

Hālau Mōhala ‘Ilima  
Merrie Monarch Festival 2022  
Wāhine Division, ‘Auana  
Hula Ho‘okūkū

## **Mokulua**

*Haku Mele:* Kīhei de Silva (words, September 1988) and Kawai Cockett (music, August 1990).

*Discography:* Kawai Cockett, ‘O Ka‘ōhao Ku‘u ‘Āina Nani, Ho‘olokahi Productions, HPC-203.

I composed the words of this mele in September 1988, after a visit with Aunty Sally Wood Naluai<sup>1</sup> at her home in Kahalu‘u, O‘ahu, where Māpuana and Aunty Lani “Nana” Kalama (Sally’s hula sister with Maiki when they studied under Lokalia in the 1940s) spent the morning reviewing “Eia mai Au ‘o Makalapua” at Aunty Sally’s feet.

Māpu learned “Makalapua” from Aunty Sally in 1985-86, after Aunty Nana explained to us that Sally had learned this hula kuolo from Mary Kawena Pukui<sup>2</sup> and that, over the years, it had become one of the hula with which Sally was most closely associated. “I want you to learn it,” Aunty Nana had said, “from the person who probably knows it best.”

This was the second or third of Māpu’s return visits to Kahalu‘u, but my first since Aunty’s stroke. Aunty Sally, you see, was now confined to her recliner, walker, and electric Lark, and these review sessions were motivated, in part, by Aunty Nana’s desire to help get her friend back on her feet.

It didn’t take the two conspirators long to coax Aunty Sally into action. First she just watched, corrected, and encouraged. Then she began to chant along. And then she sent me to her collection of ipu and pahu along the far wall of her living room to get “my dark baby with the patched neck.”<sup>3</sup> By her students’ third or fourth time through the mele, she had taken up her ipu and – after a few recliner-back adjustments – joined in completely.

Afterwards, on the drive home, I couldn’t get the sound of Aunty Sally’s voice and ipu out of my head, so that afternoon I began to put my own words to the rhythm that wouldn’t go away. By evening, I had written “Mokulua.”

The mele stayed in my composition folder until May 1990 when, after a King Kamehameha Hula Competition practice, Uncle Kawai Cockett and I were talking about how much he enjoyed singing “Hanohano Wailea.” I told him that I had written another mele for Ka‘ōhao – this one from an “offshore” perspective. Would he like to make a song out of it? Aunty Leila Kiaha – who, with Grover and Marion Lee, was backing Kawai that year – rolled her eyes when he said he would give it a try. Apparently, she was the one to whom Uncle Kawai turned for help whenever he thought he had a tune worth singing, and Kawai, she told me later, sometimes needed a lot of help.

So I didn’t give any further, serious thought to my request and was caught completely off guard that August when Uncle Kawai brought his group to visit our Merrie Monarch class to share his hula ‘auana version of “Mokulua.” We had only to hear it once to tell the class, “This is it; here’s our MM song for next April.”<sup>4</sup> After class, Kawai explained to us that, yes, Aunty Leila had helped paka the melody, but her response, when he first sang it to her, was, “E, you did good on this one.” He was pretty happy about that.

He also explained – half apologetically – that, from the start, he felt the song needed an ipu beat. “That’s why it sounds like hula pā ipu with a strum.” I got a big kick out of this because I hadn’t ever shared the Aunty Sally story with him, and he had come up, on his own, with music that reflected my “Makalapua” inspiration. When I told him about our Kahalu‘u visits with Aunty Sally, he laughed and started chanting, “Eia mai au ‘o Makalapua / Hō‘alo i ka ihu o ka Lanakila” in perfect Aunty Sally imitation. Apparently she had managed to get into both our heads, and the song, we agreed, was our little gift to her.

Nā Mokulua is the old name for the two islands that lie about a mile off the Ka‘ōhao (“Lanikai”) shoreline of Kailua, O‘ahu. This name, like many other traditional place names in our community, has been replaced and mostly forgotten by two generations of settler-residents for whom “old” Kailua means Liberty House, Hughes Drugs, Pali Lanes, and Andy’s Drive-In. For them, the Mokulua are the “Mokes” or “Twin Islands,” Popoi‘a is “Flat Island,” Mōkōlea is “Bird Sh—Island,” and the reef that runs ma uka of all four has no name at all.

One of my reasons for composing “Mokulua” (as with its older and better-known sibling “Hanohano Wailea”) was to give new life to the old Ka‘ōhāo place names and place-name associations. To put them back, where they belong, in the ears and mouths of our children before the old ties of aloha ‘āina unravel, irreversibly, into ainokea. So Mokulua is not just the name of the one-way street that leads out of “Lanikai”; it is the name of our offshore islands. And ‘A‘alapapa is not just the name of the one-way street that leads into our home; it is the name and the description of the limu-fragrant reef that protects our mansion-studded coastline. Pūnāwai is not just the name of a plaque above our front door (“Home Pūnāwai,” the neighborhood bed-and-breakfasters often ask, “is this a retirement home?”); Pūnāwai, in fact, is the name of a fresh-water spring and stream that used to bubble and flow a quarter-mile from our house, in what is now the Lanipō St. drainage ditch.

Furthermore: the low-spreading ‘ilima-kū-kahakai and lavender-flowered pā‘ū-o-Hi‘iaka vine are not just pretty decorations for the song’s first and third verses; they are native plants that grow stubbornly on the Mokulua sea strands despite the 7-11 flip-flops, beer cans, bento boxes, and sandwich wrappers left there by Lanikai’s vacation-rental navy. There is nothing random, either, about the clattering ‘ili‘ili and native bird colony of verses two and three. The water-worn pebbles for which Pūnāwai was once famous are still to be found on the Pūnāwai-facing shore of the smaller Mokulua, and the grey-and-white ‘ua‘u-kani – wedge-tailed shearwaters that remain loyal, all their lives, to a single mate – are still nesting in the upraised coral crevices and sandy cliff-bases of both islands. To remember these place-names, fragrances, plants, birds, and pebbles – to stubbornly sing and dance about them – is to give them new life so that they, in turn, will anchor and renew us.

When I wrote this mele thirty-four years ago, Māpu and I were in the habit of squeezing into our one-man Ocean Kayak and paddling out to the smaller Mokulua for what we called “quiet time”: time that consisted, in large part, of sitting, listening, and breathing. Of letting go and taking in. To do this, and just this, was to regain a healthy perspective on our work and reaffirm the love that inspires it. The waves of the channel may rise and fall, but love (for/of the loyal, lifetime ‘ua‘u), is a pau ‘ole thing.

## Mokulua

Kau aku ka mana‘o iā Mokulua <sup>5</sup> Punihei i ke ‘ala, ‘a‘alapapa. Papa‘a kai ka pua lei ‘ilima Ka ‘ilima lei ‘āpiki kū kahakai. <sup>6</sup>	My thoughts are at Mokulua Tangled there in fragrance, reef fragrance. The ‘ilima are coated with sea spray The ‘ilima, lei of mischief, growing at the shore.
Maika‘i ka ‘iniki a ka ‘ehu kai Pā mai ka makani Welo-Kīhei. <sup>7</sup> Ki‘ei, hālō iho i ke kumupali <sup>8</sup> ‘O ka ‘ua‘u-kani, kani ka puō. <sup>9</sup>	Wonderful is the sting of the sea spray When the Welo-Kīhei blows. We peep and peer into the cliff base It is the ‘ua‘u-kani, moaning.
Pu‘ō wela, pā‘ū o Hi‘iaka <sup>10</sup> A walea i ka nehe o ka ‘ili‘ili. Huli aku nānā iā Pūnāwai Ālai ‘ia e ke kua o ka nalu.	Pā‘ū o Hi‘iaka blooms in the heat At ease, absorbed in the clatter of ‘ili‘ili. I turn to gaze at Pūnāwai Now obscured by the backs of waves.
[Hea aku mākou, ō mai ‘oe Kau aku ka mana‘o iā Mokulua.] <sup>11</sup> ‘O ka nalu o ke awa a‘e emi iho Ke aloha o ka ipo, mea pau ‘ole. <sup>12</sup>	We call, please respond Our thoughts rest at Mokulua. The waves of the channel will soon subside But the love of a sweetheart is a thing without end.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Aunty Sally did not use Hawaiian diacriticals in the spelling of her name; nor, to our knowledge, did Lokalia Montgomery, and Leila Kiaha. This explains my reluctance to mark these names when they appear later in this essay.

<sup>2</sup> We also honor Aunty Pat Bacon’s request that her mother’s last name not be marked with kahakō or ‘okina.

<sup>3</sup> Aunty Sally’s “dark baby” has been in our keeping since this visit in 1988.

<sup>4</sup> “Mokulua” was our competition mele in MM 1991 and our ka‘i in MM 2010. And here we are again in 2022. The mele seems to pick us – every other decade or so – more than the other way around, probably because it won’t allow us to go too long without telling and retelling our story of Aunty Sally and Uncle Kawai.

<sup>5</sup> The more common expression is “kau aku ka mana‘o no + place-name...” but “kau aku ka mana‘o iā...” is evident in some of our mele, for example “kau aku ka manao ia Kapukaki” (“He Kanikau no Apuiki,” *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika*, 13 March 1862) and “Kau aku ka manao ia [M]oanui,” (“Mrs, Elizabeth K. Kia,” *Kuokoa*, 23 May 1919). A similar construction – “kau ka weli iā...” – appears regularly in our nūpepa.

<sup>6</sup> The wild, low-growing, beach variety of ‘ilima is called “‘ilima kū kahakai.” The ‘ilima lei is sometimes referred to as “lei ‘āpiki” – the mischief lei – because it was thought to attract mischievous spirits. The lei was therefore enjoyed by some and avoided by others; it has been, for many years now, the name of our Merrie Monarch class.

<sup>7</sup> “Welo Kīhei” is my made-up name for the land breeze that comes off Ka‘ōhau and carries to the Kailua-facing shoreline of the Mokulua. Unfortunately, the only Kailua wind name that seems to have survived the years is the Kailua tradewind named “Malanai.” A bit of “haku wale” was therefore required for the wind that blows in the opposite direction. “Welo Kīhei” was a term applied to particularly skilled messengers whose deft and tireless running sent their shoulder capes (kīhei) streaming (welo) in the wind behind them. The interaction of wind and kumu pali is the mischievous subject of the song’s second verse.

<sup>8</sup> This line is meant to echo the “ki‘ei / hālō” of “He Ma‘i no ‘Iolani,” a mele ma‘i taught to us by Auntie Pat Namaka Bacon from the repertoire of Joseph ‘Īlālā‘ole: “He ma‘i no ka lani — ke ki‘ei mai la / He ma‘i no ka lani — ke hālō mai la” (The chief’s ma‘i — ‘tis peeping in / The chief’s ma‘i — ‘tis peering in). It also echoes, more subtly, Auntie Sally’s explanation of the choreography for the “‘Ahuwale ke ko‘a o Polea” verse of “Makalapua”:

The plain of Polea is an upraised reef with many pits and sinkholes. “When you dance this part, you have to raise yourself up, make that hole with your arms, and look into that coral pit ... I have to know that you’re peering into the coral holes because that’s what this part of the mele is about.” (Sally Wood Naluai, Personal Communication, September 1988.)

<sup>9</sup> The ‘ua‘u kani is known as the “moaning bird” because of its “weird groans, moans, and wails in the nesting colony” (Robert Shallenberger, *Hawaii’s Birds*, 16-17).

<sup>10</sup> The creeping pā‘ū o Hi‘iaka thrives along the hot, rocky coastlines of Hawai‘i. It is said to have received its name from Pele when it grew over the goddess’s favorite sister, Hi‘iakaikapoliopole, to protect the sleeping infant from the sun’s heat. The ‘ilima and pā‘ū grow together at Mokulua; on the smaller island, the latter sends its runners all the way down to the ‘ili‘ili beach.

<sup>11</sup> I composed “Mokulua” as a seven-verse mele of two lines each. Kawai asked to re-arrange it into four verses of four lines each, and he added the bracketed lines of this final, fourth verse in order to bring the new version to completion. Na wai ho‘i e ‘ole!

<sup>12</sup> The last lines of “Mokulua” are inspired by the first lines of “Ka Ua a‘o Hilo,” an old mele that Kawai loved to sing for us: “Ka ua a‘o Hilo a‘e mao ana lā / Ke aloha o ka ipo mea pau ‘ole.” The rain of Hilo will (eventually) subside / But the love of a sweetheart is an endless thing.