

## Dance

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### Kumu Hula: Keepers of a Culture

Live action. Producer: Vicky Holt Takamine; Exec. Producer: Dr. Neil Abercrombie. Director: Robert Mugge. Narrator: Vicky Holt Takamine. Sponsor: Hawaii's State Foundation on Culture and Arts. Mug-Shot Productions. Copyright 1989. Available from Rhapsody Films. 85 min. Color. \$39.95, home use.

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AUDIENCE: General

Vicky Holt Takamine is a Kumu Hula (master teacher) of the hula, the traditional dance of the Hawaiian people. She and other masters of this Hawaiian dance are featured in this video; they explain the true meaning of the hula and its relationship to the culture and tradition of Hawaii and its people. The origins of this dance in Hawaii date from the arrival of the Polynesian people in 500 A.D. The hula was handed down from generation to generation by the Kahuna (priests and sages) and by the master teachers. During the 19th century missionaries and plantation owners tried to suppress the dance, but it was secretly kept alive by these teachers. The Hawaiian language at that time was not a written language, and consequently, the preservation of the tradition of the hula became even more important. The dance form disappeared for about 75 years, but it has been revived—as the language of the heart of the people and as a vehicle for the restoration of Hawaiian pride and

dignity. A new generation of Kumu Hula continue the tradition through *hula halau* (schools), public performances, and festivals. In this presentation, master teachers and their students demonstrate the two major categories of the dance, wearing colorful costumes against a backdrop of spectacular Hawaiian scenery. *Kahiko*, the ancient style of dancing, is accompanied by chants and Hawaiian percussion instruments. The *'Auana* is the modern version of this dance, and is accompanied by western instruments and singing. The teachers are dedicated to preserving remnants of their past culture, much of which has been obliterated and diluted by western influence. Watching these troupes perform, viewers will be completely caught up in the beauty of the dance and its place in Hawaiian culture.

Superb editing and camerawork add to the total enjoyment of the program. It all looks so easy, as the dancers perform and the teachers explain how the styles of hula from the various islands have changed over the years. The dancers, some of whom begin attending schools and workshops at kindergarten age, are supple and graceful, the men vigorous and dynamic. They rise above the typical hula dancer stereotypes. One of the Kumu Hula reminisces with her descendants about going to Hollywood and appearing in a film, *Waikiki Wedding* (1937), with Bing Crosby. A clip from that film is shown, and it does not do much to dispel the Western image of friendly people swaying to the beat of the drums. This video, in contrast, imparts the true meaning of the hula and places the dance in its historical context.

This documentary will hold audience attention throughout; it serves its purpose well in blending the old and the new and never patronizes the proponents of the dance. The Kumu Hula appear serious and committed to their task; they are preserving the essence of the hula, and its interpretation is the tribute they pay to their gods and ancestors. An excellent production on all levels. Highly recommended.

—Vioienne L. Lipsitz