

## **BIOGRAPHY**

### **KUMU HULA MARK KEALI'I HO'OMALU**

In perpetuating Hawaiian culture, Mark Keali'i Ho'omalua defines, through choreography and music, what it means for him to be Hawaiian today. A consummate artist, Kumu Hula Mark Keali'i Ho'omalua cannot leave tradition alone. He explains, "If you don't progress, you will lose the future." It is not without controversy that Ho'omalua fearlessly extends the limits of his chosen Hawaiian art forms.

With his 1999 debut recording, *Po'okela Chants*, Ho'omalua's melodic chant style and mesmerizing rhythms obscure the boundaries between traditional and popular Hawaiian music. While well-known as an innovator in the world of hula, Ho'omalua's endeavor to evolve the traditional mele (chant) brought him immediate attention in the world of Hawaiian music. The controversial move earned him both praise and criticism from every circle. Called "inventive" and "unrestrained," Ho'omalua's debut album would invigorate the discussion about the possibilities of Hawaiian music and what it means to perpetuate traditional Hawaiian art forms in a modern world.

Ho'omalua's distinctive style captured the attention of the producers of **Walt Disney Pictures**. In 2001, Ho'omalua was cast as the voice of Hawai'i for Disney's feature film *Lilo and Stitch*. Ho'omalua and Alan Silvestri (*Forrest Gump*, *Back to the Future*) co-wrote "Hawaiian Rollercoaster Ride" and "He Mele No Lilo" (opening theme) for the Academy-Award nominated film and soundtrack. Ho'omalua performed the featured songs accompanied by The Kamehameha Schools Children's Chorus. The performance earned him an ANNIE Award nomination for *Music in an Animated Featured Film* and an APEX Award nomination for Best Original Song ("Hawaiian Rollercoaster Ride"). Children around the world now recognize Kumu Ho'omalua as the instructor of their hula lesson on the *Lilo and Stitch* DVD.

Bold and sometimes brash, Mark Keali'i Ho'omalua's recordings of Hawaiian traditional music appeal to an ever-expanding audience. His much anticipated second release, *Call It What You Like*, not only topped charts in Hawai'i upon its release, but also placed high on the **Billboard World Music Chart** for several weeks in 2003.

If Ho'omalua's impact on Hawaiian music is impressive as a relative newcomer to the recording industry, his impact on the world of dance is equally so. In his 20-year career as a kumu hula in California, Ho'omalua's halaus repeatedly take home honors in the major hula competitions on the West Coast and are among a select few halaus based in the mainland U.S. invited to compete in the annual Merrie Monarch Hula Competition in Hilo, Hawai'i. Ho'omalua was one of three California kumu hula that filmmaker Lisette Marie Flanary chose to highlight in the PBS "Point of View" documentary, *American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawai'i*. In interviews with Ho'omalua, Flanary explores how the practice of hula sustains the connection of Hawaiians living on the mainland to their island heritage. Ho'omalua's goal to have "someplace for Hawaiians to go, to feel easy, to not feel abandoned" keeps him dedicated to making his greatest impact on the lives of dancers in his California halau.

Born and raised in Aiea, O'ahu, Mark Keali'i Ho'omalua began his hula career over thirty years ago. His first professional experience, at the age of 15, was at lavish lu'au and Polynesian productions staged by famous composer and kumu hula John Pi'ilani Watkins. Until this time in Hawaiian-American history, hula had been dominated by women dancing the popular, gentle 'auana (modern) style accompanied by western musical instruments.

However, Ho'omalua came of age at the time when many Hawaiians began their movements for sovereignty, and pride abounded with the sailing of the *Hokule'a* (outrigger canoe sail across the Pacific using only traditional navigation techniques). For Ho'omalua and other Hawaiians, this was a time of publicly revitalized Hawaiian identity, culture, spirit and voice. Renowned kumu hula Darrell 'Ihi'ihilauakea Lupenui, Thaddius Wilson, O'Brian Eselu and John Ka'imikaua, returned to the ancient Hawaiian chants as the source that guided their movements in hula. Ho'omalua joined their new halau, *Waimapua*, in 1976, immersing himself in its vigorous, warrior style. This masculine approach revived interest in hula by male dancers and for some, discredited the stereotype that male dancers had previously endured. From this auspicious experience with *Waimapua* evolved the foundation for Mark Ho'omalua's hula education as an 'olapa (dancer) and ho'opa'a (chanter).

In 1979, Mark Ho'omalua moved to California to teach hula with Tiare Clifford of *Tiare Otea* in San Francisco. After refining much of his teaching technique under Clifford's direction, he was introduced to Bea and Herb Hew Len. In 1988, the Lens turned over the directorship of their halau, Na Mele Hula 'Ohana, to Ho'omalua. Driven by Ho'omalua's distinct style of Kupaianahula (firm style), Na Mele Hula 'Ohana set high standards in hula competitions along the West Coast and in Hawai'i. At the prestigious Merrie Monarch Hula Competition in 1998, the halau's men placed fourth in the *Hula Kahiko* (ancient hula) category. They returned to the Merrie Monarch each year through 2000. Ho'omalua retired from Na Mele Hula 'Ohana in early 2002.

In 2003, Mark Keali'i Ho'omalua began anew by founding the 501(c)3 non-profit organization, *Academy of Hawaiian Arts* in Oakland, California. The mission of the organization is to offer instruction in the cultural arts of Hawai'i, including dance, music, composition and language. Ho'omalua also established MKH Productions, a production and publishing company for his music and dance projects.

Before the year was over, the dancers of *Academy of Hawaiian Arts* had established their prominence by taking two first place awards at the oldest and largest international hula competition in the western U.S., Ia 'Oe E Ka La, in Northern California. At the start of 2004, Kumu Ho'omalua featured the dancers of the *Academy of Hawaiian Arts* at the Monterey Bay Aquarium in a powerful performance honoring the mythical shark god, Kamohoali'i, for the opening its newest exhibit, *Sharks: Myth and Mystery*. Ho'omalua was commissioned by the Monterey Bay Aquarium to compose a chant and hula for the new exhibit. The video of the commissioned work will run with the shark installation for the next four years.

As a designer of ipu heke, pahu drums, 'uli'uli and lei hulu, along with his chanting, music, and choreography, Kumu Hula Mark Keali'i Ho'omalua has established himself as a visionary artist with immeasurable passion for hula and Hawaiiana.

Mark Keali'i Ho'omalua's recordings are distributed worldwide by Mountain Apple Company. For more information, send an email to [publicity@mkhproductions.com](mailto:publicity@mkhproductions.com) or visit MKH Productions on the internet at: [www.mkhproductions.com](http://www.mkhproductions.com).