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ANIMATION JARED GREENLEAF ADVISOR LEONELLE AKANA CO-PRODUCER CONNIE M FLOREZ  
PRODUCED BY QWAVES AND ITVS IN ASSOCIATION WITH PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN COMMUNICATIONS  
FEATURING HINALEIMOANA WONG-KALU AND HAEMACCELO KALU AND INTRODUCING HO'ONANI KAMAI

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# KUMU HINA

## OVERVIEW

*Kumu Hina* is a powerful feature documentary about the struggle to maintain Pacific Islander culture and values within the Westernized society of modern day Hawai'i. It is told through the lens of an extraordinary Native Hawaiian who is both a proud and confident māhū, or transgender woman, and an honored and respected kumu, or teacher, cultural practitioner, and community leader.

## SYNOPSIS

Imagine a world where a little boy can grow up to be the woman of his dreams, and a young girl can rise to become a leader among men. Welcome to Kumu Hina's Hawai'i.

During a momentous year in her life in modern Honolulu, Hina Wong-Kalu, a Native Hawaiian māhū, or transgender, teacher uses traditional culture to inspire a student to claim her place as leader of the school's all-male hula troupe. But despite her success as a teacher, Hina longs for love and a committed relationship. Will her marriage to a headstrong Tongan man fulfill her dreams? As Hina's arduous journey unfolds, her Hawaiian roots and values give her the strength and wisdom to persevere, offering a new perspective on the true meaning of aloha.



# FILM DETAILS & LINKS

## Runtime:

77 minutes

## Formats:

DCP

HDCam

BluRay

DVD

5.1 surround sound or stereo



## Websites:

[kumuhina.tumblr.com](http://kumuhina.tumblr.com)

[itvs.org/films/kumu-hina](http://itvs.org/films/kumu-hina)

## Social Media:

[facebook.com/kumuhina](https://facebook.com/kumuhina)

[youtube.com/kumuhina](https://youtube.com/kumuhina)

# DIRECTORS STATEMENT



We met Hinaimoana in early 2011 and were immediately captivated by her presence. Physically large, and covered in striking tattoos, she is easily identifiable to most as a transgender Polynesian woman. But rather than being cast as an outsider, as would likely be the case if we were in the continental United States or most other places, Hina is an important and respected person in her home town of Honolulu and throughout Hawai'i.

She is a graduate of the elite Kamehameha Schools and the University of Hawai'i's Center for Hawaiian Studies. She serves as Director of Culture at an innovative public charter school and, by appointment of the governor, as chair of a state commission overseeing the protection of Native Hawaiian ancestral remains.

When out on the streets of Honolulu, people call out and wave to their Kumu, or teacher, Hina as she is affectionately known, respecting her for the leadership she provides in educating their children and for being a steadfastly Hawaiian voice on important issues of the day.

But what most compelled us to grab our cameras and begin to follow Hina as the central character of a new film was her brief mention of an upcoming trip to Fiji to pick-up her Tongan husband, a man she had married a year earlier but had to leave waiting while she returned to Hawai'i to get his immigration papers in order. We imagined that the trials and tribulations of this unusual Pacific Islander couple navigating the most universal terrain of the human experience - romantic love and marriage - would be fascinating, entertaining, revelatory.

Indeed it has been. We were fortunate that Hina and her husband granted us intimate access to every detail of their life together, from the highest of their highs to the lowest of their lows, allowing us to capturing the emotional angst of two people who just want, in Hina's words, "someone to care for, and love us, someone to accept us, and someone to give us the aloha that we seek."

While this journey through love and heartbreak has been powerful, it is another, unexpected, story that emerged during the year we spent following Hina that transformed our vision and hopes for this film.

As a teacher at Hālau Lōkahi, a Hawaiian values-based public charter school, Hina spends months preparing her students for a big end-of-year performance at which the community will see how well they have studied and mastered their culture and its practices. Such knowledge does not come easy to many in the downtrodden communities where most of Hina's students live, and the daily struggles of their families are yet another barrier to their ability to focus on education.

But this year was special. We were filming Hina daily while she worked with a group of high school boys who just didn't seem to get the essence of the masculine hula she was teaching them. Nothing seemed to work. Nothing, that is, until the day that Ho'onani walked in the door and asked if she could join the troupe.

Ho'onani is a sixth grade girl who is very comfortable in her own very tomboyish skin. Her friends nonchalantly say Ho'o's a mixture of a girl and a boy and that it's no big deal, so Hina was not surprised when she said she wanted to join the boys.

For a brief moment, Hina wondered if it would upset parents or other teachers if she let Ho'o dance with the boys. But she knew there'd be no holding Ho'o back, and that it was just such limited thinking, brought to Hawai'i by missionaries nearly two hundred years ago, that made it so difficult for her to make her own transition from boy to girl back when she was in high school.

Perhaps as a result of those painful experiences, Hina has made great effort to create a school environment where all kids are welcome and feel like they belong. Based on ancient Hawaiian values, and traditional respect for māhū - those who embrace both the feminine and masculine traits that are embodied in each one of us - Hina has created a special “place in the middle” for students who might be marginalized and mistreated elsewhere.

Ho’onani thrives in that place in the middle.

Coming from the continental U.S. - where our previous film, the Emmy Award-winning “Out In The Silence,” introduced us to the lingering anti-LGBT prejudice and discrimination in rural and small town America - and where openly-transgender teachers are few and far between, let alone respected, and where the idea of embracing and dignifying gender nonconforming kids is almost unimaginable, we were stunned and inspired by what was unfolding before our eyes and our cameras.

So we let the cameras roll, following Hina and Ho’onani on their extraordinary journeys, through the ups and downs, trials and tribulations of the school year and the personal quests that they each had for their lives. Their stories became powerfully symbolic of the hopes and dreams that all people have, and an inspiring glimpse of how being true to one’s culture and oneself can be the key to overcoming life’s biggest challenges.

Now, as we prepare the film for its official launch, we are certain that these magical stories from Hawai’i will capture the imagination of audiences around the world, opening up new possibilities toward inclusion, acceptance and respect for all, no matter the place one calls home.

## **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND**

Although there have been several high profile films about transgender people over the years, they have tended to focus on the prejudice, discrimination, and hostility that trans people face, rather than on their abilities and accomplishments. From Paris Is Burning to The Brandon Teena Story, from Two Spirits to Southern Comfort, viewers have been introduced again and again to the ways in which people with differing gender identities and expressions have been marginalized, excluded, bullied, beaten, raped, and killed.

KUMU HINA is a different type of film. It portrays a world where instead of transgender people being marginalized because of who they are, they are actually visible, included and honored. A world where youth who are searching for their own creative forms of gender expression are embraced and encouraged to be themselves rather than to hide in fear or pretend they are just like everyone else.

KUMU HINA's Hawai'i has its roots in pre-contact Polynesian culture. Like many ancient civilizations, the original Hawaiians regarded those who displayed both male and female characteristics as gifted and special. They called these people māhū and valued and respected them as caretakers of family and guardians of culture. Māhū were also admired for their healing skills; according to legend, māhū soothsayers brought their healing mana, or spirit, to Hawai'i from Tahiti many centuries ago, a visit commemorated by the healing stones of Kapaemahu, four basalt boulders located on Waikiki Beach.

Although it is commonplace to equate the Hawaiian concept of māhū directly to the Western categorization of transgender, the situation is actually more complex and nuanced. A recent Mana Magazine article titled "Beyond The Binary: Portraits of Gender and Sexual Identities in the Hawaiian Community" captured some of these subtleties:

*"I want the concept of māhū to take itself out of the sexual context, exclusive of gender. Gender not as it applies to female and male as biological, but a natural, spiritual definition of gender."*

-Kaumakaiwa Kanaka'ole

*"A māhū is an individual that straddles somewhere in the middle of the male and female binary. It does not define their sexual preference or gender expression, because gender roles, gender expressions and sexual relationships have all been severely influenced by the changing times. It is dynamic. It is like life."*

Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu

# FILM CHARACTERS

## Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu

Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu is a kanaka maoli teacher, cultural practitioner and community leader. She was born in the Nu'uaniu district of O'ahu Island and



educated at Kamehameha Schools and the University of Hawai'i. She was a founding member of Kulia Na Mamo, a community organization established to improve the quality of life for māhū wahine (transgender women). She is currently the Cultural Director at Hālau Lōkahi, a public charter school dedicated to using Native Hawaiian culture, history, and education as tools for developing and empowering the next generation of warrior scholars. She and her students have been invited to participate in numerous events in Hawai'i and abroad including trips to Tahiti, Aotearoa and Japan. Hina also serves as a leader in many community affairs and civic activities, including as Chair of the O'ahu Island Burial Council, which oversees

the management of Native Hawaiian burial sites and ancestral remains. In 2014, Hina announced her bid for a position on the board of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, the first transgender candidate to run for statewide political office in the United States.

## Haemacelo Kalu

Haemacelo Kalu was born on Niuafou'ou, a small island in the Kingdom of Tonga. He has two brothers, and his parents are farmers and active in the Church of Tonga. Hema attended school in the capital city of Nuku'alofa, then spent two years in the



Tongan Army. He met Hinalaimoana Wong-Kalu while employed as a bank guard there. Following their marriage and a one year wait in Fiji, where the U.S. Consulate for the area is located, Hema and his wife came to Honolulu, where he is currently employed at the 'Iolani Palace. The couple recently celebrated their third wedding anniversary.

## Ho'onani Kamai

Ho'onani Kamai was born and raised in Kalihi Valley, one of the most historic and diverse districts of Honolulu, Hawai'i. She has been a student at Hālau Lōkahi since



first grade, following in the footsteps of her older sister and three brothers, who also studied with Kumu Hina. Ho'onani's greatest love is music, a passion she inherited from both her mother and father, and she has studied in the Na Pua No`eau program for gifted and talented Native Hawaiian children and performed at many venues around Hawai'i. She hopes to eventually become a professional musician or teacher.

# CREATIVE TEAM

## **Dean Hamer, Director/Producer**

Dean Hamer is an Emmy Award winning filmmaker and New York Times Book of the Year author with a long history in communicating complex and controversial ideas to diverse publics. He formed Qwaves with partner Joe Wilson to produce insightful



and provocative documentaries about often overlooked social issues. Their films have been supported by Sundance, ITVS and Pacific Islanders in Communications, won awards at over 100 film festivals across the world, and used as outreach and educational tools by a wide range of community and educational organizations.

OUT IN THE SILENCE, the first feature film from Qwaves, premiered at the Human Rights Watch International Film festival at Lincoln Center to great critical acclaim. With support from Sundance and PBS, it became a highly visible model for the use of film for social activism with wide distribution through public television, multiple digital portals, and over 700 community screenings.

In addition to his film work, Hamer is the author of several best selling nonfiction books including *The Science of Desire* and *The God Gene*, a consultant for the BBC and Discovery channels, and a sought-after lecturer and frequent guest on TV documentaries and news shows including Nightline and Oprah. In 2011 he moved to the north shore of O'ahu, Hawai'i, to work on KUMU HINA.

## **Joe Wilson, Co-Director/Producer and Engagement Director**

Joe Wilson got involved in documentary filmmaking through his professional work and social activism on human rights issues. Frustrated by the limitations of traditional organizing and advocacy, he picked up a camera with hopes of reaching broader audiences with stories that would inform and compel people to act. OTROS AMORES, his debut film, won the Videomaker National Documentary Film Challenge. Together with Qwaves co-founder Dean Hamer, his



films on controversial and often ignored human rights issues have won jury and audience awards and official selection at more than 100 film festivals around the country and the world, and received widespread attention for their role in promoting social change.

In 2004, Wilson returned to his small hometown of Oil City, Pennsylvania, to direct and produce the Emmy Award-winning PBS documentary OUT IN THE SILENCE. Through more than 700 grassroots screenings across the country, this film has become part of a national movement to open dialogue, counter school bullying, and support fairness and equality for all in small towns and rural communities.

Wilson is a frequent speaker at colleges and conferences about justice and film activism. He lives with his partner Dean Hamer on the north shore of O'ahu, Hawai'i.

## **Connie M Florez, Co-Producer**



Connie Florez has many years of experience as an advisor, researcher, writer and producer of films in and about Hawai'i. Her numerous awards include a Women in Film/GM Acceleration Grant for Emerging Women Filmmakers, CINE Winner-Golden Eagle Award, and the Accolade Competition. Her PBS credits include the narrative films THE FISHBOWL and CONSTRUCTIONS and the recent documentary STATE OF ALOHA. She has taught film studies since 2006 at the University of Hawai'i-Manoa with the Academy for Creative Media and produced many award winning shorts and features

for television and film festivals around the world. Florez, a native American and third generation Hawaiian, is the founder/CEO of Hula Girl Productions and lives in Honolulu, HI.

## **Nels Bangerter, Editor**

Nels Bangerter is an Oscar-nominated and Emmy Award-winning documentary film editor with a keen sense of story and an alert eye for revealing moments. His feature WAR CHILD, which documents hip hop artist Emmanuel Jal's remarkable journey from Sudanese child



soldier to international star and activist, premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival and won the Audience Award at the Tribeca Film Festival. He won the Best Editing Award at the 2013 Tribeca Film Festival for the critically acclaimed LET THE FIRE BURN and was nominated for an Academy Award in 2012 for his work on BUZKASHI BOYS. He has worked with Whoopi Goldberg on a series of short documentaries for MSNBC's MISSISSIPPI RISING after Hurricane Katrina, with Dan Rather on DAN RATHER REPORTS, and on numerous other short and long projects for screen and television. Nels previously worked with Qwaves as editor on OUT IN THE SILENCE, which won an Emmy and numerous domestic and international film festival awards. Bangerter received his MFA in film production from the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Art.

## **Makana, Composer and Guitarist**



Born and raised on Oahu, Hawai'i, Makana is an internationally acclaimed, Grammy award-nominated slack key guitarist, singer, and composer. The NY Times calls him "A dynamic force within the style" of slack key and National Geographic Society says Makana is "Charting a new sonic frontier with deep ties to tradition." A student of the legendary Sonny Chillingworth, his work ranges from traditional to highly original, exploring a broad spectrum of musical styles and themes that have a dramatic texture well suited for cinema. A strong advocate for community, many of

Makana's performances are donated to cultural and educational causes, and he was honored With the Artist for Peace Award by the city council of Kaua'i.

## **Leonelle Akana, Advisor**

Leonelle Akana is a Native Hawaiian writer, historian and actress. She serves as Director of Cultural Programming at Halau Lokahi Public Charter School, where she writes, directs and produces the school's annual public community performance. Over the past thirty years, "Aunty Leo," as she is widely known, has performed in numerous stage productions in Hawai'i and throughout the world, and has appeared in many films, including as Queen Liliu'okalani in the award-winning 2009 narrative PRINCESS KA'IULANI. Akana is an alumna of the Sundance Screenwriters



Lab, where she developed a script for a one woman performance on the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i.

## **Jared Greenleaf, Animation**



Jared Greenleaf is an artist and animator from Kaua'i, Hawai'i. He received his BFA from Brigham Young University Hawaii, where he developed the distinctive Polynesian art style for which he has become known, and his MFA from Brigham Young University in Utah, where he currently teaches at the undergraduate level. Visitors to the Polynesian Culture Center in Laie have undoubtedly seen Greenleaf's work, which is featured in the animation for "Ha - The Breath of Life," directed by Ryan Woodward. He also worked with Woodward on "The Turtle and the Shark" (which is used as the temp animation in our rough cut), and on the animated PIC logo. Jared's fine art work has been featured in exhibitions in national and international venues ranging from Provo, Utah to Perth, Australia to Karachi, Pakistan.

# PRODUCTION PARTNERS & FUNDERS

**Independent Television Service**



**Pacific Islanders in Communications**



**Hawai'i Peoples Fund**



**Frameline Completion Fund**

