

Review Essay

Hula Pahu: Hawaiian Drum Dances (Two Vols.)

Volume 1: *Ha'a and Hula Pahu: Sacred Movements* by Adrienne Kaeppler. 1993. Bishop Museum Press, Honolulu, Hawaii. xv + 289 pp., including Foreword by James Ka'upena Wong, Jr. (pp. xi-xiii). Preface, Introduction, Appendices (Glossary of Hawaiian words, pp. 235-37; Labanotation clarification and Abbreviation; Summary of Lower-body Movement Motifs, by Judy Van Zile, pp. 238-49). Notes, Bibliography, Discography. Illustrations and Labanotation scores. Indexes (incl. Chant Titles, pp. 272-75). Paperback \$35.00 [U.S.] ISBN 0-930897-55-2. Reviewer: Joann W. Keali'inohomoku.

This book, *Ha'a and Hula Pahu: Sacred Movements*, is the first of two volumes in the series *Hula Pahu: Hawaiian Drum Dances*. The second volume is *The Pahu: Sounds of Power* by Elizabeth Tatar. The printed series is accompanied by a compact disc or audio-cassette; *Hawaiian Drum Dance Chants: Sounds of Power in Time*, compiled and annotated by Elizabeth Tatar. The series confirms Kaeppler and Tatar as major published scholars about Hawaiian *hula*. In the years to come, their work will be required reading for people who are interested in the *hula* along with Nathaniel B. Emerson (1909), Mary Kawena Pukui (1980), and Helen Heffron Roberts (1926).

Kaeppler contrasts her book with that of Tatar's:

The study by Tatar deals with the drum in mythological contexts, as well as the sound of the drum and associated chants as preserved on audio recordings. There is some overlap because certain elements and sources are relevant to both studies, but they differ in focus, methodology, and the specific data subjected to detailed analysis. It is not surprising, considering the paucity of detailed documentation from the past, that our interpretations and conclusions vary. My study is more speculative than that of Tatar, as I attempt to interpret the data and project them backward in time, in an effort to understand the meaning of the movements and texts (p. xiv).

Towards the conclusion of Kaeppler's book, she affirms "Dance—in this case *hula*—communicates, but only to those who have the competence to understand the structure of the dance system as well as its sociocultural background and history" (p. 234). With that in mind this review is taken from two perspectives: for readers who do not have a background on Hawai'i and *hula* and those who have. Below is some supportive material to prepare my readers to understand Kaeppler's achievement.

Before contact and through most of the nineteenth century, Hawai'i had a ranked society. The stratifications were four: titled aristocrats or chiefs, both male and female, priests and teachers, commoners and slaves or outcasts. The first three are determined by birth. The last were usually war captives. Within the first three categories there were numerous sub-categories. The most ritually powerful of the aristocrats or high chiefs were descendants of equally powerful chiefs. Those most powerful chiefs were considered to be sacred, liv-

ing gods. They were imbued with so much divine power (*mana*) they could only marry persons with like power, very often a sibling. Like the Peruvian Incas, Hawaiian sacred chiefs kept their lines pure through royal incest.

Even the gods were ranked. The chiefs and high priests worshipped four supreme gods that parallel those found in other Polynesian societies. Commoners had two sets of gods—family or personal gods (*`aumakua*) that I think are comparable to totems, and occupational gods, such as gods for canoe-makers, fishermen, and the *hula* people.

Because Hawaiian high chiefs were isolated they depended heavily upon the priests to maintain civil order and keep the society stable. The priests enforced a *kapu* (*tabu*) system according to the needs of the moment. Transgression was punished severely, even by death. In short, the priests controlled the religious and political lives of Hawaiians.

In pre-contact Hawai'i, religious ceremonies were held on carefully constructed mounds surmounted by towers. This distinctive place of worship was called *heiau*, of which the most important were dedicated to the four main gods and the sacred chiefs and their priests. Rituals at a *heiau*, like rituals everywhere, had rules and regulations in the use of time, space and behavior.

The above information sets the stage for understanding Kaeppler's thesis in *Ha'a and Hula Pahu: Sacred Movements*. She describes the *pahu* thus:

... a single-headed cylindrical membranophone that stands vertically, the carved footed base raising the septum above the ground. ...The body of the drum was traditionally carved of coconut or breadfruit...wood. The open end of the sounding chamber was covered with a tightly stretched shark-skin which was lashed with cordage made from coconut fiber and *olona* The *pahu* is sounded by striking the membrane with one or both hands. In a similar form, and with the same name, the *pahu* is found in the Society Islands, Marquesas Islands Austral Islands, and sporadically elsewhere in East Polynesia. In Hawaiian tradition, La'amaikahiki is specified as the individual who brought the *pahu* and other cultural refinements....*Pahu* were often given personal names, and were conceptualized as having a voice. More than just a wooden shell and shark-skin drumhead, a *pahu* was imbued with *mana*, power (pp. 5-6).

Oral traditions that surround Hawai'i and the *hula* have many twists and turns. For one thing, it is generally accepted that the *hula* was brought to Hawai'i through the auspices of the favorite younger sister of Pele, the goddess of the volcano. At the same time the *pahu* was said to have been brought from the Society Islands by one La'amaikahiki. The curious thing about this is that all of the other instruments¹ are all unique to Hawai'i. The *pahu* is the only traditional instrument associated with *hula* that has a named provenance and is found elsewhere in eastern Polynesia. The *pahu* is considered to

¹ "Implements" as instruments have been called since the early sixties when that change of nomenclature meant that the items were not taxable.

be a serious instrument, and not many *hula* people use it. It is generally accepted that it was at one time used on *heiau*.

With the persistence of a Sherlock Holmes searching for clues, Kaeppler pieced together several fascinating points. She paid close attention to the fact that the carved figures that represent the gods, and which we know were used at *heiau* because of sketches made by early explorers, are always distinguished by their deeply flexed knees. She also noticed that an obscure word that has not been commonly used by *hula* paractitioners, *Ha`a*, is defined in the Pukui/Ebert Hawaiian dictionary (1957) as "a dance with bent knees." Meticulously, Kaeppler scoured every source about the *hula* until she could articulate her hypothesis: the "structured movement"<sup>2</sup> that was performed on the *heiau* was *Ha`a* and not *hula*, and the *pahu* was restricted to use on the *heiau*.

Further, she addressed what has always been a point of contention—whether the *hula* was originally performed by men only—and the answer is "no." All the early drawings and the argument by Barrère, Pukui and Williamson (1980) clearly show that women traditionally performed the *hula*. Frankly, the claim that the *hula* was originally restricted to males has always annoyed me. I, too, knew from my own research that it was incorrect to claim that only men danced *hula* at one time. The answer becomes clear from Kaeppler's brilliant deduction—*Ha`a* was performed only by men, but the *hula* was performed by both sexes.

Why was this information obscured? By tracing historical incidents and accidents, Kaeppler's hypothesis makes perfect sense. We know that the *tabu* system was broken in 1819. Ka'ahumanu, the co-regent of the Hawaiian Islands after the death of Kamehameha, the chief who united the islands, was the agent for this drastic change. She ate forbidden foods with her male co-regent in public (both were strict tabus), and on the following day the *heiaus* were destroyed (Kuykendall 1938: 68). As Kuykendall explains, however, "There were a huge number who refused to cast aside their old practices; and many idols, instead of being burned, were merely hidden from sight" (1938: 68-9). The passion for keeping a tradition alive by keeping it secret, was a useful strategy that later became apparent.

By the end of 1819, the plot thickened. Kuykendall notes:

At the very time that the people of Hawaii were discarding their old religion, missionaries were on their way from the United States zealously intent on persuading the Hawaiians to embrace the teaching of Christianity.... In October 1819, two whaleships visited the islands, the vanguard of a vast fleet whose hulls and sails became familiar sights to the island people. Whalers and missionaries were destined to play roles of outstanding importance on the stage of Hawaiian history. That they came at nearly the same time is a striking coincidence; and it is still more remarkable that they came just when the Hawaiians were themselves preparing the way for a new order of things (Kuykendall 1928: 70).

² As she calls behavior that might otherwise be called "dance."

Ka'ahumanu grasped these three things as a way to capture political control. She saw the missionaries, especially, as leverage to regain the power that was lost when the islands were plunged into anarchy after the breaking of the *tabu* system. She embraced Christianity and made a number of proclamations, including the abolition of the *hula*. Years later, King Kalakaua revived the old *hula* for his coronation in 1883. After he sent an invitation throughout the Hawaiian Islands an amazing number of *hula* masters and their students appeared in Honolulu for the big event. To the day Kalakaua is called "the merrie monarch," revered for his reclamation of many old traditions, and commemorated at an annual competitive *hula* festival called (fittingly) The Merrie Monarch Festival.

Kaeppler develops a convincing scenario. Both the traditional *heiau* paraphernalia and the *hula*, underground for over half a century, were maintained and passed on in secret for more than two generations. By the time of the Kalakaua revival, Christianity was firmly entrenched in the islands. The Kalakaua call was for *hula* but not for the old religion. *Ha'a* and the *pahu* apparently came back with the *hula*, but in a revised form. The old *heiau* version of the *pahu* and *Ha'a* did not. At least, not exactly. That is not a surprise, because the old *heiau* traditions would be known only to a select few in the first place because of their privileged place in the old ranked social system. Apparently, remnants of the tradition were scattered and passed on through generations of *hula* performers.

Kaeppler interviewed those few elderly *hula* masters and their students who used the *pahu*. She discovered bits and pieces of information from which she classified three traditions that make use of the *pahu* today: the 'Classical', the 'Generative' and the 'Composite'. She also describes "Other *Hula Pahu* Traditions" that are somewhat idiosyncratic, and she examines the current *hula* scene, "The *Hula Renaissance*" in which the *pahu* is often used without regard to its sacred usage. Most important, she traces how *hula* was transformed from ritual to art.

This book is a marvel of investigative scholarship and great fun to read. I particularly loved the first chapter as Kaeppler reveals her insights. I kept saying "Yes!" as she scored point after point.

Most reviews have some criticism, and I have a few that do not in any way undermine my admiration for this book. I wish that more Hawaiian words had been included in the glossary, specifically *hapa* (p. 112), *mana* (p. 6), and *mo'o* (p. xii). *Hapa*, as in *hapa haole* is popularly understood to mean 'foreigner'.³ *Mana* is a psychic or spiritual power that can be inherited through birth or bequeathed through mystical transfer. *Mo'o*, featured in the Foreword by James Ka'upena Wong, refers to a reptile or water spirit.

³ *Hapa* is a transliteration of the English word 'half', but *haole* is Hawaiian for (literally) 'no breath'.

I was startled when I read that Kaeppler called Laka an *`aumakua* (e.g. p. 180). *`Aumakua* refers to a non-human family or personal god (animal, plant, or natural phenomenon)—really a totem. Laka, the goddess of the *hula*, can be considered an occupational deity rather than a family deity. In addition, I think a few photos are misidentified, specifically Figures 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5. Finally, I wonder why Kaeppler did not cite Katharine Luomala for her study on *hula ki'i*—Hawaiian puppetry (1984). These criticisms are almost inconsequential compared with the great strengths of this book, and the review would not be complete without a note of appreciation for the enormous contribution by Judy Van Zile who notated motifs and dances.

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