Flanary



"Every time someone asks me if I wear a grass skirt and a coconut bra to dance the hula, I feel as though I might spontaneously combust. As a hula dancer, it's frustrating to continually be confronted with popular misconceptions and one of the main reasons I wanted to make this film was to bash the stereotypes that are ingrained in our culture by the media. Being born and raised on the mainland, I also felt this common bond with the community and the stories that they shared with us. While I have always felt a strong connection to Hawaiian culture because of the time I spent there while growing up, I also felt that I was an outsider—even though my mother is from Hawai'i. Through making this film, I began to dance hula in New York City and realized that you don't need to be in Hawai'i to dance the hula. Culture isn't *where* you are, but *who* you are. The hula really opened a door to my own cultural identity and allowed me to reconnect with my heritage in a way that I had never explored before."

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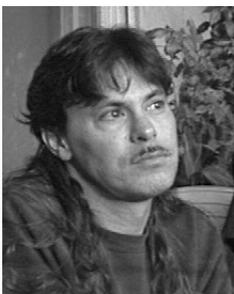
Hula Beyond Hawai'i

CAST BIOGRAPHIES



Sissy Kaio is the kumu hula of Hula Hālau 'O Lilinoe Nā Pua Me Ke Aloha based in Carson, California. Having taught hula on the mainland for over 20 years, Sissy focuses on the *hula kāhiko*, or ancient traditions of hula in Hawai'i. She has served not only as a teacher, but as a parent to a hula family that includes over a hundred men,

women and children ranging in age from 4 to 75. Sissy began to dance at the age of 16 and learned from her mother and great aunt, Mary Kawena Pukui, a noted Hawaiian historian who translated many of the old chants and wrote the first Hawaiian-English dictionary. She continued her studies with two highly respected kumu hula: Uncle George Na'ope, founder of the Merrie Monarch Festival and her aunt Pat Bacon, daughter of Mary Pukui. In recent years, the hālau has performed in such venues as the Getty Museum, the World Sacred Music Festival in Los Angeles, the National Folk Arts Festival in Maine, and the Merrie Monarch Festival in Hilo, Hawai'i. Her halau has won many awards at various competitions and she was recently the recipient of the Durfee Artist Award given to support the work of artists based in Los Angeles.



Mark Keali'i Ho'omalulu is the kumu hula of the Academy of Hawaiian Arts, a newly founded hālau that opened in 2002 in Oakland, California. Continuing to push the boundaries of the art form, Mark's cutting-edge style of Hawaiian chant and fresh approach to hula have brought him international acclaim. Born and raised in Aiea,

Oahu, Mark began dancing at 15 with kumu hula John Pi'ilani Watkins doing various shows around the island. In 1976 he joined a new hālau, Waimāpuna, that would give him his hula foundation under the direction of kumu hula Darrell Lupenui, Thaddius Wilson, O'Brien Eselu, and John Ka'imikaua. Ten years after he moved to California, Mark took over the directorship of Nā Mele Hula 'Ohana in 1988. The halau would go on to set high standards in hula competitions along the West

Coast and in Hawai'i where the men placed fourth at the prestigious Merrie Monarch Festival in 1998. Most recently his vocal skills have been showcased on his first CD, 'Po'okela Chants', on the soundtrack of the Disney animated feature film, *Lilo & Stitch*, and on his new recording album entitled 'Call It What You Like'. As a designer of many traditional hula instruments and as a chanter and choreographer, Mark has established himself as a talented artist of immeasurable passion for the hula.



Patrick Makuakāne is the kumu hula and director of Nā Lei Hula I Ka Wēkiu based in San Francisco. Well known as a creative force in the hula world for his innovative choreography, Patrick brings hula to a new level with theatrical performances that blend the traditional and contemporary forms of hula into a unique style called the 'hula mua', or

'hula for the future'. Incorporating traditional hula movements with non-Hawaiian music, Patrick's work shows that the hula is a living and evolving art form. Born and raised in Honolulu, Hawai'i, Patrick began dancing at age 13 and eventually danced professionally as a principal dancer with Nā Kamalei, the premier male hula dance troupe in Hawai'i under kumu hula Robert Cazimero. He performed throughout the islands and for national audiences on Good Morning America in 1983, Carnegie Hall in 1991, and the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City in 1992. Patrick received a 'Profiles of Excellence' Award from KGO-TV in 1998 and the 'Local Hero of the Year' Award from KQED-TV in 2001 for his outstanding work in the Asian/Pacific Islander community in the San Francisco Bay Area. He was also presented an Isadora Duncan Dance Award in 1999 which recognizes excellence among Bay Area dance organizations. In 2000, Patrick was awarded the prestigious two-year Irvine Fellowship in Dance that acknowledges his outstanding accomplishments in choreography and supports his artistic development by allowing him to continue his studies in Hawai'i with kumu hula Auntie Mae Kamamalu Klein.



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CAST AND CREW LIST

Sissy Kaio

And the dancers of
Hula Hālau 'O Lilinoe

Mark Keali'i Ho'omalua

And the dancers of
Nā Mele Hula 'Ohana

Patrick Makuakāne

And the dancers of
Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu



Director/Co-Producer

Evann Siebens

Producer/Co-Director/Writer

Lisette Marie Flanary

Production Company
bluestocking films, inc.

Editor
Dena Mermelstein

Contributing Editor
Linda Hattendorf

Additional Editing
Sarah Andrew
Mathieu Borysevich

Videographer
Mark Eby

Contributing Videographer
Kevin Cunningham

Additional Videography
John Bishop
Evann Siebens
Ryan Williams

Still Photography
Mark Eby

Sound Recording
Matty Nematollahi
John Solomon

Research Consultant
Dr. Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman

Credit Design
Omnivore, Inc.

Title Animation
Todd Akita

Publicity Photography
Tom LeGoff

On-Line
The Tape House NY

Sound Mix
Caterini Studios

Music Supervision
The Music Bridge/David Powell

Editing Facility
Downtown Avid
Chop Shop Pictures

Dub House
Hello World Communications

Post-Production Co-ordinator
Hazel Gurland

Post-Production Intern
Esmé Shigeko

Fiscal Sponsor
Women Make Movies

Archival Hollywood Footage
Getty Images

**Archival Photographs and
Proverb Footage**
The Bishop Museum
DeSoto Brown/Ron Schaeffer

Ka Po'e Hula Hawai'i Kāhiko
By Vivienne Mader (Huapala)
'Iolani Luahine
By Tip Davis

Archival Competition Footage
Used with permission from KITV-4

The Merrie Monarch Hula Festival
Darrell Lupenui and the Men of
Waimāpuna

*King Kamehameha Hula
and Chant Competition*
Robert Cazimero
and Hālau Nā Kamalei

**Mahalo to all of the
kumu hula and music artists
who shared their chants
and songs.**

(See Music List in order
of appearance)

**Mahalo to the following kumu
hula and their hālau who
participated in the making of
this film:**

Kunewa Mook
Keali'i Ceballos
Renee Ku'uleinani Price
Naomi Kalama
Kui Marte
Michael Yamashita
and Moku Yoshikawa

Mahalo to everyone at:

Nā Mamo and E Hula Mau Competition

Ho'olaulea at Alondro Park

Aloha Festival in San Francisco

The Hawai'i Cultural Foundation
Janu Cassidy and Michelle Akina

**In-kind donation
of equipment and services:**

Judy Mitoma and the
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at UCLA

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P.O.V. /American Documentary, Inc.

The Independent Television Service
(ITVS)

Pacific Islanders in Communications
(PIC)

Executive Producer for P.O.V.
Cara Mertes

Executive Producer for ITVS
Sally Jo Fifer

Executive Director for PIC
Carlyn Tani

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NIPAD
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PRESERVE AMERICA'S DANCE
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NEA
The National Endowment for the Arts

NYSCA
The New York State Council for
the Arts

The Wallace Alexander Gerbode
Foundation

The Muriel McBrien Kaufmann
Foundation

The Mary Duke Biddle Foundation

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CONTACT AND TECHNICAL INFORMATION

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New York, NY 10003
USA
TEL / FAX (212) 505-6676

Contact Person:
Lisette Marie Flanary

For downloadable
production stills and
director's photos:

[http://www.omnivorous.org/
Bluestocking/](http://www.omnivorous.org/Bluestocking/)

For more information
on the public television
broadcast or to visit
our website:

[http://www.pbs.org/pov/
pov2003/americanaloha/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2003/americanaloha/)

Technical Specs

CATEGORY
Documentary Feature

RUNNING TIME
55 minutes

ORIGINAL SHOOTING FORMAT
Beta SP

SCREENING FORMAT
Digi-Beta or Beta SP (NTSC)

ASPECT RATIO
1.33

COLOR
Color with B/W

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE
English

SOUND
Stereo

COMPLETION DATE
March 2003

ESTIMATED BUDGET
\$300,000

BROADCAST SCHEDULE

**PBS NATIONAL BROADCAST PREMIERE
ON THE P.O.V. SERIES**

**August 5, 2003
at 10:00 pm (check local listings)**



FESTIVAL HISTORY AND AWARDS

**ASIAN CINEVISION'S ASIAN AMERICAN
INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**

**June 20–29, 2003
at Asia Society, New York**

MAUI FILM FESTIVAL

**June 11–15, 2003
at the Maui Arts and Cultural Center**

**PACIFIKA: THE NEW YORK
HAWAIIAN FILM FESTIVAL**

**May 16–18, 2003
at NYU Graduate Film and Television Institute**

**VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS
LOS ANGELES ASIAN PACIFIC FILM
AND VIDEO FESTIVAL**

**May 1–8, 2003
at the Director's Guild of America, Los Angeles**

DANCE SCREEN FESTIVAL 2002

**December 10–14, 2002
at Monaco Dance Forum**

NOMINATED FOR BEST DANCE DOCUMENTARY