

‘ŌHI‘A LEHUA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

IN

DANCE

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By

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Keywords: ‘Ōhi‘a Lehua, Rapid ‘Ōhi‘a Death, Dance Hybridity, Tau Dance Theater,  
Hana Keaka, Hawaiian Theater, Dance Studies, Performance Studies, Contemporary Dance

Dedicated in memory of my father, David Chung,  
to whom education was very important, and who provided me with an excellent education.

Dedicated with love and gratitude to my mother, Alice Chung,  
and my brother, Christopher Chung,  
who have always believed in me as a person, artist, and scholar,  
and who have stood by me throughout the process of graduate school  
and the creation of my MFA Thesis Project.

Dedicated with love and gratitude to my partner and friend, Charles Walker,  
for your love, patience, understanding, and support,  
and for standing by me during both the good times and the challenging times.

Dedicated in loving memory of my dance teacher and mentor,  
Betty Jones,  
with gratitude for all that you have taught me about dancing, performing, teaching, and life.

Dedicated with love and gratitude to my friend and collaborator, Peter Rockford Espiritu,  
whose artistic contributions helped to make my MFA Thesis Project possible,  
and whose love, friendship, shared understanding, and support throughout the creation process  
has made everything better.

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My MFA Thesis Project came to fruition because of the collaborative contributions of many artists. I am forever grateful to all the people who have generously given of their talents, of their time, and of themselves to bring *‘Ōhi‘a Lehua* to life. Thank you for joining me on this journey.

Thank you to my friend and colleague, Melisa Orozco Vargas, for sparking my interest in the beautiful and precious *‘ōhi‘a* lehua trees and their contemporary plight of Rapid *‘Ōhi‘a* Death that is currently causing so many *‘ōhi‘a* lehua trees to die. Thank you for being willing to share with me the play that you wrote, entitled *E aha ‘ia ana ka ‘ōhi‘a lehua?: What’s Happening to the ‘Ōhi‘a Lehua?* Your play is the foundation and inspiration for this work of choreography. Your story is beautifully written with many layers of knowledge woven into it. Your ability to tell a story in such an interesting and captivating way, challenges me to become a better storyteller.

I have immense gratitude for my friend of many years and my co-collaborator on this project, Peter Rockford Espiritu, who donated his time and artistic gifts to help make this project a reality. Thank you for selecting the traditional oli that provide the foundation for the contemporary story that we are sharing. Thank you for creating original and completely new oli, mele, and hula that help to tell this story. Thank you for performing live with the ensemble and for leading the hula sections of the piece with your beautiful chanting and percussive accompaniment. Thank you for being a guest artist for this production and for taking the time to

teach and nurture a new generation of talented dancers from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Thank you for being here for me throughout this process and for believing in me and my ability to tell this story, even when no one else did.

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In my artistic vision for *'Ōhi'a Lehua*, music is not just an accompaniment to the dancing. I believe that music and dance are of equal importance. I would like to express a special thank you my friends and colleagues Ron Perry and John Signor for generously sharing your original music with me for this project. Perry and Signor are each talented composers who uniquely capture the sounds and rhythms of Hawai'i in their musical compositions. I would also like to thank Uncle Calvin Hoe for being open to meet me. I treasure the wisdom and knowledge about 'ōhi'a lehua and ka'eke'eke that you shared with me. I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to talk with you and hope that I will be able to continue learning from you in the future

Thank you to my Thesis Committee for all your support throughout the creation of this project. Your suggestions and constructive criticism helped me to ask myself questions that ultimately improved both the choreography and the telling of this story. I greatly appreciate your kindness, understanding, and patience with me. Thank you, Kara Jhalak Miller, for your guidance through this entire process over the span of the past two years. Thank you for your wisdom and advice regarding all aspects of this project and especially regarding both the choreography and the projections, that were both such important aspects of *'Ōhi'a Lehua*. Thank you, Haili'ōpua Baker, for your advice regarding the hula, oli, mele, 'ōlelo Hawai'i, and how to best share this story with audience members of diverse backgrounds. Thank you also for sharing beautiful costumes from your past productions with our cast. Thank you, Betsy Fisher, for encouraging me to challenge myself as a choreographer. Your comments regarding the dancers' interpretation and execution of the choreography helped them to push themselves to a higher

level of performance. Your shared dedication and passion for ‘ōhi‘a lehua has helped me to continue to believe in the importance of telling this story.

Thank you to the performers: Hannah Archer, Madison Audette, Kylie Butts, Melissa Cabrera, Peter Rockford Espiritu, Keala Fung, Kawehionalani Goto, Chloe Groom, Lily Hi‘ilani Kim-Dela Cruz, Emma Majewski, Dulcinea Sabin, Tavehi Tafiti, and Reina Yamashita. I appreciate your dedication and commitment to this process and for working with me for many months to make this dream a reality. The contribution of your talents and your willingness to collaborate with me, has created a movement vocabulary that is fresh and unique to all of us. I encourage you to continue to grow as artists and to continue to follow your dreams.

I would like to express my appreciation to Keala Fung, a guest artist from Tau Dance Theater, who came to this project as an assistant to Mr. Espiritu. Thank you for your professionalism and dedication in learning these oli, mele, and hula and for helping to teach and coach the other dancers. Your energy and positive attitude brought so much light to our process.

I also want to express a special thank you to Lily Hi‘ilani Kim-Dela Cruz, for making time in your very busy performance and academic schedule to be a part of ‘*Ōhi‘a Lehua*. I have enjoyed being in Hana Keaka<sup>1</sup> classes with you and getting to know you during the past four years that I have been at UHM. It means so much to me that you were able to work things work out in your life so that you could be a part of this production. Thank you also to fellow MFA candidate, Ākea Kahikina, for being willing to communicate and to work cooperatively with

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<sup>1</sup> Hawaiian Theater classes taught by Kumu Haili‘ōpua Baker at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

me, to figure out how we could share the very talented Kim-Dela Cruz, who was in rehearsal for both of our MFA thesis projects at the same time.

I would like to express my gratitude to all of the talented designers, artists, administrators, and technicians who contributed to this project. Thank you, Rick Greaver for helping me to schedule rehearsal space for my cast over a period of nine months. I appreciate your kindness and patience with me through this process. Thank you, Michelle Bisbee for your artistic input and help with designing sets and props. Thank you, Joyce Kiks and Miles Bohas for contributing your artistic talents, thoughtfulness, and time to create the beautiful giant 'ōhi'a lehua blossoms that brought vibrant color and energy to the stage. Thank you, Becca Mahar for your beautiful lighting that highlighted the performers, created magical environments, and worked in unison with the projections. Thank you, Brian Shevelenko for helping with the sound and for providing microphones for the performers. Thank you also for coordinating all technical aspects of the show. Thank you Kekela Oku-Fernandez, for being such an excellent stage manager who treats others with professionalism and the true spirit of aloha. I especially appreciate that you took the time to study the rehearsal videos of *'Ōhi'a Lehua* to make sure that you knew all the cues.

Thank you to the photographers/videographers who generously shared their time and talents with me and the cast of *'Ōhi'a Lehua*. Christine Lamborn, thank you for your beautiful photographs that captured the dancers at their best, from the Kennedy Theatre publicity photo shoot and from the dress rehearsal shoot through. Greg Noir, thank you for the many times that you guided us to various outdoor locations to film for projections and for documentation

purposes. The video shoots and photo shoots that we did together created magical experiences for the dancers that they were fortunate to experience. Anne Selby, thank you for offering your professional skills, your experience, and your time, to film a performance of *'Ōhi'a Lehua*, so that we could have a high quality recording to document this project.

I was able to survive the challenging circumstances that arose during graduate school and my MFA Thesis Project, because of the love, support, kindness, and positive energy of my friends. Thank you to all the beautiful and talented graduate and undergraduate students of the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. I would like to express a special thank you to fellow Graduate Assistants, Angela Sebastian and Katelyn Wyatt, for all the experiences that we have shared together.

I have extreme gratitude for the three people who were my foundation and provided unconditional love and support during my time as a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa: my mom, my brother, and my partner, Charles. To my mother, Alice Chung, and my brother, Christopher Chung, thank you for always loving me and believing in me. You have supported me in so many ways. You have constantly remained positive and have always believed that I could receive my MFA degree. To my partner, Charles Walker, thank you for remaining by my side through the intense times and the challenging circumstances that arose because of graduate school. Thank you for being such a good listener and for your constant love, patience, wisdom, and understanding.

## ABSTRACT

For my MFA Dance (Performance and Choreography) Thesis, I created, directed, and choreographed a work of performance art entitled *‘Ōhi‘a Lehua*. In this live stage production, I tell a story that takes place in twenty-first century Hawai‘i, incorporating hula, oli, mele, contemporary dance, music, and video and still image projections. This story centers on a forest on Hawai‘i Island, whose healthy ‘ohi‘a lehua trees become infected with Rapid ‘Ōhi‘a Death (ROD). Two birds of the forest, ‘Apapane and ‘I‘iwi, become concerned when their beloved ‘ohi‘a lehua trees are suddenly and mysteriously dying. They seek out the goddesses Hi‘iaka and Pele and ask them to help to save the trees. Pele decides to send a huge lava flow to cover the infected forest and to cleanse the surrounding land. After Pele’s newly formed lava hardens, ‘ohi‘a lehua seedlings are the first new life to take root and grow, demonstrating their resilience. *‘Ōhi‘a Lehua* premiered at the Earle Ernst Lab Theatre at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, as part of the *Spring Footholds 2022* student concert, entitled *Co-Motion*. Performances took place on March 26th at 7:30 pm and March 27th at 2:00 pm and 7:30 pm. This document about my dance choreography and performance thesis begins with excerpts from my Thesis Proposal. The main body of this paper includes descriptions, observations, and analysis of the rehearsal process, the collaborative process with other artists, and the culminating performances. At the end of my paper, I include biographical information about myself, including my personal narrative, a description of my dance lineage, and a summary of my graduate studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>TIMELINE .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: DESCRIPTION OF MFA THESIS PROJECT: ‘ŌHI‘A LEHUA .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>PART ONE: EXCERPTS FROM MY ORIGINAL THESIS PROPOSAL.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>STATEMENT OF INTENTION.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>STATEMENT OF PURPOSE .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>ARTISTIC STATEMENT .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>MOVEMENT DESCRIPTION .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>CHOREOGRAPHY FROM THE NA‘AU .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>CASTING PROCESS.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>PART TWO: THE ACTUAL MFA THESIS PROJECT.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>SUMMARY OF MFA THESIS PROJECT .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>CAST OF CHARACTERS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>SEQUENCE OF SCENES .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>PART THREE: REFLECTION ON CREATIVE PROCESS AND.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>PRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>MY CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS FOR CREATING THE CONTEMPORARY DANCE CHOREOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON MY MFA THESIS PROJECT.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>REHEARSAL SCHEDULING FOR DANCERS.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>NUMBER OF DANCERS.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>DOCUMENTATION.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>PUBLICITY .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>EXPENSES.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>FUTURE PLANS TO RESTAGE ‘ŌHI‘A LEHUA.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: PRODUCTION DESIGN.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGN .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>COSTUME DESIGN.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>VIDEO PROJECTION DESIGN.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>LIGHTING DESIGN.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>SET DESIGN.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: PERSONAL RESEARCH AND REFLECTION.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>PERSONAL NARRATIVE.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>HIGHSCHOOL AND UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>MY DANCE LINEAGE .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>GRADUATE STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>REFLECTION ON MY INSPIRATION FOR THIS TOPIC .....</b>	<b>44</b>

**MY PERSONAL JOURNEY: RESEARCH LEADING TO THE CREATION OF A  
DANCE VERSION OF THE STORY OF ‘ŌHI‘A LEHUA ..... 46**

**WORKS CITED..... 51**

**APPENDIX..... 57**

## TIMELINE

Reach Out to Possible Collaborators in the Creation of this Project	June 2020
Begin Research: Music	June 2020
Discussion with John Signor about Possibly Composing Music	June 2020
Submit First Draft of Thesis Proposal to Thesis Committee Chairperson	June 2020
Left Hip Replacement Surgery	July 2020
Submit Second Draft of Thesis Proposal to Committee Chairperson	August 2020
Submit First Draft of Comprehensive Questions to Committee Chair	August 2020
Submit Second Draft of Comprehensive Questions to Committee Chair	October 2020
Circulate Comprehensive Exam Questions to Dance Faculty	October 2020
Submit Third Draft of Thesis Proposal to Committee Chairperson	November 2020
Circulation of Thesis Proposal to Committee	November 2020
First Meeting with Thesis Committee Chairperson	January 2021
Organize First Meeting with Thesis Committee	January 2021
Set Up Electronic Journal for Thesis Project	January 2021
Begin Workshopping Process on <i>Mist</i> Scene	January 2021
First Thesis Committee Meeting	February 2021
Organize Meeting/Presentation with Design Professors	March 2021
Contact Takumah Itoh: Search for Possible Composers for Project	March 2021
Invite Ka‘iukapu Baker to be Costume Designer for Project	April 2021
Send Out Emails to Potential Cast Members to Join Cast	April 2021
Meeting/Presentation with Design Faculty	April 2021
Written Comprehensive Exams	April 2021

Oral Defense of Comprehensive Exams	May 2021
Contact Nawāhine Lanzilotti About Composing Music for Project	May 2021
First Meeting with Peter Rockford Espiritu	May 2021
Send Out Second Round of Emails to Potential Cast Members	May 2021
Create Rehearsal Schedule for Summer and Fall Semester	May 2021
Contact Rick Greaver regarding Rehearsal Space for the Summer	May 2021
Discussion with John Signor About Using Already Composed Music	May 2021
Created First Draft of Ideas for Soundscape	May 2021
Sent First Draft of Ideas for Soundscape to Nawāhine Lanzilotti	May 2021
Set Up Summer Workshopping & Fall Rehearsals w/ Dancers	May 2021
Initial Meeting w/ Costume Designers: Ka‘iu Baker and Maile Speetjens	June 2021
Begin Workshopping/Rehearsal Process: Fungus Scene	June 2021
Second Meeting w/ Costume Designers: Ka‘iu Baker, Maile Speetjens, Peter Rockford Espiritu	June 2021
Meeting w/ Playwright Melisa Orozco Vargas	June 2021
Meetings w/ Peter Rockford Espiritu: Sequence of Scenes/Transitions	June 2021
Right Hip Replacement Surgery	29 June 2021
Four Week Break from Rehearsals Following Surgery	July 2021
Meetings w/ Peter Rockford Espiritu: Sequence of Scenes/Transitions	July 2021
Third Meeting w/ Costume Designers	July 2021
Emailed & Confirmed Claire Paul as Projection Designer	July 2021
Meeting w/ Richard Criley, Botanist	July 2021
Rehearsal Process Resumes Following Surgery	26 July 2021
Meeting w/ Peter Rockford Espiritu about Rehearsals w/ Hula Dancers	August 2021

UHM Dept. of Theatre & Dance Declares that Students Must Be Vaccinated to Attend Rehearsals and to Perform In-Person	August 2021
Received My First COVID-19 Vaccination	20 August 2021
Cast Member Chloe Groom Doesn't Want to Get Vaccinated	August 2021
Cast Member Tavehi Tafiti Doesn't Want to Get Vaccinated	August 2021
Canceled Rehearsals from 8/18/21 - 9/27/21 While Waiting to Process Both Vaccinations for Myself	Aug/Sept 2021
Meet and Brainstorm with Design Faculty	August 2021
Email Exchange w/ Rick Greaver & Maile Speetjens About Unvaccinated Dancers Remaining a Part of Project	September 2021
Cast Member Melissa Cabrera Doesn't Want to Get Vaccinated	September 2021
Peter Rockford Espiritu Starts Rehearsals w/ Hula Dancers	September 2021
Restart Rehearsals w/Contemporary Dancers	September 2021
Meeting w/ Michelle Bisbee About Sets & Props	October 2021
First Faculty Committee Viewing	29 November 2021
Dancer Francis Philip Vilar Drops Out of Project	November 2021
Meeting w/ Michelle Bisbee to Look at Possible Props	December 2021
Meeting w/ Peter Rockford Espiritu to Update Sequence of Scenes	December 2021
Meeting w/ Costume Designers and Peter Rockford Espiritu: Discuss Storyline Development & Casting of Characters	December 2021
Meeting w/ Costume Designers	January 2022
Individual Meetings w/ Unvaccinated Cast Members	January 2022
Dancer Sky Kupahu-Nakayama Drops Out of Project	January 2022
Second Faculty Committee Viewing	2 February 2022
Audition MFA Thesis Project for Spring 2022 <i>Footholds</i> Concert	8 February 2022

Filming Video for Projections	February/March 2022
Phone Meeting with Musician and Instrument Creator Calvin Hoe	March 2022
Third Faculty Committee Viewing	9 March 2022
Continue Rehearsal Process During Spring Break	14 - 18 March 2022
Spring Footholds Dance Concert: <i>CO-Motion</i>	25 - 27 March 2022
First Thesis Paper Draft Due to Committee Chair	April 2022
Thesis Paper Due to Committee	April 2022
Thesis Committee Final Meeting	14 April 2022
Last Day of Instruction Spring 2022	5 May 2022
Final Draft Thesis Paper Due	13 May 2022

## **CHAPTER 1: DESCRIPTION OF MFA THESIS PROJECT: ‘ŌHI‘A LEHUA**

In Chapter One of this paper, I describe my MFA Thesis Project, entitled ‘*Ōhi‘a Lehua*. In Chapter One: Part One, I will return to excerpts from my MFA Dance (Choreography and Performance) Thesis Proposal, written in 2020, to establish a starting point for explaining my initial inspiration and intentions for this project. In Chapter One: Part Two, I will describe the completed version of the project. In Chapter One: Part Three, I will reflect on my experiences in creating, directing, and choreographing my thesis project.

### **PART ONE: EXCERPTS FROM MY ORIGINAL THESIS PROPOSAL**

#### **STATEMENT OF INTENTION**

In fulfillment of the Thesis Concert requirement for the Masters of Fine Arts degree in Dance, at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM), I will be choreographing and directing a suite of dances with the working title of ‘*Ōhi‘a Lehua - A Cycle of Life* for twelve to twenty performing artists. This 30 - 50 minute dance piece is based on a short play written by Melisa Orozco Vargas, entitled *E aha ‘ia ana ka ‘ōhi‘a lehua?: What’s Happening to the ‘Ōhi‘a Lehua?* The performance will be presented at the Earle Ernst Lab Theatre at UHM as part of the *Footholds* Performance series in March 2022. This suite of dances will be a visually stimulating, abstract version of this story about a healthy and thriving ‘ōhi‘a lehua forest, which becomes infected by the invasive *ceratocystis huliokia* and *ceratocystis lukuohia*, the two fungi that have been identified as causing what is more commonly known as Rapid ‘Ōhi‘a Death (ROD). This project will include twelve sections that incorporate a minimum of fifteen minutes of original contemporary modern dance that I choreograph, plus additional guest artist choreography that

blends contemporary modern dance and hula, created by Peter Rockford Espiritu. Espiritu will assist me with finding appropriate oli and mele, and will also be a Hawaiian cultural consultant to the production. Playwright Melisa Orozco Vargas will be a consultant in all aspects of the production, including dance, music, acting and Hawaiian culture. My role will be to create, direct, and oversee all aspects of the production and to choreograph the contemporary modern dance sections.

My thesis committee members are from the Department of Theatre & Dance at UHM. My thesis committee members from the Department of Dance, Dr. Kara Jhalak Miller, and Dr. Elizabeth Fisher, will advise me regarding the contemporary modern dance choreography, staging, artistry, and media design. I will consult with and seek Hawaiian cultural and artistic advice from committee member Dr. Tammy Haili'opua Baker, the Department of Theatre faculty member who specializes in Hana Keaka or Hawaiian Theatre. Dr. Baker also excels in directing and playwriting, and I will seek guidance from her in these areas as well.

The music and soundscape will be original work created by composers who have a strong connection to and knowledge of Hawaiian music and culture. Ideally, I would like to have live musicians performing on stage with the dancers. I envision that in certain sections of the production, the dancers will play musical instruments and sometimes the musicians will be incorporating movement into their performance. The music chosen will feature Hawaiian instruments and hula implements, including the pahu, ipu heke, kala'au, ka'eke'eke, 'uli 'uli, pu'ili'ili, 'ili'ili, pu, and the ohe hano ihu. Ideally, I would like to invite Dr. John Signor, a musician, composer, and a professor of music from Leeward Community College, located in Pearl City, Hawai'i, to create original compositions for this dance performance. I will also contact Dr. Takuma Itoh, an Associate Professor of Music from the Music Department at UHM,

for recommendations regarding any student composers and musicians that might be interested in collaborating with me on this production. I am also interested in working with musician, musical instrument creator, and Hawaiian cultural practitioner Calvin Hoe, who has previously been an advisor for student projects for the Department of Theatre at UHM.

Video projections depicting various landscapes and natural lifeforms of Hawai'i will be a strong element of production design. Through the video projections, I hope to bring to the audience members sitting in the theater, a visual understanding of the beautiful outdoor environments of Hawai'i, where these scenes that make up the story take place. I also hope to bring to the audience a sensory understanding of what is experienced when given the opportunity to be outdoors in these breathtaking natural environments.

The main structure of the set will consist of scaffolding placed in the upstage area of the stage, creating various levels of height for the performers. Large pieces of white fabric will be hung on the scaffolding so that images can be projected on them. A second part of the set would be a nontraditional staircase with wide, deep steps, to allow for the performers to move through the performance space at different levels. The third major component of the stage would be a fallen tree trunk that would be strong enough for the dancers to dance on. Tree trunks, branches, and fresh greenery from the forest, including ferns, moss, 'ie'ie, and maile, could help to create the atmosphere and fragrance of the rainforest inside of the theater.

## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

In the telling of this story, I acknowledge both the spiritual realm and the earthly world. My first purpose is to honor and pay respect to the goddesses Pele, Hi'iaka, and Laka. It is also important for me to honor all of the ancestors that have come before us. I also want to honor the

‘aina, or the land and environments that make up our Hawaiian Islands and all life forms that share this earth with us.

My second purpose is to specifically bring attention to the importance of the ‘ōhi‘a lehua tree: to the ecosystem of the Hawaiian Islands; to Kanaka ‘Ōiwi people and to Kanaka ‘Ōiwi culture; to all of us that are fortunate enough to live in Hawai‘i. The ‘ōhi‘a lehua forests are a backbone of the forest and a vital part of sustaining the freshwater cycle of the tropical rainforests. The ‘ōhi‘a lehua trees also provide shelter and sustenance for many living creatures that inhabit the forests.

I hope that our performances of *‘Ōhi‘a Lehua* will bring awareness and inspiration to all people, to preserve our treasured ‘ōhi‘a lehua trees and to prevent them from becoming extinct. In 2010, the residents of Hawai‘i Island began noticing a strange phenomenon occurring to their beloved ‘ōhi‘a lehua trees, that had dominated the landscape for many centuries. In 2014, the ‘ōhi‘a lehua were diagnosed with infection from a fungus that appeared to be similar to *ceratocystis fimbriata* and that was responsible for causing Rapid ‘Ōhi‘a Death. Aerial surveys conducted of Hawai‘i Island in 2019, revealed that more than 175,000 acres of forests containing ‘ōhi‘a lehua trees showed symptoms of ROD. Currently, steps are being taken by concerned scientists and community members to help and save these beloved trees. We can all become involved and help the ‘ōhi‘a lehua trees by preventing the spread of ROD and by replanting new trees.

## **ARTISTIC STATEMENT**

Being born and raised in Hawai‘i affects my unique vision and voice as a choreographer and as an artist. I have lived in Hawai‘i for most of my life. Through creating *‘Ōhi‘a Lehua*, I

will examine how my respect and admiration for the Hawaiian culture merges with my love of contemporary dance.

I also believe in the power of collaboration in creating any work of performance art. In my role as Artistic Director of this project, I hope to weave together the talents of many individual artists who can equally contribute to a new, fresh, creative, and innovative original production. I hope to be able to find artists that will be willing to work with me collaboratively and cooperatively in this process.

## **MOVEMENT DESCRIPTION**

I have spent many years of my life studying with master teachers Betty Jones and Fritz Ludin and was also a former member of their *Dances We Dance* company. My choreography honors the teaching and legacy of Jones and Ludin and pays homage to my teachers' lineage. Both Jones and Ludin danced with American modern dance pioneers Doris Humphrey and José Arcadio Limón and are recognized nationally and internationally for their teaching of the Humphrey-Limón technique. My choreography reflects their teachings through what is instinctively and naturally remembered and spoken through my body. My choreography draws from the Humphrey-Limón movement vocabulary and includes important Humphrey-Limón philosophies such as: fall and recovery; drop and suspension; rebound; speaking clearly with the individual voice of each body part; attention to musicality and rhythm.

## **CHOREOGRAPHY FROM THE NA'AU**

The Hawaiian word na‘au, when defined in the Hawaiian dictionary, translates to mean “the small intestines of men or animals, which to Hawaiians is the seat of thought, of intellect, and the affections.” I believe that the choreography that I create should come from my na‘au, from the center of my being. I hope that the dancers will be performing from their na‘au. I hope that the choreography will inspire the audience to look inside of themselves and to search for what speaks deeply to their na‘au. I hope to provide the dancers and the audience with the opportunity to experience the choreography in a way that goes beyond visual sensation. I hope to connect them to something that is much deeper than the physical, to provide for them the opportunity to have a spiritual experience.

## **CASTING PROCESS**

I will cast performers for *‘Ōhi ‘a Lehua* by reaching out through individual invitations as opposed to holding an open audition. Ideally, I hope to work with performers who have an interest in learning about and sharing about the history, stories, and culture of Kanaka ‘Ōiwi. I hope to work with dancers who are open minded and enthusiastic about working through both improvisation and who have experience in learning choreography. I also hope to work with dancers who are willing to approach this project with humility and with a spiritual connection to the gods of Hawai‘i, to the forces of nature, to the land, and to all the living beings of the islands of Hawai‘i.

## **PART TWO: THE ACTUAL MFA THESIS PROJECT**

### **SUMMARY OF MFA THESIS PROJECT**

I presented *‘Ōhi‘a Lehua* as part of the Spring 2022 *Footholds* Student Choreography Concert, which was entitled *Co-Motion*. The performances took place at the Earle Ernst Lab Theatre at UHM, on Saturday, March 26th at 7:30 pm and Sunday, March 27th at 2:00 pm and 7:30 pm. The completed production time is approximately fifty minutes. The story consists of six main sections:

1. Prologue: Creation
2. The Living Forest
3. Mysterious Death of ‘Ōhi‘a Lehua Trees
4. Hulihia: Pele Sends a Lava Flow
5. Healing Rain
6. New Life; Finale: *He Ma‘i ‘Ōhi‘a*

Our cast for the stage production consisted of eleven members. There were three additional performers that appeared only in the projections.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

Hi‘iaka	Kawehionalani Goto
Halaulani	Keala Fung
Hoakalei	Dulcinea Sabin
Laka	Tavehi Tafiti
‘Apapane	Dulcinea Sabin
‘I‘iwi	Keala Fung
Pele	Lily Hi‘ilani Kim-Dela Cruz

Contemporary Dance Ensemble: Hannah Archer, Madison Audette, Kylie Butts, Holly Chung,  
Emma Majewski, Reina Yamashita

Hula Ensemble: Peter Rockford Espiritu, Keala Fung, Kawehionalani Goto, Dulcinea Sabin

Additional Performers Appearing Only in Projections: Melissa Cabrera, Chloe Groom, Tavehi  
Tafiti

## **SEQUENCE OF SCENES**

### **PROLOGUE: CREATION**

*O Wākea Noho iā Papahānaumoku* (Traditional Oli): Hula Ensemble

*Nā ‘Aumākua* (Traditional Oli): Keala Fung with Contemporary Dance Ensemble

*Kau Ka Hali‘a* (Traditional Oli): Kawehionalani Goto

### **SCENE 1 - THE LIVING FOREST**

*Noe I Ka Ulula‘au*

Choreography: Peter Rockford Espiritu

Mele composed by: Peter Rockford Espiritu

Halaulani - Keala Fung

Hi‘iaka – Kawehionalani Goto

Hoakalei – Dulcinea Sabin

Laka (in projection) – Tavehi Tafiti

Accompanied by Peter Rockford Espiritu and Lily Hi‘ilani Kim-Dela Cruz

***Nā Kumula‘au***

Choreography and Musical Composition: Holly Chung with Hannah Archer, Madison Audette, and Kylie Butts

Dancers: Hannah Archer, Madison Audette, Kylie Butts, Holly Chung

This scene opens at sunrise, revealing a forest of majestic ‘ōhi‘a lehua trees that have been alive for hundreds of years. The trees communicate with one another, playing an original percussive composition using ka‘eke‘eke<sup>2</sup> and kala‘au<sup>3</sup>.

***Mist***

Choreography: Holly Chung with Emma Majewski and Reina Yamashita

Music: *Kai Pi‘i* from the *WAVES* Sountrack, composed by Ron Perry

Dancers: Emma Majewski and Reina Yamashita

***Nā Manu and Hi‘iaka:***

***Ke Ao Nani***

Choreography: Peter Rockford Espiritu

Music: Mary Kawena Pukui

Hi‘iaka: Kawehionalani Goto

***Nā Manu Le‘a***

Choreography: Peter Rockford Espiritu

Music: Peter Rockford Espiritu

‘Apapane: Dulcinea Sabin

‘I‘iwi: Keala Fung

Hi‘iaka: Kawehionalani Goto

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<sup>2</sup> Bamboo drums of different lengths and tones.

<sup>3</sup> Wooden sticks of different lengths and tones.

Vocal Soloist: Lily Hi'ilani Kim-Dela Cruz

Musical Accompaniment: Peter Rockford Espiritu

## **SCENE 2 – MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF 'ŌHI'A LEHUA TREES**

Projection: *Foreign Fungi Arrive in the Forest*

Winds bring *Ceratocystis Huliohia* and *Ceratocystis Lukuohia* to the Hawaiian rainforest.

These foreign fungi block of the trees' internal water supply, causing them to suddenly wilt and die.

### ***Foreign Invasion***

Choreography: Holly Chung with Hannah Archer, Madison Audette, Kylie Butts, Chloe

Groom, Emma Majewski, Dulcinea Sabin, Tavehi Tafiti, Francis Philip Vilar, Reina

Yamashita

Music: edited by Holly Chung

Music Compilation:

*Plantation* (from the *'Ulalena* Soundtrack) - composed by Michel Cusson and

Luc Boivin

*Kulu Wai* (from the *WAVES* Soundtrack) - composed by Ron Perry

*Kai Pi'i* (from the *WAVES* Soundtrack) - composed by Ron Perry

*8 Dio Water Percussion: Waterdrops and Watercymbals* - composed by Troels Foelmann

*8 Dio Water Percussion: Water Human Beat Boxing* - composed by Troels Foelmann

Dancers: Hannah Archer, Madison Audette, Kylie Butts, Emma Majewski, Reina

Yamashita

Additional Dancers in Projection: Chloe Groom, Dulcinea Sabin, Tavehi Tafiti

Sneaking in through a lesion in the bark of an ‘ōhi‘a lehua tree, a band of the ceratocystis fungi invade the interior of the tree. The ceratocystis fungi indulge in the water that they find in the interior of the tree and become intoxicated from drinking it. They have a wild, highly energized party, vandalizing and destroying the tree’s interior.

Projection: *‘Apapane and ‘I‘iwi Ask Hi‘iaka to Save the ‘Ōhi‘a Lehua Trees*

‘Apapane and ‘I‘iwi, concerned for their dying ‘ōhi‘a lehua trees, seek out the goddess Hi‘iaka, to ask for her help in saving their forest.

Projection: *Hi‘iaka Asks Her Sister Pele for Her Help*

Projection: *Newsreel*: Footage of Queen Liliu‘okalani, Haunani Kay Trask, Mauna Kea, Red Hill

### **SCENE 3 – HULIHIA: PELE SENDS A LAVA FLOW**

#### ***Hulihia Ta Motu***

Choreography: Peter Rockford Espiritu

Music Composed by: Peter Rockford Espiritu

Pele: Lily Hi‘ilani Kim-Dela Cruz

Hula Ensemble: Keala Fung, Kawehionalani Goto, Dulcinea Sabin

Additional Hula Dancers in Projection: Melissa Cabrera, Tavehi Tafiti

Musical Accompaniment: Peter Rockford Espiritu

Contemporary Dance Ensemble: Hannah Archer, Madison Audette, Kylie Butts, Emma Majewski, Reina Yamashita

With both anger and sadness in her heart, Pele sends a lava flow to cover the infected trees and the cleanse all of the land. Both the hula dancers and the contemporary dancers represent the flowing lava and are an extension of Pele.

Projection: *‘Apapane and ‘I‘iwi*

#### **SCENE 4 – HEALING RAIN**

Projection: *Rain Falls on Newly Formed Lava*

#### **SCENE 5 - NEW LIFE**

*‘O kēia ‘u‘uku e nui ana (Sprouts)*

This scene opens to reveal bodies of the contemporary dancers lying on the stage, representing seeds of new ‘ōhi‘a lehua plants, scattered by the wind across Pele’s newly formed lava. Taking root in the tough surface of the lava, the new ‘ōhi‘a lehua sprouts struggle to grow, reaching for the sunlight, and demonstrating their resilience. Hula dancers perform a ritual of planting ‘ōhia lehua saplings in the forest.

#### **SCENE 6 – HE MA‘I ‘ŌHI‘A**

In the finale sequence, hula dancers and contemporary dancers perform on stage together, in a dance number choreographed by guest artist Espiritu, to celebrate the ‘ōhi‘a lehua and to summarize the story that has been told.

## **PART THREE: REFLECTION ON CREATIVE PROCESS AND PRODUCTION**

## **MY CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS FOR CREATING THE CONTEMPORARY DANCE CHOREOGRAPHY**

I created the contemporary dance choreography for *'Ōhi 'a Lehua* using several different processes. I needed my dancers to be open minded and to be open to working with different choreographic processes. If they did not start out this way, I challenged them to become open over the eight months of our rehearsal process.

We started with a workshop setting, where I gave the dancers ideas, images, words, theater games, and somatic writing exercises to improvise with. This helped me to see how they move naturally and to see what movements are comfortable to their bodies. Sometimes my choreography consisted of original movement phrases that I created and then staged on the dancers' bodies. However, I am open to the possibility that the choreography I create will not always work and will change it to fit the talents and abilities of the dancers.

Sometimes the dancers and I experiment over and over again with material and try several different versions of choreography and to see what works visually. Sometimes, I ask the dancers to each create their own movement phrase. I then arrange and weave these movement phrases together, as an visual artist would do when creating a collage. In this situation, the dancers and I work collaboratively to create a complete work of choreography. I also experimented with using the process of chance, as used by Merce Cunningham in his work. This process is new to me, and I took the chance of embracing it in certain sections of the dance, with the help of the dancers.

## **THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON MY MFA THESIS PROJECT**

When I originally dreamed up this project in the Spring Semester of 2019, I had no idea that our world was to become affected by a worldwide pandemic that would upend my MFA Thesis production plans. The COVID-19 pandemic began to seriously impact the world in March 2020. For dancers enrolled in the Dance Program at UHM at this time, this meant that in-person dance classes, rehearsals, and performances were not allowed and could only be held through Zoom. As a solution to the challenges of the pandemic, many dance students created dance films that were solo works. Dance films of larger groups of people could be created by editing together video of individual dancers to create a whole piece. Another option was to create a site specific work or a dance film in an outdoor setting.

I waited until June 2021 to start the workshopping process and rehearsals for my Thesis Project. This was the first time since March 2020 that the UHM Department of Theatre and Dance allowed students and dancers to rehearse together in the same room. Continuing to be concerned about not spreading COVID-19 among the dancers, UHM regulations required that the dancers maintain a distance of six feet apart from one another. I had to choreograph and run rehearsals with this in mind. Dancers could not stand in close proximity to one another, affecting the visual appearance of formations and spacing. Partnering and touching were not allowed. The dancers were also required to wear protective surgical masks.

In August 2021, the Department of Theatre and Dance at UHM made a decision requiring all dancers and actors attending in person rehearsals and performing on stage to receive two vaccinations. Exemption from being vaccinated through testing was not an acceptable alternative for the Department of Theatre & Dance. Some of the dancers that I had cast did not want to be

vaccinated. I was reluctantly given permission by the Department of Theatre and Dance to conduct rehearsals with these individuals through Zoom.

I planned to include the unvaccinated dancers in the project by filming them for the video projections. I planned to film them by myself and to film them individually. The vaccinated dancers felt badly for the unvaccinated dancers, because they had to learn the choreography through Zoom, which is a more challenging way to learn choreography, and also because they could not be a part of the in-person rehearsal process. In February and March of 2022, when we filmed the unvaccinated dancers for the projections, many of the vaccinated dancers volunteered to attend the video shoots with the unvaccinated dancers, so that they could help and support them.

For the performances at the Earle Ernst Lab Theatre in March 2022, many rules regarding social distancing and wearing masks continued to be enforced: vaccinated dancers to be spaced far enough apart to meet regulations; partnering and touching were not allowed; masks were incorporated into the costume design. In March 2022, the Department of Theatre and Dance did make the choice to switch from live streamed performances with no audience, to having the audiences attend the performances in person. Ironically, on Saturday, March 26th, 2022, the opening night of our show, a change to COVID-19 regulations by the City and County of Honolulu, and by UHM, made it possible for unvaccinated people to attend public performances without having to show proof of vaccination.

## **REHEARSAL SCHEDULING FOR DANCERS**

In June 2021, I started a one month workshoping process on the *Fungus* section with the contemporary dancers. I initially proposed meeting three times a week since this was their

summer break, but the dancers preferred to meet twice a week. At the end of June, we took a one month break during which time I had a hip replacement surgery and took some time off to heal from this.

I resumed rehearsals with the contemporary dancers at the end of July 2021. However, we were forced to take another one month break when UHM's Department of Theatre and Dance made it mandatory for performers to receive both vaccinations for COVID-19 in order to attend in person rehearsals. Dancers who had not yet received their vaccinations, including myself, needed to schedule their shots, followed by a two week period after the second vaccination.

In September 2021, the hula dancers began once a week rehearsals with *Espiritu* and myself. I also resumed twice weekly rehearsals with the contemporary dancers on the *Fungus* section at this time. In October 2021, I also began working on the *Mist* section with dancers Emma Majewski and Reina Yamashita. In January 2022, we added an additional weekly rehearsal for the contemporary dancers to work with *Espiritu* and to work on sections where both contemporary dancers and hula dancers would be on stage at the same time. In February and March 2022, we additionally began filming for the projections.

Throughout the rehearsal process with the contemporary dancers, it remained important to me to make sure we did conditioning and that we warmed up thoroughly before we started rehearsing. This took a lot of our rehearsal time, but I feel rewarded that none of the dancers in this project became injured as a result of rehearsing and performing in this piece. I feel that the warm ups also helped to unify the dancers as a cohesive group.

## **NUMBER OF DANCERS**

I initially hoped to form a cast of twelve to twenty performing artists. Due to COVID-19 Physical Distancing regulations, limiting the number of dancers that we could have on stage at one time, I ended up working with a smaller cast than I had initially envisioned. Our cast consisted of eleven people performing live on stage. Three unvaccinated dancers continued the rehearsal process with us through Zoom and appeared only in the video projections. I had several performers that dropped out of the process along the way for various personal reasons, and I chose not to replace them.

## **DOCUMENTATION**

Utilizing Dance and Performance Studies Practice as Research (PaR) Methodologies, I created an electronic journal to document my artistic process. The electronic journal includes written documentation of the events that made up the everyday workings of my MFA Thesis project. I also included commentary on what worked, what didn't work, what needed to change, what the growth process was for myself and for the dancers involved in the project, and how the collaborative process was with all other artists involved. I also documented the rehearsal process through still photography, video footage, recordings of Zoom rehearsals, photo shoots, and video shoots. Anne Selby, a local professional videographer, filmed wide shot documentation of our matinee performance on Sunday, March 27th, using a two camera shoot from different angles. The link to Selby's video of this performance is in the Appendix of this document.

## **PUBLICITY**

The publicity campaign for our student *Footholds* concert, entitled *Co-Motion*, launched in January 2022. All of the student choreographers whose work was featured in *Co-Motion*, were given public relations support by Kennedy Theatre’s team of Jessica Jacob and Christine Lamborn. *Footholds* faculty directors Betsy Fisher and Lorenzo Perillo also provided direction and guidance during our publicity photo shoot.

## **EXPENSES**

Costumes (mostly provided by Costume Shop, Haili‘ōpua Baker, Peter Rockford Espiritu)	\$200.00
Musical Instruments: built or donated	0.00
Props: Supplies to Create Giant ‘Ōhi‘a Lehua Blossoms	\$200.00
Projectors	0.00
Stock Footage for Projections (free footage found by Claire Paul)	0.00
Videographer/Photographer fee for Greg Noir	\$300.00
Snacks for Dancers	\$2000.00

## **WISHLIST**

Additional Videographer/Photographer Fee for Greg Noir	\$700.00
Video Documentation/Editing Fee for Anne Selby	\$1000.00
Honorarium for Guest Artists	\$2000.00

## **FUTURE PLANS TO RESTAGE ‘ŌHI‘A LEHUA**

This version of *‘Ōhi‘a Lehua* is only the beginning of a longer term project. I plan to continue to work with Espiritu to create an improved, further developed version of this project. I also plan to continue writing about on my role as an artistic director, choreographer, and collaborator with Espiritu and other artists in the production, in a future article for publication

## CHAPTER 2: PRODUCTION DESIGN

### MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGN

Most of the music that I selected for *‘Ōhi‘a Lehua* was written by two composers who have a strong connection to Hawaiian music and culture, my friends and colleagues, Ron Perry and John Signor. Espiritu generously shared with me music created by Perry and Signor, that had originally been written for several of his past productions. Additionally, two pieces of music were selected from the *‘Ulalena*<sup>4</sup> soundtrack, composed by Luc Boivin and Michel Cusson. While Boivin and Cusson are from Montreal, Canada, they spent time in Hawai‘i researching and studying with Kanaka ‘Ōiwi musicians who specialize in composing and performing Hawaiian music. Espiritu and I were also blessed to have the opportunity to receive advice regarding the ka‘eke‘eke, or bamboo drums, from musician, musical instrument creator, and Hawaiian cultural practitioner, Calvin Hoe.

### COSTUME DESIGN

The costumes were a very important component of *‘Ōhi‘a Lehua*. A large and beautiful collection of costumes for the hula and contemporary dancers and for the featured characters, was created by student costume designer, Kaneikoliakawahineika‘iukapu Baker. The costumes were an important visual element that helped to tell the story and also enhanced the dancers’ movement. Baker’s indepth understanding of of Kanaka ‘Ōiwi history, language, culture, stories,

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<sup>4</sup> *‘Ulalena* was a long running show, performed in Lahaina, Maui, that shared the stories, history, and culture of Hawai‘i and the Hawaiian people. I was a cast member of this show for ten years.

and knowledge, as well as her talents as a visual and performing artist, all contribute to her being the perfect choice to be the costume designer for this project.

## **VIDEO PROJECTION DESIGN**

Video projections, created by MFA lighting design candidate, Claire Paul, were another very important part of the production. The projections were key to telling our story and also brought the natural environments of Hawai‘i into the theater for the audience. Video footage of the dancers on location in natural environments of O‘ahu, were filmed by professional videographer Greg Noir and myself. I also filmed the performers acting out scenes that were important to telling the story, against a green screen that was put up in the Earle Ernst Lab Theatre. Paul edited the green screen footage together with beautiful stock footage to create videos for projection. Throughout the production, text was projected onto the upstage scrim, to help to tell the story of *‘Ōhi‘a Lehua*. We also projected text of ‘ōlelo no‘eau<sup>5</sup> that referred specifically to ‘ōhi‘a lehua throughout the show.

## **LIGHTING DESIGN**

The Lighting Designer for *‘Ōhi‘a Lehua* was MFA lighting design candidate Rebecca Mahar. She created beautiful lighting for the production that helped to sculpt the bodies of the dancers and props on stage. Her lighting also worked well in cooperation with Claire Paul’s projections.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Ōlelo no‘eau are beautiful, poetic, and thoughtful Hawaiian proverbs and words of wisdom that have been passed on from generation to generation.

## **SET DESIGN**

Michelle Bisbee, our professor of Set Design and Props, made time for meetings and to advise me on sets and props. Our set was quite minimal. We had a small platform, in the shape of a half circle, placed upstage center, for Espiritu and a large pahu drum. Bisbee provided the lava rocks for the *Nā 'Aumākua* oli and designed the giant 'ōhi'a lehua blossoms that were created from foam pool noodles. The giant 'ōhi'a lehua flowers were created by the team of artists Joyce Kiks and Miles Bohas.

## CHAPTER 3: PERSONAL RESEARCH AND REFLECTION

### PERSONAL NARRATIVE

My name is Holly Mariko Chung. I was born and grew up in Kane‘ohe, O‘ahu. I have always considered Hawai‘i to be my home. I am the third generation of my family to live in Hawai‘i. I am one of many settler colonizers that inhabit the Hawaiian Islands in the twenty-first century.

My grandparents immigrated to Hawai‘i at the beginning of the twentieth century to work as laborers in the sugarcane plantations. My paternal grandparents came from South Korea and my maternal grandparents came from Okinawa. They came to Hawai‘i seeking a better life for themselves and for future generations of their family. They lived difficult lives. They worked very hard, were poor for most of their lives, and could barely speak or understand English. Both of my parents come from very large families and have many siblings. They were both the first in their families to receive college educations and degrees, which they received from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

As a child growing up in Hawai‘i, I was brought up to be as American as possible. I wanted to fit into this environment. My parents’ cultures were not a significant part of my upbringing. I think of myself as a person who is extremely blessed to grow up and live within the multicultural diversity of Hawai‘i. I identify most strongly as a person born and raised in the Hawaiian Islands. I have a great love, respect, and reverence for Kanaka ‘Ōiwi who are the original inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands and to whom these islands rightfully belong. I have a great love, respect, and reverence for all aspects of Kanaka ‘Ōiwi ways of thinking and perceiving the world. I have a love and feel a connection to the ‘āina, or the land. Growing up in

Hawai‘i, I was taught about Hawaiian gods and goddesses. Learning about the history of Kanaka ‘Ōiwi and about many different aspects of Kanaka ‘Ōiwi culture was interwoven with my western based education.

As an Asian American settler colonizer of the Hawaiian Islands, I humbly hope that it is okay that I feel inspired to tell the stories and the history of Kanaka ‘Ōiwi and of these islands. I am grateful to have been born in Hawai‘i, to have grown up here, and to be able to continue to live in Hawai‘i. It is important for me to show my respect and love for these islands, for the gods and goddesses that are revered throughout the islands, for Kanaka ‘Ōiwi and for their ancestors, for the ecosystem of the Hawaiian Islands, and for all the living beings that inhabit these islands.

## **HIGHSCHOOL AND UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION**

Growing up in Hawai‘i, I attended Punahou School for thirteen years, from kindergarten through the twelfth grade. My undergraduate studies began at Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, Washington. I completed my undergraduate education at the George Washington University (GWU) in Washington, D.C., where I received a B.A. in Political Science. Upon completing my undergraduate degree, I moved to New York to live, work, and dance, which is something that I had always dreamed of.

## **MY DANCE LINEAGE**

Growing up in Hawai‘i, I actively participated in classes in ballet, jazz, hula, and theatre. I studied the piano and the flute. I enjoyed all these classes but did not excel in any of these forms of performance art. As an undergraduate student, I was introduced to modern dance

through summer classes at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. I took a summer intensive with Edward Akio Taketa, who was originally from Hilo, Hawai‘i, and who danced professionally for the Murray Louis Company in New York. Because of his dance classes and his incredible dancing, I became especially inspired to study modern dance. At GWU, my professors supported and encouraged me to take dance classes, to perform in the university’s concerts, and to perform with choreographers in the Washington, D.C. community.

After completing my undergraduate studies in Washington, D.C., I moved to New York to live and to start a career in the Public Relations Industry. However, I missed dancing very much. I took advantage of exploring the wide assortment of dance classes available to me in New York. I initially focused my dance studies at the Alvin Ailey American School of Dance and then went on to study with the Erick Hawkins Company. After falling in love with the classes with Erick Hawkins and his company members, I decided to leave my Public Relations career and take a job waiting tables, so that I could focus on dance.

Four years later, I returned to Hawai‘i. I began studying with Betty Jones, who was a long-time company member and muse for innovative twentieth century choreographer, José Limón. Jones also had a close relationship to second generation American Dance pioneer Doris Humphrey, who was one of Limón’s teachers and the original Artistic Director and a choreographer for Limón’s Company. Jones and her husband, Fritz Ludin, became my mentors. I danced for their repertory company, *Dances We Dance*, for four years. Jones is also the person who encouraged me to start teaching dance. Today, my artistry as a modern dancer in performance and teaching, is a reflection of many years of studying with Jones and Ludin.

Through my studies and performing with Jones and Ludin, I met fellow dancer and choreographer, Peter Rockford Espiritu. I began working with him on several freelance projects

that he choreographed. When Espiritu decided to start his own dance company, Tau Dance Theater, he invited me to become a charter member of the original company. Since that time, Espiritu has become recognized for his work that fuses ballet, Humphrey-Limón based modern dance technique, and hula. Because Espiritu has studied and performed all these forms for many years at professional level, I believe that he is one of the few individuals who is qualified to choreograph a fusion of ballet, modern dance, and hula.

In 2001, I joined the cast of a show on Maui called *'Ulalena* and ended up performing in this show for ten years. *'Ulalena* shared the history and stories of the Hawaiian people through theater, hula, oli (chant), mele (song), puppetry, modern dance, and aerial dance. The original soundtrack, performed by live musicians, featured Hawaiian instruments and percussion from many different cultures from around the world. It featured the gods and goddesses of the Hawaiian pantheon including Pele, Maui, Hina, Kamapua'a, and Kāmohoali'i. Hāloa, the kalo, or taro plant, the staple food of the Hawaiian people, is also one of its featured characters of the show. Important moments of Hawaiian history, including scenes about the ali'i or Kanaka 'Ōiwi royalty, were woven into its storyline. *'Ulalena* also demonstrated aspects of everyday Kanaka 'Ōiwi life, such as pounding kalo into poi for food or beating the bark of the wauke or paper mulberry tree, to create kapa or cloth.

The show was created and directed by ARRA Montreal, a team of artists and designers from Montreal who had all worked with Cirque du Soleil during their careers. These artists had done a lot of research and had sought out the help and knowledge of Hawaiian cultural consultants including: Keola Beamer, Nona Beamer, Oliver Dukelow, Valerie Dukelow, O'Brien Eselu, Calvin Hoe, Nancy King Holt, Frank Kahala, George Kahumoku, Nalani Kanaka'ole, Charles Kaupu, Lyons Naone III, Hokulani Holt Padilla, Dr. Roger Rose, Dr. Kalena Silva, Leon

Sterling, and Kaliko Trapp. While *'Ulalena* was created with the intention of bringing commercial entertainment that was not a lu'au to the island of Maui, it became a show that was well loved by the local residents of Maui. Many adults and children of Hawai'i were educated by and inspired by this production that told their stories and their history.

I performed the soloist roles of Hina and Kalo and was a troupe dancer. This show really changed my life. While I had always enjoyed learning about Kanaka 'Ōiwi history and culture as a young person growing up on O'ahu, through this experience I gained a passion to learn more about Kanaka 'Ōiwi history and culture. I also had the opportunity to meet, work with, and become friends with, many talented local artists through this show.

I feel fortunate to have had to have the opportunity to work with and perform for Tau Dance Theatre and *'Ulalena* during my professional performing career in Hawai'i. These collective experiences have inspired me to create dance that reflects the beauty and spirituality of the Hawaiian Islands and all of the beings that inhabit these islands. I am especially inspired by a small group of multi-talented dance artists: Hokulani Holt Padilla and Nākinimakalehua; the descendants of Edith Kanaka'ole, who perpetuate her legacy through Hālau o Kekuhi; and Peter Rockford Espiritu and Tau Dance Theater. I admire their creative and unique theatrical productions that fuse hula, oli, mele, and other Kanaka 'Ōiwi cultural arts with Western theater arts, Western dance forms, and modern technology. I hope to follow in their footsteps and create artistic works of performance art, using my own unique artistic voice. As an artist, I will do my best to do this in a humble, honest, and respectful way.

**GRADUATE STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA**

I am currently a graduate student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, with a focus on Dance Performance and Choreography. I have learned so much from and have so much gratitude for the faculty from the Department of Dance at UHM who have contributed to my graduate school education: Gregg Lizenbery; Dr. Elizabeth Fisher; Dr. Kara Jhalak Miller; Amy Schiffner; Peiling Kao; Dr. Lorenzo Perillo. I have also enjoyed learning from all of the many talented and knowledgeable lecturers that I have gotten to study with during the past four years, with special thanks to Marcie Munnerlyn, Yukie Shiroma, and Desiree Quintero.

In addition to my studies in dance, I feel fortunate to have had the experience to study Hana Keaka or Hawaiian Theatre with Dr. Tammy Haili‘ōpua Baker. Through Baker’s own studies as an undergraduate and graduate student in theatre at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, and her own personal desire to produce indigenous Hawaiian Theater, she discovered the lack of representation of Hawai‘i in the curriculum and in the productions, and the need to create new and original work. In 1995, she co-founded a group called Ka Hālau Hanakeaka, which exemplifies the practices or modern-day Hana Keaka, or Hawaiian language theatre. She takes on the roles of playwright, director, and performer in the troupe. As a result of many years of dedication to teaching Hawaiian Language and Theatre at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, she created the Hawaiian Theatre Master of Fine Arts degree, which was approved by the University Graduate Council in the Fall semester of 2014.

In her doctoral dissertation entitled *The Development and Function of Hana Keaka (Hawaiian Medium Theatre) A Tool for Empowering Kanaka Maoli Consciousness*, she documents the history and practice of Hana Keaka from the past, long before contact with the western and outside world, and looks at how it has resurfaced, grown, and developed in our modern times. Through her understanding of the ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language), Baker is

able to draw her research from the great wealth of knowledge of the Hawaiian language newspapers that were published from 1834 - 1948 (Baker, 2018, p. 136). While it is impossible to summarize her work in a brief statement, this quote from her dissertation is helpful in explaining her work and how it inspires others.

The arts have promoted Hawaiian language, elevated Hawaiian culture, language and spirituality. Performing arts like hana keaka assert a Kanaka Maoli worldview through the medium of 'Ōlelo Hawai'i while reaffirming Kanaka Maoli consciousness . . . This study proves how hana keaka is being used as a tool to Promote Kanaka Maoli perspectives, to empower Kanaka Maoli identity, and to Reinforce Kanaka Maoli consciousness (Baker, 2018, p.i.).

Through her research she has determined four kūkulu or pillars that are fundamental for hana keaka: mo'olelo (storytelling), kū'auhau (genealogies), hana noeau (art forms), and 'ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian language). Each of these is a necessary element in creating Hana Keaka and Hana Keaka Hula.

The third basic pillar, or Hana No'eau is the collective foundation that includes the various forms of performing arts that exist in the Kanaka Maoli repertoire (2018, p. 345). Baker explains that the phrase hana no'eau is often used to refer to the visual arts. However, she challenges this definition and suggests that it should be used to include Hawaiian performing art genres as well. Baker classifies eight major genres of performance: pule (prayer and incantations), oli (chant), mele (poetry and song), ha'a (sacred ritual dance), hula (dance), hula ki'i (image dancing or puppetry), kākā'ōlelo (oratory or the orator), and ha'i mo'ōlelo (storytelling) (2018, p. 345).

During the time that I have been a graduate student at UHM, I have taken several classes with Baker in which I learned a lot and that deeply affected me: THEA 424 - Hawaiian Acting Workshop (Spring 2019); THEA 468 - Drama and Theatre of Hawai'i (Fall 2019); THEA 478 - Hula Ki'i: Hawaiian Puppetry/Image Dancing (Spring 2021). My professional performing experience with Tau Dance Theatre and as a cast member of *'Ulalena* made me feel immediately connected to Baker's work, research, and teachings. I appreciate and admire Baker's goals in wanting to share Hana Keaka with students and people across the state of Hawai'i. I feel that through being a part of *Tau Dance Theatre* and *'Ulalena*, I have been given the opportunity to live the experience of this unique style of theatre as a part of my everyday life. I hope to share my own experiences to help to educate and inspire others.

## **REFLECTION ON MY INSPIRATION FOR THIS TOPIC**

During my first semester in the Graduate Program in Dance at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, in Fall 2018, I was enrolled in DNCE 651: Dance Research Seminar, with Dr. Kara Jhalak Miller. At this time, I started to research my contemporary dance lineage with research into the creative process of a choreographer by looking at my modern dance training practices before coming to UHM. My contemporary dance studies had been based on the teachings and choreography of Doris Humphrey and Jose Limón, as taught by Betty Jones and Fritz Ludin.

In Dr. Miller's class, we explored improvisational movement and writing techniques to open our creativity within the fields of dance scholarship. I wrote a few papers that began to explore how Hawai'i affects and influences my training and artistic vision. I was born in Hawai'i and had lived here for most of my life. I wanted to examine how contemporary modern dance

could be fused with elements of the Hawaiian culture, language, spirituality, and philosophy. One way I wanted to do this was to connect to my professional experience performing with Peter Rockford Espiritu's Tau Dance Theater and with ARRA Montréal's production of *'Ulalena*. I also wanted to incorporate video projections that show the uniqueness and beauty of the Hawaiian Islands with my choreography. A research paper for this class, entitled *Na'au*, was focused on Dance and Performance Studies approaches to sharing oral history and documenting dance training through Performance and Practice as Research Methodologies.

During the Spring Semester 2019, I took a class entitled THEA 424: Hawaiian Acting Workshop with Dr. Tammy Haili'ōpua Baker. For the final projects for this class, we did a Ho'ike (a cultural presentation to show or display Hawaiian music, hula, and song), or Hana Keaka (Hawaiian Theatre) Acting Showcase, presenting theatre scenes in small groups or as individuals. Melisa Orozco Vargas, who was at this time an MFA candidate in Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA), presented a video that gave a behind-the-scenes look at a short play that she had written and directed entitled *E aha 'ia ana ka 'ōhi'a lehua?: What's Happening to the 'Ōhi'a Lehua?* For her project she had taught and guided first grade students at Ke Kula 'o Ānuenue, a Hawaiian immersion school located in Palolo Valley, Honolulu, 'Ō'ahu, where students only speak in the Hawaiian language, to be the performers of her play.

During a five week long arts integrated workshop, she taught the young students about the importance of the 'ōhi'a lehua trees as an important water source for all other life in the forest and about the living creatures of the forest that depend on the 'ōhi'a lehua for shelter and for food. She also educated the students on the current plight of the 'ōhi'a lehua trees, due to the Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death. Orozco Vargas created a beautiful story centered on a family of 'ōhi'a lehua trees that make up the tropical rainforest. They are loved by all the creatures of the forest,

including the native birds, the ‘apapane and the ‘i‘iwi, and the kāhuli, or Hawaiian tree snail. When the trees start dying from a mysterious disease, the creatures of the forest go to Pele and ask her for her help. Pele creates a devastating lava flow that covers the dying rainforest. However, through the destruction and devastation, the resilient ‘ōhi‘a lehua is one of the first forms of life to survive and find new life in the newly formed lava fields.

I was immediately drawn to Orozco Vargas presentation of her play. I loved both the music and the movement that she taught the students. I also liked the story that she created and the idea that from death and destruction comes new life. I asked for her permission to observe and film some of her class sessions with the students. I also filmed the young students’ final event in May 2019, where they shared their Hawaiian Theatre workshopping experience with their parents and other family members. Family members joined the students on the floor of the Ke Kula ‘o Ānuenue cafeteria, and everyone explored the theatre, dance, and music improvisations about ‘ōhi‘a lehua together.

## **MY PERSONAL JOURNEY: RESEARCH LEADING TO THE CREATION OF A DANCE VERSION OF THE STORY OF ‘ŌHI‘A LEHUA**

My MFA Dance (Performance and Choreography) Thesis Concert is the culmination of three years of research and rehearsal process. This began during the Spring 2019 semester, when I asked Orozco Vargas for her permission to create a short dance/film, based on her play. At this time I was exploring and developing my screendance choreography, filming, and video editing skills, in DNCE 362 Visual Media for Dance, and DNCE 661 Advanced Problems in Movement Analysis (now called 673 Advanced Dance Technology and Live Performance), both with Dr.

Jhalak Kara Miller. As my Final Project for DNCE 661, I created a film was entitled '*Ōhi'a Lehua: A Cycle of Life*'. This was presented as part of an end of semester dance presentation by DNCE 362 and DNCE 661 at the Aupuni Space in Kaka'ako. The film was accompanied by me dancing a live solo performance. For the dance film, I shot original footage of an 'ōhi'a lehua forest in Palehua, Ō'ahu and of trees from the Lyon Arboretum in Mānoa. I incorporated this with video footage that I took of Orozco Vargas' first grade students from Ke Kula 'o Ānuenue and of the students from my DNCE 131 Beginning Contemporary Dance Class, performing improvisationally to the story that Orozco Vargas created.

During the Fall 2019 semester, for DNCE 671 Advanced Choreography, taught by Dr. Betsy Fisher, we were assigned a project to create our ultimate Dream Dance. I wrote a proposal about an imaginary suite of dances, with the working title of *Manawa 'ō ke Ola Holo'oko'a or A Cycle of Life*. In this story, a forest of 'ōhi'a lehua trees on Hawai'i Island was faced with devastation by Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death. The rapid spread of the fungus and the possible extinction of this sacred and valuable trees makes Pele feel both anger and sadness. When she sends a destructive and devastating lava flow to kill the infected trees, she also brings cleansing and the promise of new life to the land and to her people.

My research also led me to the 'ōlelo no'eau or wise Hawaiian saying: I ole 'oe. I ola makou nei. This translates to mean: My life is dependent on yours. Your life is dependent on mine. This 'ōlelo no'eau talks about how dependent we are on the 'ōhi'a lehua tree, because of its ability to provide water for all living beings of the forest and to replenish the natural watershed as a water supply source. Birds, insects, and other plant forms depend on the 'ōhi'a lehua as a source for food and shelter. In return, it is our responsibility to take care of the 'ōhi'a lehua forests and to do our best to make sure that these trees never become extinct.

For another project for DNCE 671 Advanced Choreography, I created a solo for myself, again based on the environmental and cultural issue of Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death, entitled *Ceratocystis Lukuohia: THIRSTY*. In 2018, researchers in Hawai'i, working with national and international specialists, identified two new species of plant pathogenic fungi that cause ROD, that were recently introduced to Hawai'i. Scientist Lisa Keith and a team from the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and Kumu Hula and Hawaiian cultural consultant, Kekuhi Keali'ikanaka'olehaililani, of the Edith Kanaka'ole Foundation, collaboratively came up with the names of the two new, invasive fungi, *ceratocystis lukuohia* and *ceratocystis huliohia*. The *ceratocystis huliohia*, which changes the natural state of the 'ōhi'a, causes a canker disease below the bark of the tree, which slowly spreads throughout the tree, killing off localized areas of water-conducting tissues. *Ceratocystis lukuohia*, or the destroyer of 'ōhi'a, is the more aggressive and deadly of the two fungi, which chokes off the internal water supply of the tree, causing a systemic wilt that quickly causes the entire crown of the tree to go brown. Both are considered causes of ROD.

In *Ceratocystis Lukuohia: THIRSTY*, the character that I portray is the *ceratocystis lukuohia* fungus. My character has a serious addiction problem. It is highly addicted to water and passionately driven to find water to ensure its own survival, regardless of the effect that it has on other living beings. The story of this dance finds the fungus sitting alone on a mossy rock in the rainforest, surrounded by a collection of empty plastic water bottles scattered randomly and in disarray. It is sitting hunched over, having withdrawals, feeling sick, sad, lonely, delirious, dejected, and angry.

Eventually, the fungus discovers a small patch of ohe or bamboo trees that are holding water, and it is finally able to quench its thirst. It travels through the rainforest in search of more

water. It begins to rain and the fungus feels refreshed and elated to be bathed by the moisture of the raindrops. In the closing section of the dance, the fungus discovers a lesion, or opening, in the trunk of an 'ōhi'a lehua tree. The invasive fungus sneaks in through the entrance of its new home. It is ecstatic, as it has found a new source of water to quench its thirst.

I wanted to incorporate the use of percussive instruments into the choreography, so I chose the Hawaiian hula implement the 'ili 'ili, or four small flat stones. Two stones are held in each hand and struck together to create a percussive sound. I also chose to use the ka'eke'eke or the Hawaiian bamboo drum. These instruments helped to shape my movements and helped to tell the story of the fungus. The musical score that I used was from the *'Ulalena* Soundtrack and was entitled *Mythical Forest: Bamboo Chase*. I chose this music because it featured an ensemble of ka'eke'eke that I also play during the dance. Ideally, I would like to create a score that would also incorporate sounds of nature: drops of water, pouring of water, rain falling and hitting the earth and trees, and the sounds of the 'ili'ili and ka'eke'eke. What I learned through the creation, rehearsal process, and performance of *Ceratocystis Lukuohia: THIRSTY* are all important experiences that naturally lend themselves to telling the story of *'Ōhi'a Lehua - A Cycle of Life*.

During the Spring Semester 2020, I took a class with Dr. Betsy Fisher, entitled DNCE 452 Dance History I - From Ritual to Theater. For my Research Paper and Final Presentation, I did my research and wrote a paper entitled *The Importance of the 'Ōhi'a Lehua to the Hawaiian Culture and to Hula: A Beloved Family Member to the Hula Practitioner; A Source of Inspiration for their Art*. In this paper, I focused on the importance of the 'ōhi'a lehua to hula dancers and to the Hawaiian people before western contact. This paper was a way for me to review the research and read more deeply into the research that I had done for the previously mentioned creative projects. Through the research for this paper, I found even more resources,

and focused on looking at information from various contemporary Kumu Hula. It also helped me to synthesize and articulate all that I had learned, in both written and spoken communication, about the ‘ōhi‘a lehua.

I continue to be inspired to do further research about ‘ōhia lehua. It is my dream to travel to Hawai‘i Island and to revisit the land where this story takes place. I would like to take collaborators and dancers along on this journey with me. I would like to speak to people from Hawai‘i Island whose families have loved and taken care of the ‘ōhi‘a lehua for generations and to hear their stories about ‘ōhi‘a lehua. I would like to speak to the scientists and the people from the Hawai‘i community that are working to save and replant the ‘ōhi‘a lehua and to become actively involved in their efforts. I would like to visit Kilauea and make an offering to the goddess Pele.

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## APPENDIX

Appendix A. 'Ōhi'a Lehua Performance - Video Recording Documentation:  
<https://vimeo.com/702672559>

Appendix B. *Spring Footholds 2022: Co-Motion: Program Green* Program

(Outside cover of Program: pages 1 and 4)

### front of house information

For large print programs, Assistive Listening Devices or any other accessibility requests please contact the House Manager or call the Kennedy Theatre Box Office at 956-7655.

After dark: to arrange a Campus Security Escort between two points on campus please see a House Manager.

As a courtesy to your fellow audience members and to our performers, please remember that eating, drinking, video recording, photography and use of cell phones and other electronic devices is not allowed inside the theatre. Please take a moment to turn off any sound or light emitting devices now.

### front of house staff

Box Office Staff: Olivia Schmitt, Rebekah Wood  
Publicity Assistant / Social Media Design: Landon McCann  
Photographer: Christine Lamborn  
Kennedy House Manager: Danielle Tuscher  
Assistant House Managers: Yajna Casiano, Manuel Moreno  
Playbill: Christine Lamborn, Jessica L. Jacob

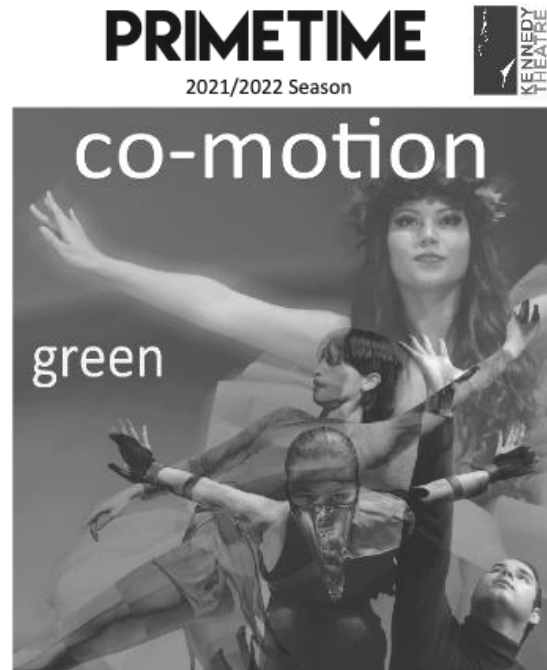
### kennedy theatre staff

Department Chair: Markus Wessendorf  
Associate Chair, Theatre: Julie A. Iezzi  
Associate Chair, Dance: Betsy Fisher  
Production Manager: Rick Greaver  
Theatre Manager/Publicity: Jessica L. Jacob  
Operations Coordinator/Publicity Associate: Christine Lamborn  
Technical Director: Gerald Kawaoka  
Costume Shop Manager: Hannah Schauer Galli  
Office Staff: Lori Chun, Jenna Wheeler-Gonsalves

### coming soon to the stage

<i>Ho'oilina</i> Kennedy Theatre Mainstage April 15-24, 2022 A farcical <i>hana keaka</i> that knocks on the door of a <i>Kanaka Maoli</i> family. Written & directed by MFA candidate Ākea Kahikina.	<i>Keep It Brief...</i> <i>A Festival of Short Works</i> Late Night Series April 16-24, 2022 Short plays and performance pieces directed by current UHM students.
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Visit us on the web at [manoa.hawaii.edu/liveonstage/kennedy-theatre](http://manoa.hawaii.edu/liveonstage/kennedy-theatre)



Program Direction: Betsy Fisher & Lorenzo Perillo  
Scenic Design: Michelle A. Bisbee  
Costume Coordination: Hannah Schauer & Maile Speetjens  
Light Design: Rebecca Mahar

Earle Ernst Lab Theatre

March 26 at 7:30pm\* and March 27 at 2:00pm & 7:30pm  
\*Post-show Rap follows the MAR 26 7:30pm performance

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII  
MANOA

Department of Theatre + Dance  
College of Arts, Languages & Letters

(Inside of Program: pages 2 and 3)

## co-motion: green

a spring footholds dance concert

### production staff

Stage Manager: Kekela Oku-Fernandez  
Asst. Stage Manager: Evan Kerr, Momoko Shibata  
Light Board Operator: Shanel Crawford  
Sound Board/Projections Operator: Justine Whyland  
Props Crew: Kayla Lemon  
Set Construction Crew: Sage Enomoto, Kekela Oku Fernandez,  
Justin Fragiao, Kara Nabarrete, Gage Thomas  
Costume Construction Crew: Hannah Archer,  
Kaneikoliakawahineika'ukapuomua Baker, Kayla Crawford, Tuesday Doyle,  
Jesse Høyhty, Lisa Nilsen, Devin Walter, Jade Young  
Wardrobe Supervisor: Alyssa Reyes  
Dressers: Ashlyn Healey, Christopher Pascua, Michael Sannito,  
Emma Torgrimson-Lee  
Head Electrician: Rebecca Mahar  
First Electrician: Kekela Oku Fernandez  
Electrics Crew: Students of THEA 240 & THEA 345  
Faculty Consultants: Halli'ōpua Baker, Sai Bhatwadekar, Betsy Fisher,  
Peiling Kao, Lorenzo Perillo, Kara Jhalak Miller, Amy Schiffner, Maile Speetjens

### concert program

#### Wallpaper Resistance

Choreography: Carla Guajardo\* in collaboration with the ensemble  
Music: ANBR, Sevdaliza  
Costume Design: Nathan Manna  
Dancers: Alaina Cota, Nani Marcos, Hannah Morrow, Greta Pearse,  
Erika Sanchez, Iana Weingrad, Katelyn Wyatt

#### Flightless Bird

Choreography: Christianne Moss+  
Music: Camille Saint-Saëns, performed by Kalikopuanoheoakalani Aiu on cello  
Costume Design: Maile Speetjens  
Dancer: Christianne Moss

#### 'Ōhi'a Lehua

Inspired by: *E'aha 'ia ana ka 'ōhi'a lehua?*  
*What's Happening to the 'Ōhi'a Lehua* by Melisa Orozco Vargas

Contemporary Choreography: Holly Chung\* with Hannah Archer,  
Madison Audette, Kylie Butts, Chloe Groom, Emma Majewski,  
Dulcinea Sabin, Tavehi Taftiti, Francis Philip Vilar, Reina Yamashita  
Hula and Pohuli Choreography: Peter Rockford Espiritu  
Projections: Claire Paul  
Videography: Holly Chung, Peter Rockford Espiritu, Greg Noir, video  
footage of 'i'iwi provided courtesy of Dr. Dubhan Clark  
Music: John Signor, Traditional Oli, Peter Rockford Espiritu with  
translations by Puakea Nogelmeier, Ron Perry, Mary Kawena Pukui,  
Michel Cusson & Luc Boivin, Troels Foelmann  
Cast: Hannah Archer, Madison Audette, Kylie Butts, Holly Chung,  
Kawehionalani Goto, Emma Majewski, Lily Hi'ilani Kim-Dela Cruz,  
Dulcinea Sabin, Reina Yamashita  
Dancers in Media: Hannah Archer, Kylie Butts, Melissa Cabrera,  
Kawehionalani Goto, Chloe Groom, Emma Majewski, Dulcinea Sabin,  
Tavehi Taftiti  
Costume Design: Kaneikoliakawahineika'ukapuomua Baker  
Guest Artists from Tau Dance Theater: Peter Rockford Espiritu, Keala Fung

*ADVISORY: addresses mortality, some projections contain strobe effect*

#### Synopsis

This contemporary story centers around a forest in Hawai'i, where the healthy and thriving 'ōhi'a lehua trees suddenly become infected with Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death (ROD), caused by two invasive fungi, ceratocystis huliolia and ceratocystis lukuohia. Two birds of the forest, 'Apapane and 'i'iwi, are concerned that their beloved 'ōhi'a lehua trees are rapidly dying. They seek out the goddesses Hi'iaka and Pele and request their help to save the trees. Pele sends a lava flow that engulfs the diseased and dying forest and all of the surrounding land.

#### Scenes

PROLOGUE · THE LIVING FOREST · MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF 'ŌHI'A LEHUA TREES  
HULIHIA: PELE SENDS A LAVA FLOW · HEALING RAIN  
THE CYCLE OF LIFE: NEW LIFE · HE MA'I 'ŌHI'A (FINALE)

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