

Lecture delivered to the Kamehameha Seniors, May 6, 1945

Part I

Hawaiians were lovers of poetry and keen observers of nature. Every phase of nature was noted and expressions of the love and observation woven into poems of praise, of satire, of resentment, of love and of celebration for any occasion that might arise. These poems or mele were not recited but chanted.

There are many interesting characteristics of Hawaiian poetry. Hula poems had lines nearly of uniform length but the old poems vary considerably in length in different parts of the poem. This unevenness did not destroy the rhythm or smoothness of the flow because there never was any attempt at rhyming at the end of lines. Kalakaua was the only Hawaiian to attempt a poem with rhyming words.

The poets of old Hawaii were skilled in the use of words. Carelessness in the choice of words might result in death for the composer or the person for whom it was composed. Words and word combinations were studied to see whether they were auspicious or not. There were always two things to consider, the literal meaning and the kaona or inner meaning. The literal meaning is like the body and the kaona is like the spirit of the poem.

The poets of old Hawaii were skilled in writing poems. Many poems did not hold to one thought alone. Two lines might be about a ship, the next two about a bird on a tree. Such sudden and apparently fickle changes in thought might sound peculiar or jerky to a European but to a Hawaiian it was perfectly comprehensible because the kaona told the consecutive story. Persons were sometimes referred to as rains, winds, ferns, and so on. A person might be referred to in the same poem as rain in one place and as flower in another.

The kaona of a chant was believed to be potent enough to bring lovers together, to mend broken homes or break up an undesirable union. But it was ineffective unless chanted before a gathering of people (aia a puka ka mele i waho), and so the composer looked for such an opportunity. Birth-day celebrations were especially liked for the debut of a poem.

Meles were composed for almost every and any occasion and for every emotion, love, hatred, jealousy, admiration or woe. From birth to death meles were composed for the ali'i. When one came for a visit, meles were composed to commemorate it, if his leis were beautiful, they were sung about; if he were fond of surfing that was a theme for a mele and if he liked to travel by canoe, that, too, was sung about.

Chants "belonged" to the person or family of the person to whom they were dedicated or for whom they had been composed. Others were not allowed to use them except to repeat them in honor of the owner. In order to preserve chants, however, it was necessary to take some old chants belonging to a person long dead and revise and re-dedicate them to living persons in the family.

There were different styles of chanting called the oli, the Kepakepa, the hoaeae and others.

The oli was used for prayers, prophecies, dirges and chants not intended for dancing. The melodies consisted only of two or three notes. They are usually chanted in a monotone. Occasionally there was a slight change of pitch.

The kepa kepa is a rhythmic recitation rather than an actual chanting.

The ho'aeae differs from the oli in the prolonging of the end of each line. It is a form much used in love chants.

The mele hula or hula chants were used for dancing and ranged over several notes, in contrast to the chanting in other meleas.

The music of our ancestors was more rhythmic than melodious.

## Part II

### The Hula

Although the hula was used for entertainment it was deeply rooted in religion. There were special gods worshipped, taboos observed, altars erected in special houses called the halau and heiau built to receive the greenery of the altar and dregs of the 'awa after the period of training was over. Prayers to the goddess Laka were innumerable and varied. The rules of the halau were many and strict. A pupil was not allowed to eat squid, sugar cane, taro greens or sea weeds of the lipe'epe'e variety until after graduation. All kissing was prohibited. It was kapu to "talk back" to the instructor; kapu to argue and quarrel with each other; kapu to gossip; kapu to criticize the methods of other schools; kapu to pare the nails, trim the hair or beard until after graduation. Girls did not wear the hair coiled or braided but simply combed free of tangles.

In the old hula schools, pupils were divided into two groups, the olapa or dancers and the hoopaa or drummers. The hoopaa were boys, but the dancers were both boys and girls. To be a hoopaa it was necessary to learn not only the mele hula but also the innumerable prayers, for it was the ho'opa'a who eventually became the teachers of the hula.

Everything was done in an orderly manner in the old hula schools. The pa-u or skirt was girded on only when the instructor or kumu chanted the mele of the pa-u, never before or after. Anklets and leis were put on with their appropriate meleas. The anklets were made of dog's teeth and sea shells in the olden days and in the days of the monarchy were made of worsted.

Men and women dressed alike for the hula with pa-u or skirt and the kikepa. The kikepa was draped under one arm and knotted on the opposite shoulders. Malos were not worn by men for dancing. The pa-u was made up of several layers of tapa about a yard wide and four in length sewed together on one side. When worn the pa-u reached just below the knees.

Hula girls of the olden days did not dance with bared thighs as they do today, for they were taught that to leave the thighs uncovered was immodest. Even down to the days of our last ruler, dancers wore knee length skirts.

When tapa cloths were no longer made, cloth skirts and blousy muumuu came into fashion. These skirts were very wide and were tied on with a draw string. There is a great contrast

in the appearance of those who danced before our aliis and some of the dancers of today.

Before graduating his pupils, a teacher called in several others to look his pupils over and to watch them dance. These critics were called ke. They made their criticisms and offered their suggestions. The graduation ceremony or uniki followed after the pupils had been pronounced perfect.

While a teacher acted as judge in the halau of another, he did not attempt to learn any new melees belonging to the other lest the person robbed should appeal to Laka in this manner, "O Laka, so-and-so has taken one of my melees. Make him stutter and stammer when he tries to use it. Make his memory fail him so that he will not remember the words." And Laka would indeed make the one who had taken that which did not belong to him, forgetful and nervous whenever he tried to use it. Laka liked honesty among her devotees.

Graduation was a great occasion in which every one was invited. Everybody was welcome and the more the merrier. There was no obligation whatever but almost every one gave a gift to the dancers. Gifts thrown or laid in the area where the dancing was held were divided among musicians and dancers but gifts tucked into the hand were personal and not shared with others.

A graduating pupil could voice no objection if she were kissed, even if the person who kissed her was not much to her liking.

### Musical Instruments and Dances

#### Pahu

The original use of the pahu or shark skin drum was in connection with the services of the temple and its adaptation to the hula was simply a transference from one religious use to another.

The hula pahu was a dance of formal and dignified character. It was not for light-hearted entertainment, but was reserved for notable occasions and distinguished guests.

#### Ipu

The ala'apapa, now called olapa was a formal dance with moderate action. The dancer used feet, hands and body to illustrate the meaning and emotion of the chant.

The instrument was invented in Hawaii and was not an introduction.

#### Ka-la'au and Papa-hehi

The music of the kala'au was produced by striking two sticks together rhythmically with the chant. It was danced on all the islands, but on Niihau and Kaua'i there was the added use of a papa-hehi or foot board. There is very little movement in this dance, merely a rhythmic beating of the sticks and the board.

#### Ka-la'au

The very common types of kala'au was done without a foot board and the time was kept by tapping two sticks together.

### Pu'ili

In the hula pu'ili a split bamboo was used to keep time to the rhythm of the chant.

### Uliuli

The hula 'uli'uli was named for the uliuli or feathered rattle used for its accompaniment.

### Ilili

In the hula ilili, two water worn stones are held in each hand and knocked together like castanets.

### Ukeke

The ukeke was the only stringed instrument of old Hawaii. It has no sound box of its own, so it is held against the open mouth and the throat used as a sound box. The sounds produced on the ukeke were never loud. Because of the similarity of its sounds to the jew's harp the name ukeke was given to that instrument also when introduced here.

### Hano

The hano or nose flute is an instrument of antiquity. It is made of a section of bamboo closed at one end except for a hole for the nose to blow through and finger stops near the other end which is open.