

Hālau Mōhala ‘Ilima  
Merrie Monarch 2024  
Wāhine Division, Hula ‘Auana  
**Hula Ho‘okūkū**

## **Mahalo Lahaina**

*Haku Mele:* Irmgard Farden ‘Āluli and Mary Kawena Pukui.<sup>1</sup> Circa 1958.

*Source:* 1. “Mahalo Lahaina,” words and translation (both by Pukui<sup>2</sup>) shared with us on December 5, 2023, by Hailama V. K. K. Farden.  
2. “Mahalo Lahaina,” in Nicholas and Zachary Lum’s, *Lei Nāhonoapi‘ilani – Songs of West Maui*, (Lahaina; North Beach-West Maui Benefit Fund, Inc., 2019) 154-155.

*Discography:* “Lahaina,” Halona (Jack Ha‘o, Kaulana Kasparovitch, Manu Palama, Kimo Alama), *Cha-Lang-A-Lang Today*, Pumehana, PS4905, 1977. Verses of this upbeat rendition are sung in 1, 2, 4, 3, 6 order by Jack Ha‘o: Verse 5, arguably the most important verse of the song, is not sung.

*Our Text:* Shared by Hailama Farden as noted above.

Māpuana graduated from Maiki in August 1975, and immediately signed up for Hawaiian language class at Kalāheo adult night school, saying, “I have to be better at ‘ōlelo if I’m going to teach.” The class was taught by Robert Lokomaika‘iokalani Snakenberg, the day-time Hawaiian language teacher at Kailua High School and former *hoa kulanui* of Larry Kimura mā when that first group of “paionia” was at UH. Loko’s night school class was a famous-aunty class, full of laughter, talk-story, and Hawaiian music. Its matriarchs were Irmgard ‘Āluli and Leiana Woodside with assists from Betty Evensen and husband ‘Alapaki. Also in the class were the young, initially intimidated, and completely unknown Māpuana de Silva and Howell Chinky Mahoe. The Aunties wouldn’t allow for intimidation, and it only took a couple of nights before we had all become a kind of impromptu ‘ohana.

When word leaked out that Māpu had graduated from Maiki but not yet started her own hālau, Loko and Aunty Irmgard would not let-up on “you have to.” It was gentle, but insistent persuasion; the kind you can’t ignore. In January 1976, though still not anywhere near proficient in ‘ōlelo,<sup>3</sup> Māpu did as encouraged and opened Hālau Mōhala ‘Ilima – named by Lokomaika‘i Snakenberg – to her own Mom, aunties, and family friends. Three months later, on Kūhiō Day at the Kailua Recreation Center, the hālau made its first public appearance. The emcee: Loko Snakenberg. The singers: Loko, Al Evensen, and Irmgard ‘Āluli. The first song: “Puamana.” Among the first dancers: Māpu’s childhood friend, Melody Kapilialoha Mac Kenzie, newly transferred from Beloit to the UH School of Law and still with us today, 48 years later, as kumu

hula of HMI and professor emerita at Ka Huli Ao Center of Excellence for Native Hawaiian Law.

Our relationship with Aunty Irmgard never wavered over the next quarter century. She was the first person outside of our immediate family to hold our eight-day old Kahikina. Māpu spent hours talking with and learning “Kananaka” from her at her Kalāheo St. and ‘Ohana St. homes. She and Puamana sang for us regularly, unfailingly, at our fundraisers at the Waimānalo home of Bill and Charlotte Fuller, at our first keiki hula competition at the Farrington High Auditorium (“Sweet Patuti”) and in many that followed (“Kananaka,” for example, at the Kekūhaupi‘o fieldhouse), at a multitude of events at Bishop Museum, Castle Auditorium, Honolulu Country Club, Washington Place, Lanikūhonua, the Willows, and – most memorably – at ‘Āluli family parties in Mihana’s backyard in Kailua.

So: there is pilina. It began 25 years before Aunty’s death, and it is still with us almost 25 years later. Pilina that brings us, in an admittedly round-about way, to “Mahalo Lahaina.”

When it became apparent, after our November 11, 2023, offering of “He Inoa no Henelika” to an audience of Lahaina fire survivors, that we were going to set aside our original Merrie Monarch plans for 2024 and focus, instead, on Lahaina, we asked Hailama Farden for help with an ‘auana set from his collection of mele composed by Aunty Irmgard. He sent us several of Aunty Irmgard’s songs and offered a suggestion that I don’t think he expected us to take. *Would we consider “Mahalo Lahaina” – it was one of her lesser-known songs, but full of Lahaina place names, memories, and aloha?* He wasn’t sure if the one commercially recorded version that he knew of – the group Hālonā’s abbreviated “Lahaina” – was findable,<sup>4</sup> so he took out his ‘ukulele and sang for us. That was all the inspiration we needed: pīpī holo ka‘ao.

“Mahalo Lahaina” was composed by Irmgard and Kawena, by haku mele for whom ma‘ema‘e, in word and music, was paramount. Their mele has a beguiling purity of voice – a “Puamana” quality – that invites us to see what Irmgard is remembering in a way that, in Hailama’s words, “almost convinces us that we were there when the memory was created.”<sup>5</sup> Aunty Irmgard, he says, went to her friend Mrs. Pukui with a simple request: I’d like to write a song that shows my appreciation for Lahaina; will you help me? He remembers Aunty saying that the two of them worked so well together. Kawena didn’t know Maui, but she had the language. Irmgard had the memories and music, but not the language. Together, they made everything fit.<sup>6</sup>

“Mahalo Lahaina” begins in a comforting, familiar, image-triggering way – with a statement of “dearest-to-my-heart” affection followed by language traditional to that place: the breadfruit shade of Lele and the soft breezes of what we “Kananaka” people might identify as the fragrance-carrying Ma‘a‘a as it wafts over the ‘Uo-caressed shoreline.

Mahalo wale au iā Lahaina  
Ka heke nō ia i ka pu‘uwai

I am in great admiration for Lahaina  
The dearest to my heart

Malu i ka ‘ulu napenape mālie	Shaded by the breadfruit trees gently swayed
He ‘olu i ke ahe pā kolonahe	By the zephyr (soft winds) wafting softly

The surf of ‘Uo is, in fact, what comes next in the song. It reminds us, today, of what is no longer there – of all that has been altered, renamed, or taken by fire. It reminds us, as well, of what will never be lost, not as long as mele and memory prevail. The surf rises, falls, and murmurs. Its music is answered by dancing coconut fronds that summon, in turn, the beloved friends who still exist, in mind’s eye, beneath the palms of Puamana.

Ka nalu a‘o ‘Uo e holu mai nei	The surf of ‘Uo rising and falling
He nehenehe mālie i ka ‘ae one	Softly murmurs to the sand

‘O ka lau niu e holuholu mai ana	The coconut fronds swaying there
He ani pe‘ahi i nā makamaka	Are beckoning to friends

What happens in the penultimate verse of the song is remarkable for its depth and subtlety. It would have slipped by us, unnoticed, had it not been for Hailama, who, having listened attentively to the stories of his kūpuna, still remembers. He explained that before the Fardens moved to Puamana in 1916, they lived in Māla where Aunty Irmgard was born in 1911.<sup>7</sup> Prominent in the Māla memories of the Farden girls who were also born there, Diana and Maude in particular, was “going up to Hālonā for white roses.” The sisters would follow Kahoma Stream (from where the cannery used to be) to a place in the uplands where vines were hanging from the trees above. This was Hālonā, and wild white roses bloomed from those vines – roses they would gather, put in baskets, and take home to their mother, roses whose fragrance was incomparable. Hailama does not know any other name for these roses, nor does he know if they still bloom up there, nor does he know if the sisters continued to pick these roses after they moved to Puamana at Pōlānui, Lahainalalo. He does know that the sisters, later on, found a perfume at Liberty House that reminded them of “nā loke onaona a‘o Hālonā.” “Aunty Emma<sup>8</sup> wore this perfume all the time, and when she died, her family gave it to Irmgard who wore it for the rest of her life.” They wore it to remember their days of going up-stream to the white-rose vines of Lahainaluna, and to remember their mother who loved when the girls came home with those precious blossoms.<sup>9</sup>

My admiration for old mele – for mele composed by those who knew their haku mele traditions – is based, in part, on what I think of as echoing and adding. Western song-writing is almost always about the last of these, about creating something new, something never written before. Echoing, on the other hand, is either frowned on as plagiarism or dismissed as cliché. Our thinking is different, although less so now than it used to be. Ours, at its best, is kūpuna-based writing. What our kūpuna have said comes first, their words are honored, and then we add our own. We demonstrate our fidelity to their words, and then – usually without ostentation – we contribute. The fragrant white roses of Hālonā are exactly this kind of quiet contribution to a time-honored poetic foundation. It is the kūkulu part of the already established kāhua.

Lahainaluna ka‘u i aloha	Lahainaluna is my love
Me nā loke onaona a‘o Hālonā	With the sweet white roses of Hālonā

Puana ka‘u mele no Lahaina	This ends my song of Lahaina
Ka heke nō ‘oe i ka pu‘uwai	Dearest are you to my heart

Aunty Irmgard, with her friend’s deft assistance, shares something unique and personal here: a memory from before Puamana that serves as a mahalo to the earliest days of her Lahaina upbringing. She’s doesn’t announce this with fanfare or flourish, but I love that she gives us a little clue to its deeper significance, should we care enough to pay attention. “White” (or its Hawaiian equivalent) doesn’t appear in the actual song, only in the translation. This is what leads the careful listener to wonder: other mele speak of “ka ua Paupili...ma uka o Halona,”<sup>10</sup> “ka malu kukui o Halona,”<sup>11</sup> “ka uka anuanu o Halona,”<sup>12</sup> “ka o-o kani kua mauna o Halona,”<sup>13</sup> “na hau alialia o Halona,”<sup>14</sup> “ka ohu maluna o Halona,”<sup>15</sup> and “ka maile o Hālonā e ‘a‘ala nei”<sup>16</sup> – *but where does the sweet white rose of Irmgard’s Hālonā come from?* Luckily, we have Hailama to answer that question. Sharing his answer, with his permission, is a big reason for our choosing what many will think of as just another old, boring, aunty-kine song.

Our friend Zachary Lum has his own take on the dangers of inattention. In his introduction to another old-lady song – kupuna Mima Apo’s “Lei Nāhonoa‘opi‘ilani” – at a Maui MAC concert celebrating the release of the songbook of the same name, he talked about the flame of aloha ‘āina that must be kept burning if we are to prevail. One way of flame-keeping that we cannot afford to neglect is that of singing, over and over again, those mele kupuna that come to us from the heart of aloha ‘āina. These are the songs that say the old names and trigger the old memories. We need to pay full attention to them and not allow the forces of *forget* to prevail over those of *remember*. “Mahalo Lahaina” is one such song. Today it fights, with the flame of love for land and family, that which despair over the fires of Lahaina might otherwise destroy.

### **Mahalo Lahaina**

Mahalo wale au	I am in great admiration
Iā Lahaina	For Lahaina
Ka heke nō ia	The dearest
I ka pu‘uwai	To my heart

Malu i ka ‘ulu	Shaded by the breadfruit trees
Napenape mālie	Gently swayed
He ‘olu i ke ahe	By the zephyr (soft winds)
Pā kolonahe	Wafting softly

Ka nalu a‘o ‘Uo	The surf of ‘Uo
E holu mai nei	Rising and falling

He nehenehe mālie I ka ‘ae one	Softly murmurs To the sand
‘O ka lau niu E holuholu mai ana He ani pe‘ahi I nā makamaka	The coconut fronds Swaying there Are beckoning To friends
Lahainaluna Ka‘u i aloha Me nā loke onaona <sup>17</sup> A‘o Hālonā	Lahainaluna Is my love With the sweet white roses Of Hālonā
Puana ka‘u mele No Lahaina Ka heke nō ‘oe I ka pu‘uwai	This ends my song Of Lahaina Dearest are you To my heart <sup>18</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hawaiian diacriticals for ‘*Āluli* are those given to us by Hailama Farden, email to Māpuana, Jan. 16, 2024. We leave *Pukui* unmarked as requested several years ago by Aunty Pat Namaka Bacon.

<sup>2</sup> The translation in *Lei Nāhonoapi‘ilani*, although credited to Kimo Alama Keaulana is, in fact, Mrs. Pukui’s as shared by Hailama Farden.

<sup>3</sup> Three years at UH Mānoa, mostly with Kawehi Lucas, would later make a bigger dent in that deficit.

<sup>4</sup> He told us later that he preferred the original, slower version anyway – although Aunty Irmgard had nothing negative to say about Hālonā’s speedier rendition (Telephone conversation, Jan. 14, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Hailama Farden, “Mahalo Lahaina!” *Ka Wai Ola*, October 1, 2023. <https://kawaiola.news/moomeheu/moolelo/mahalo-lahaina/>.

<sup>6</sup> Hailama Farden, Jan. 14, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Maude Ka‘ehukai Tanner was born in 1906, and Diana (“folks called her Diane”) Kaleionehu Fernandes was born in 1909. Hailama’s “Uncle Buddy” (Llewellyn, 1920) is one of the family members who carries the name Hālonā – a fact that contributes to our understanding of the importance, to the Farden family, of the place of the same name. Shared with us by Hailama Farden: email, January 16, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> The fifth born (at Pu‘ukōli‘i in 1904): Emma Kapi‘olani Farden Sharpe.

<sup>9</sup> Hailama’s own composition, “Lovely White Rose o Hālonā” (*Lei Nāhonoapi‘ilani*, 148-9, music by Zachary Lum) was written with these aunts – Maude especially – in mind. It is his tribute to Maude; it is his memory of the memory that she shared with him.

<sup>10</sup> J. Elia, “Hālonā,” *Lei Nāhonoapi‘ilani*, 44-45. Hailama says that Elia’s song played a big part in the life of the Farden family. Great-grandparents Charles and Annie were champion waltzers, and before Bob Nelson’s “Maui Waltz” (which was written with the waltzing Farden sisters in mind), “Hālonā” was the mele they sang and to which they always danced.

<sup>11</sup> “Kanikau no L. S. Ua,” *Ka Elele*, 1 March, 1854.

<sup>12</sup> “Kanikau no John A Puuwai,” *Nupepa Kuokoa*, 24 Oct., 1863.

<sup>13</sup> “Auhea ka Oiaio?” *Nupepa Kuokoa*, 6 Feb., 1864.

<sup>14</sup> “Na Wahawaha o ka Lai o Lele,” *Nupepa Kuokoa*, 6 Feb., 1864.

<sup>15</sup> “Mai ka Malu Hekuawa Mai,” *Nupepa Kuokoa*, 25 August, 1866.

<sup>16</sup> Mima Apo, “Lei Nāhonoapi‘ilani,” *Lei Nāhonoapi‘ilani*, 142-143.

<sup>17</sup> “In the original 5th verse, the composers settled on “me nā onaona a‘o Hālonā,” but later, when I was working with Aunty Irmgard, she asserted the affinity for the white roses and we added *loke* [“me nā loke onaona...”] because we were comfortable that the word would fit okay” (Farden, January 16, 2024).

<sup>18</sup> This four-line-per-verse text and translation is exactly that given to us by Hailama in December 2023.