

LIBERTY CALL



The King and Queen (above) of the 36th annual Merrie Monarch Festival arrive at the stadium last Saturday to witness the evening's competition.

Halau Hula 'O Hokulani (left) from Honolulu perform an ancient hula about the birthplace of kings during group competition last Friday.

Poetry in motion

Annual Merrie Monarch Festival celebrates 'language of the heart'

By J01 David Nagle
HNN Editor

Hula.
Words alone cannot describe it. And yet, it speaks to you, allures you, without saying a word.
It is a language as ancient as the people for whom it is best associated, but it still captivates and charms us today. It is pure poetry in motion.
The Merrie Monarch Festival, held annually since 1964 in Hilo, is a celebration of this ancient language. According to Dottie Thompson, who has chaired the Merrie Monarch Festival since 1969, the festival is dedicated to "the Merrie Monarch" King David Kalakaua, who reigned from 1874 until his death in 1891. Kalakaua, a patron of the arts, revived many of the nearly extinct cultural traditions of the Hawaiian people, including the hula, which had been forbidden by missionaries for more than 70 years.
Since ancient Hawaiians had no written language, communication beyond the spoken word took place in the form of chants and the hula dance. "Hula and its accompanying chants recorded Hawaiian genealogy, mythology, and prayers of the heart and mind," said Thompson. "The hula was the means by which the

culture, history, stories and almost every aspect of Hawaiian life was expressed and passed down through generations."
The Merrie Monarch Festival is a week-long event, which begins every year on Easter Sunday. The festival includes Hawaiian arts and crafts, a royal parade and entertainment at local hotels in Hilo.
But, the highlight of the festival is the three nights of hula competition at the Edith Kanaka'ole Tennis Stadium. Hula halau (troupes) come from all over the state of Hawaii and the mainland United States to compete in what could be considered the Super Bowl of hula.
The first night is dedicated to individual competition, while the last two nights feature group competition. Dancers perform two kinds of hula: the kahiko, or ancient hula, with its pulsating chants and rhythms while dressed in the traditional dress of their ancestors, and the modern, or auana style, with its colorful costumes and beautiful, flowing melodies.
Kalakaua once said "hula is the language of the heart, and therefore the heartbeat of the Hawaiian people." It is a language that still speaks to hearts today. It is, indeed, poetry in motion.



A member of Ka Pa Nani 'O Lili'oe (above), a halau from Aiea dances a hula originally written for Kaumuali'i, chief of Kauai, and performed at the coronation of King Kalakaua.

Halau Hula 'O Hokulani (left) from Honolulu performs a modern, or auana hula during the final night of competition. The song and dance says that life is a blessing and never a burden.

The male halau Ke Kia'i A O Hula (below) of Honolulu dances a prophecy uttered just before the coming of Captain Cook, telling of the foreigners' influence on the Hawaiian people and their culture.



Photos by
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