

Poetry, dance & community reveal the real Hawai'i

By Maileen Hamto

The Asian Reporter

Who is Hawai'i? What does she stand for? A local group of Native Hawaiians and friends are delving deeply into questions of identity through an intentional exploration of poetry, creation stories, song, and dance.

A collaboration between Music in Small Spaces and the 'O.H.A.N.A. Foundation brought a sampler of this discourse to life at the Beaverton City Library. At center stage were members of the music and dance troupe called Ka lei Hali'a O Ka Lokelani: children and seasoned chanters, dancers, and singers.

"The beauty of the islands lives on in many poems and stories," according to Leialoha Ka'ula, founder of 'O.H.A.N.A. "We learn about what each island stands for, and tell the stories of the sadness, hope, and renewal that she has gone through."

More than 13,000 Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders make their home in Oregon, representing one of the fastest growing communities in the state. The growth — coupled with a sincere interest in bringing authentic Hawaiian culture to music aficionados in Washington County — are among the key reasons for the Music in Small Spaces exposition.

Music in Small Spaces presents musicians from the greater Portland area in a seasonal lineup of chamber and world music. With a keen focus on music education, the music producer also has featured folk and traditional musical expressions from across the globe. With a grant from the Cultural Coalition of Washington County and support from the Beaverton Arts Commission, Music in Small Spaces created an important space for Hawaiian music and stories to be heard in Washington County.

"Many people from the mainland have a Hawaiian hotel experience," said Judy Castle, founder and executive director of Music in Small Spaces. She's been wanting to highlight Hawaiian music for some time. "This program helps to explain the real Hawai'i: the creation myths and unique points of view," Castle explained. "Hula is a lifelong study. It's a way of living and thinking."

There is poetry embedded in the name of the 'O.H.A.N.A. Foundation, which stands as an acronym for key Hawaiian values: *onipa'a*, meaning steadfast; *ha'aeo*, or cherish with pride; *alaka'ina*, which stands for guidance; *na'auao*, knowledge; and *aloha*, denoting compassion.

A critical part of 'O.H.A.N.A.'s approach is providing a social support network for Native Hawaiians and others with a deep interest in Hawaiian culture. A cornerstone of the work is supporting families and young people to build a strong and tightly knit community. Hula classes teach more than music and dance: they teach about tradition and cultural values that prioritize family, kinship, and community.

"One of the main themes of Hawaiian poetry and dance is family. Love your family, always be there for them, and know they will always be there for you," said Ka'ula.

'O.H.A.N.A. connects children and adults in exploring and celebrating culture, language, song, and movement arts. *Keiki* — the children — learn more than song and dance. "They learn movement and rhythm. They learn traditions, and the importance of paying attention and behaving appropriately," said Castle, who attended several 'O.H.A.N.A. classes in preparation for the show.

The auditorium at the Beaverton City Library came alive with songs and chants from the islands. The chosen



CONTINUING TRADITIONS. Chanters, dancers, and singers organized by the 'O.H.A.N.A. Foundation performed at the Beaverton City Library this month. The organization helps teach the next generation about the gifts of hula and helps them remember where they came from. (AR Photos/Maileen Hamto)

work builds upon last year's theme, when the group focused on mele and hula that told creation stories involving spirituality and deities of the islands.

"Teaching the next generation about the gifts of hula helps them remember where we came from — to be proud and hold strong to our roots — so they can continue our traditions and culture," she said.

An important part of the learning journey is a homecoming trip. "Every year, a group of us dancers go back to the islands, to physically see and feel what it's like to be Hawai'i. It's not just an island, and much more than just a state. The legends and stories of the ancestral lands are much deeper."

Ka'ula invites Oregonians to the 'O.H.A.N.A.'s Foundation's sixth annual "E Ala E" — rise up — a hula exhibition scheduled for Saturday, October 3 at Alpenrose Dairy's Opera House. The event also represents the organization's main fundraiser for the year, with proceeds benefitting the cultural preservation works of the foundation.

"Each island in Hawai'i has its own *mo'olelo*, its own story, and dancers are digging into that identity," she said. "We want to share our stories, and inspire our audiences to see Hawai'i beyond the paradise, and learn about what Hawai'i really stands for."

To learn more about the 'O.H.A.N.A. Foundation, visit <www.ohanafoundationpdx.org>. For more information about Music in Small Spaces, call (503) 644-0712 or visit <www.musicinssmallspaces.org>.

Oregon Symphony
CARLOS KALMAR, MUSIC DIRECTOR

NATIONAL CIRCUS & ACROBATS

of the People's Republic of China

Wednesday, September 9 | 7:30 pm

Direct from Beijing comes the world's most riveting acrobatic troupe whose astonishing acts have dazzled audiences the world over. China's preeminent circus company will have your whole family on the edge of your seats.

The Oregon Symphony does not perform.

Tickets as low as \$20 — while they last!

OrSymphony.org | 503-228-1353 Groups save: 503-416-6380

ARLENE SCHNITZER CONCERT HALL · SW MAIN & BROADWAY

Retirement Living

CHAUCER COURT

- APARTMENTS ~ STUDIO, ONE BEDROOM, AND MOBILITY IMPAIRED
- FEDERAL RENT SUBSIDIES AVAILABLE
- NO BUY-IN OR APPLICATION FEES
- AFFORDABLE RENT 30% OF ADJUSTED GROSS INCOME
- IDEAL URBAN LOCATION NEAR RESTAURANTS PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, MEDICAL FACILITIES, & SHOPPING



503-224-3559

Come Visit Us and See Our Newly Renovated Apartments!



1019 SW 10TH AVE • PORTLAND 97205