



THE ART OF *Performing*

Despite challenges facing performing arts education across the nation, the Kamehameha Schools Performing Arts department is thriving and helping to perpetuate Hawaiian culture

They include some of the most recognizable names in Hawai'i's musical history.

The list includes **Keola Beamer '69, Kapono Beamer '70, Mahi Beamer '46, Manu Boyd '80, Robert Cazimero '67, Roland Cazimero '68, Brother Noland Conjugacion '75 and his brother Tony Conjugacion '79, Don Ho '49, Dorothy Kahananui Gillett '36, Martha Poepoe Hoku '25, Sam Kapu '27 and his son Sam Kapu '62, Leila Hoku Kiaha '44, Aaron Mahi '71, Noe Kanoho Mahoe '51, Keith Ikaia Purdy '75, Marlene Sai '59, Jerry Santos '69, Zillah Young '63** – if they ever decided to have a concert featuring graduates of the Kamehameha Schools, it would certainly be a long, long night.

And there are literally hundreds of other graduates who could be added to the list.

Recording artists, singers, composers, arrangers, band leaders – even an opera singer – ever since the days of legendary Hawaiian composers **Charles E. King 1891 and Helen Desha Beamer 1900**, Kamehameha Schools has had a rich tradition of producing many of Hawai'i's finest musicians.

Today, despite some of the challenges facing performing arts education across the country, including a national trend toward reducing music education, Kamehameha's Performing Arts department is stronger than ever, with students actively studying not only music, but

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dance and drama as well.

Kapālama Campus Performing Arts Department Head **Randie Fong '78** doesn't think much of the national challenges toward arts education.

"That reflects a mainstream American perspective, and I say mainstream because of this western notion that the arts are a frill," Fong said. "Yet, if you go to Asia, Europe, or other parts of the Pacific, music is a key part of daily expression and is central to the culture."

"It's really only in the United States where there seems to be this attitude. It's certainly not in step with indigenous cultures. In fact, it may be backward thinking, that somehow we don't need to recognize the aesthetics, the beauty in life, as being as important to the quality of mankind's existence as the study of math, history and science."

"Thankfully, that's not the case at Kamehameha Schools – here, it's all important."

Besides being an advocate for Hawaiian language, Fong plays the piano, 'ukulele, guitar,



bass, sings, choreographs, composes and arranges music. A boy wonder if ever there was one, Fong was arranging his class' Song Contest entries while still a sophomore at Kamehameha, something that is almost unheard of.

By the time he was 24, Fong had already been named department head. And while a majority of Kamehameha students are exposed to music and dance at a young age, Fong's musical background actually began in infancy.

"My parents owned a Hawaiian nightclub called Club Polynesia, which featured outstanding Hawaiian music and was very successful from 1946 through the 1960s. I was born into this Hawaiian music-making tradition," he said.

"I literally grew up there. As a baby, my crib was in back of the stage, to the right of the bar.

Far left, Maui Campus dancer Tyana Tamanaha performs an enchanting *hula*. **Above left**, Hawai'i Campus band and orchestra instructor William Harris conducts a school performance. **Above right**, on an average year between 500 and 600 students perform in the annual Kapālama Campus Christmas Concert held at the Neal Blaisdell Concert Hall. **Below**, Kapālama Campus thespians form a chorus line in a scene from "Guys and Dolls."

and dance.

"Our Hawaiian people not only gravitate toward performing arts, but have for centuries depended on performing arts to express themselves and the beauty of the world around them," he said. "It's a cultural thing and it's natural for Kamehameha Schools to highlight that part of the culture that allows young, impressionable Hawaiians to express themselves."

"Performing arts help shape the culture of a place," said Alan Akaka '74, who serves as a choral music instructor at the Kapālama Middle School. "It helps to perpetuate our Hawaiian music, poetry and dance – that's very important, and without it we wouldn't have much of a culture. It's important to study math, but math does not make a culture.

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 – LYNELL BRIGHT



My mother, a native speaker, dancer and singer, worked with the performers and they included the who's who of Hawaiian entertainment from that era.

"That was the kind of lifestyle we had, and how our family was brought up. We had a piano from that nightclub in our house, and we all learned to play it by ear. The whole family sang."

Fong suspects a strong tie between Kamehameha's emphasis on performing arts and the Hawaiian cultural proclivity toward music





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– LEIMAMO NITTA

"I really believe in a holistic education – academics, fine arts, even physical education. It all works together. Having the kids use the left and right sides of their brains helps the child become more balanced."

One of the finest steel guitar players in the world, Akaka still performs weekly at the Halekūlani with his group The Islanders. He has performed with many of the famous old-time Hawaiian musicians, and still backs up Genoa Keawe during shows in Waikīkī.

Seven years ago, Akaka started the Nā 'Ōpio Singers, a choir group backed by a Hawaiian ensemble of musicians on bass, guitar, 'ukulele and drums. All members are in grades seven and eight, and Akaka said he takes 90 percent of the students who audition.

"You don't necessarily need to have the finest voice to be in the group," he said. "Being middle school students, sometimes their voices are going through a physical change. I wanted to offer all the students, regardless of whether they had good voices, a chance to be in the group. My group is not designed to be the great show choir, but still, these kids make me proud."

Akaka does have the luxury of picking up students who have performed with the Kamehameha Schools Children's Chorus, a select choir made up of fourth- through sixth-graders directed by elementary music teacher Lynell Bright.

The Children's Chorus, begun by the late

Suzanne Kaupu Soon '78 in 1988 and taken over by Bright in 1989, has sung on the movie soundtrack of Disney's "Lilo and Stitch," backed up Celine Dion, performed at the Pro Bowl and in Florida, California and across Japan.

Bright, who toured the world with the Continental Singers while a music major at the University of Hawai'i, sees a range of benefits to students who participate with her group.

"For some of these kids who might be struggling academically, this is the one area where they can shine and feel good about themselves," she said. "It's priceless to have something where these kids can start to feel self-confident, because that's a key for so many things and you can see them start to apply that to the other areas of their life.

"The other thing about performing arts is that it's very disciplined. In the chorus I demand discipline, and when you learn that, hopefully it carries over into the academics area. When you can get a child to have discipline and a positive self-esteem - that's the world. Then there's no stopping what that child can do, and they can go on and be successful in life."

While Kapālama's performing arts traditions reach back more than 100 years, interest in the field of study is high on Kamehameha's Hawai'i and Maui campuses. Both schools will welcome their first sophomore class in the fall.

According to Hawai'i Campus choral instructor Michael Springer, nearly one-third of the freshmen class turned out for choir or band, while the middle school band program saw 188 of 288 students participate. The band marched in both the Hilo Christmas Parade and the Merrie Monarch Parade.

Springer, a professional accompanist on piano and organ, said students in performance ensembles learn life lessons in cooperation, leadership, discipline and integrity.





'58, once said that it was singing that made Kamehameha Schools unique, and I quite agree," Leimamo said.

"Music can connect one to his or her cultural heritage, and hearing Hawaiian children sing and chant in Hawaiian truly touches the heart. It's also true that in order to produce moving music, one needs to live the Hawaiian values of *lokahi*, *ha'aha'a*, *mālama* and *aloha*."

"Kamehameha Schools recognizes the importance of educating the whole student, and values the performing arts as one component that reaches out to the expressive, creative and emotional development of each student," he said.

"In spite of national trends in some school districts, it's encouraging that there are national campaigns championing the awareness that reversing cuts in music education programs will result in better student achievement."

Springer added that starting at a young age makes all the difference when studying the performing arts.

"A lot of times, it's early exposure and participation in musical activities that develops musical expression and skills," he said. "Hawaiian students, in particular, have a great deal of exposure to music and dance at a very young age and musical expression within the culture is very highly cherished and encouraged."

On Maui, musical disciplines offered in middle and high school include chorus, orchestra

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All the Kamehameha teachers say it's just a natural extension of Hawaiian culture for the school to put such emphasis on performing arts.

"Our kids are artistic by nature, so I'm glad that we can create programs that allow them to showcase their performing arts abilities," Fong said.

"The kids come in here practicing. Many of them have very little training, but they have this knack, or cultural inclination toward the arts – and that's something that some people who train for years can't get. And when they start playing, this passion just comes out of them, and nobody has taught them that."

"One of the greatest things about this school is the heart of these kids," Bright said. "When they perform, it's emotional – they put their heart and soul into the performance. There's a big difference between performing, and performing with your heart. That's what these kids do, and you can just see it."

"From kindergarten on, there's music at this school," Akaka said. "I'm very happy to be at Kamehameha, at a school that puts so much emphasis on performing arts because we're perpetuating our Hawaiian culture. It's our destiny, and it's really something that Kamehameha Schools ought to be doing."

"Performing arts help to perpetuate our Hawaiian music, poetry and dance – that's very important, and without it we wouldn't have much of a culture."

– ALAN AKAKA



and *'ukulele*, with the Maui Campus band set to debut in the fall.

"I believe that the music of a people embodies the culture of those people," said Maui Campus music instructor **Leimamo Fukino Nitta '78**.

Nitta's specialties are voice, *'ukulele* and she also plays a mean cello. Nitta comes from a long line of musicians and is even married to a musician (Maui Campus *'ukulele* instructor Dale Nitta).

"Our high school principal, **Mitchell Kalauli**

Far left, Kamehameha's Nā'Ōpio Singers represent the Kapālama Campus Middle School. **Middle left**, Kapālama Campus contemporary dance students strike the pose. **Near left**, orchestra students at Kamehameha study musical literature from all periods, classic as well as popular, contemporary and Hawaiian music. **Above**, Kamehameha's Children's Chorus is comprised of fourth-through sixth-grade Kapālama Campus students.

