



FEATURE

“The message is that Hawaiian culture is alive and well.”

– Randie Fong



KS on PBS



Elizabeth Lindsey Buyers '74 serves as the show's host.

In December, the Public Broadcasting System presented “Hawai‘i: Songs of Aloha,” one of a number of musical specials that traditionally highlight its annual winter pledge drive. “Songs” was unique in two ways: it was the first nationwide production of the music of Hawai‘i by Native Hawaiians and Kamehameha Schools graduates made up the majority of if its cast.



Production principals (l-r) Aaron Mahi '71, Elizabeth Lindsey Buyers, and Randie Fong '78.

It could have been any night in Hawai‘i. A full moon hung bright and beautiful over a lush, tropical landscape of full-leaved palms with lau‘e huddled tightly at their bases. Wispy clouds layered lavender light so that it spilled in a soft canopy over an ocean-green surface.

It could have been any night in Hawai‘i, but it was not. It was a set. A stage.

This was the night PBS’ producer Stephen Reed of SDR Films (*The Three Tenors*, *Riverdance*, *Yanni at the Acropolis*, and *The Newport Jazz Festival*) brought his national reputation, a network broadcast crew, and four wide-screen digital video cameras to Honolulu’s historic Hawai‘i Theatre Center.

He was there to record the contemporary and traditional music and dance of these islands on its own terms, by its own rules, with its own people. In a national broadcast first, this production would capture for a nationwide audience – without distillation or interpretation – Native Hawaiians in the act of being themselves.

“Stephen had come over on vacation,” said **Randie Fong '78**, KS Performing Arts’ department head selected by Reed as the show’s artistic

Above – Kamehameha Schools Concert Glee conducted by Tim Ho '91.

director, "and he heard Hawaiian music. He loved it. So he went back to the mainland and pitched the program idea to PBS."

"I wondered why the music from Hawai'i was not better known outside the islands," Reed said. "Here in the islands music is held in such high regard. It's central to the culture. It's alive and real."

Chosen as the program's host was actress/writer/producer **Elizabeth Kapu'uwailani Lindsey** Buyers '74. Her excitement about this opportunity to share Hawaiian cultural authenticity led her to jump at this chance. "It was an opportunity to show an authentic version of who we are, what our music sounds like and how it is performed."

"The message is that Hawaiian culture is alive and well," Fong said. "That it's contemporary. Even when we perform hula kahiko, it's an ancient style of dance but we're not going back in time. Rather, we are bringing our kūpuna into our present and future."

The production was not scripted. Instead, as Fong described it, "startling facts about Hawai'i" would be revealed, such as the fact that Polynesians were traversing millions of square miles of open ocean two millennia before Europeans set sail on their own voyages of discovery.

Each of the production principals – Fong, Lindsey, and Royal Hawaiian Bandmaster **Aaron Mahi** '71, who served as the show's musical director – saw this production in family terms.

"I gratefully accepted the opportunity to be part of this production," Mahi

said. "I saw my role as enabling and enhancing the performance. It was making music with our family; exhibiting their talents which exemplify our culture."

And, there was that other connection.

"When PBS asked that our Kamehameha Concert Glee lead the finale," Fong said, "we just happened to be going down the list of cast and crew and realized, 'Oh, my! This is a Kamehameha Schools reunion.'"

"Every time I asked, it turned out that a person I wanted for the production was a graduate of Kamehameha," said Reed. "I was constantly impressed with their artistry, professionalism and knowledge."

"I think the world is ready to listen to indigenous voices," said Lindsey, who recently completed her Ph.D. in anthropology. "I think the audience is ready for that. They want what is real."

"You used to walk into a music store and see a sort of *National Geographic* world music section," Fong said. "That was it. Now, there's an entire section called World Music. So, is the world ready?"

"Yes," said Lindsey. "The times, they are a-changin'."

"I think the world is ready to listen to indigenous voices."

– Elizabeth Lindsey Buyers



Randie Fong confers with producer Stephen Reed (left).



Nā Leo Pilimehana – Lehua Kalima Heine, Nalani Jenkins Choy, and Angela Fernandez Morales, all KS '84 – under a Hawaiian moon.

"It was making music with our family."

– Aaron Mahi

Kamehameha 'ohana whose works, compositions, performances or behind-the-scenes contributions were featured in *Hawai'i: Songs of Aloha* included:

Robert Cazimero '67

Roland Cazimero '68

Randie Fong '78

Brickwood Galuteria '73

Tim Ho '91

Ka'ula Kalawa '02

Charles E. King 1891

Elizabeth Lindsey Buyers '74

Zanuck Lindsey '77

Aaron Mahi '71

Kenneth Makuakāne '73

Nā Leo Pilimehana with
Angela Fernandez Morales '84

Nalani Jenkins Choy '84

Lehua Kalima Heine '84

Keali'i Tau'ā '60