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English 315

### Hawaiian Culture as Music

The musicians of Hawaii include many names and faces such as Peter Moon, Bradda' IZ, keali'i rachele, and others. These people have brought us many great songs which people associate with Hawaii. The entertainment, emotional and even monetary value of the music which we all enjoy is immeasurable. The communication that is available through music is unexplainable. It is the thing that connects the past to the present and prepares us for the future. One of the greatest examples of this attribute of music is the Hawaiian music renaissance. Which is recorded as two instances, one in the 1800's under King David Kalakaua and the second being in the 1970's with people like George Na'ope.

The Connection between both revivals of Hawaiian culture was music. The revival of chant and language within the context of music helped it become better contained for the future to carry it on. The celebration of the Merry Monarch festival is evidence of the power of music and the effect it had with the Hawaiian culture. But even as the culture was reborn, there were many things that were new and introduced by foreigners helped to contribute to what Hawaii is now.

One of the iconic instruments that has become known as "Hawaiian" is the

Ukulele. Brought to Hawaii in 1879 by the Portuguese, quickly took root with the locals. The ease of playing and the mobility of the small instrument made it the perfect instrument for the Native Hawaiians. Brought to Hawaii at the time of massive change and transition, it became a symbol of a time where the Hawaiian way of life was being revived and renewed. Despite the loss of the Nation, the music of Hawaii carried the culture which was at one point fading and brought new life and eventually worldwide recognition of the Hawaiians. That would be thanks to the small instrument known as the Ukulele.

On the other hand was the Guitar which the Hawaiians took and made their own. The style of playing was unlike any other but the instrument was a foreigner to Hawaii. But over time it has come to be part of the Hawaiian culture just as the Ukulele has. The repertoire of Hawaiian music can be played on both Ukulele and Guitar alike and the style of playing makes it part of the Hawaiian culture. But still the Ukulele is special because of its simplicity and unique characteristics of being quick yet relaxing all at once.

In and of itself the Ukulele became the catalyst which carried the Hawaiian Culture to the world. The ukulele was the key musical instrument that helped the Hawaiian culture stay alive and find its place in the future. The ukulele's far reaching influence began with the first few who played it, down to the popular artist of the 20<sup>st</sup> century and the carrying of the Hawaiian culture through time.

From the beginning the Ukulele was wining hearts of the natives. In the Hawaiian

Gazette the Ukulele is mentioned in 1879 as the Portuguese who arrived “have been delighting the people with nightly street concerts.” As the Ukulele made its way from the hands of the Portuguese to the locals it made a friend by the Name of King David Kalakaua. His influence as a king helped carry the instrument into the hearts of the native Hawaiian people and thus was propelled into the Locals and soon became part of the culture.

King Kalakaua helped the Ukulele become part of the Hawaiian culture through his talent as a song writer and through his musical knowledge of both the ancient and contemporary Hawaiian music of his time. In Jim Beloff's *The Ukulele A Visual History*, Beloff says “Because the ukulele became King Kalakaua’s favorite instrument, he made every effort to include it in all of his musical activities.... the ukulele began to be a featured part of the instrumental ensembles... and it was even written into the music of the royal composers” (16). Not even ten years after it was introduced to the islands had it made its mark with the most influential people of Hawaii and made its home in the culture of the Native Hawaiians.

As time went on the music of the native Hawaiians changed and evolved but there was one thing that tied everything back to the roots of a rediscovered Hawaiian tradition and that was the Ukulele. Using the small four stringed instrument Israel Kamakawiwo’ole continued to reintroduce Hawaii to the world. Through his music and skill with the Ukulele he took what was the worlds view of Hawaii, the tourist Paradise, and brought into light the many issues that the native Hawaiians were facing, bringing in a whole new era of Hawaiian national pride. Even after his passing the spirit of Hawaii

carries on through the tie of the ancient Hawaiian music and the evolution of the new.

The example that I would like to use is “Hawaii 78.” The tie that Bradda IZ makes to the past, present and future with this is a perfect example of how the music and especially the ukulele made it possible for the Hawaiian Culture to be propelled into the future to survive the changes that were forced upon the native population.

The introduction of “Hawaii 78” tells of ancient Hawaii through the chanting, the Hawaiian rhythm of the drums calls to a time long before the one we are in now. The plucking of the ukulele brings us to the modern, more contemporary Hawaii. The chant-like verse and chorus makes a connection to the ancient chant of old. With all the chant-like and ancient aspects of this song, it is the ukulele that brings both the old and new together.

The ukulele is the tie that held the old ways and traditions to the modern and because of such is one of the carriers of the Hawaiian culture. In Beloff’s *The Ukulele A Visual History* he says, “Another aspect of the uke revival in Hawaii is a renewed appreciation for all things Hawaiian, especially among the younger generation”(44). Moving toward the future we can see the ukulele continuing to be the instrument of choice that the youth use just as in the past. The ties from generation to generation are being formed through this musical instrument.

The Ukulele has been the most recognizable method of Hawaiian music over the past century. The simplicity and diversity of the little instrument made it the tool which the Native Hawaiian people could carry the tunes and words of their past into their

future. From King Kalakaua to Israel Kamakawiwoole, and many other musicians they helped make the Hawaiian sound for the 21st century, but all used the Ukulele in some form or another and was able to sing with heart and Aloha. The aloha which was transferred to them from those who came before. Taking that which was lost in tourist Hawaii and bringing it back to the true meaning and feeling through the message in the music.

The things that weren't recorded but given through tradition survive today because of music. The chants of old still ring in the ears of those who are not only blood but Hawaiian in spirit. Just as the Ukulele was not a "native" instrument to Hawaii, became Hawaiian at heart just as people like Jake Shimubukoro, Tosh from *All I'm asking for is my body*, and others who influenced the revivals and spreading of the Aloha spirit and culture that is so Unique to Hawaii. The ukulele is the reason the Hawaiian culture is so strong today. Not only in Hawaii but known through the world. The past kings and queens worked hard to get Hawaii known as a kingdom and though they are gone, the music that was carried from that time till now through the ukulele and other means help that tradition of sharing the Aloha.

The Hawaiian sound as talked about previously was changed and redefined over the years but the culture has been rediscovered as well along with the sound. The strength of the people in Hawaii is tied to the land and the culture which was preserved through music. The Ukulele was the catalyst for preserving the culture of Hawaii from the first renaissance to the second in the 1970's. It carried the Hawaiian sound and culture to the world. The ukulele was the key instrument that helped the Hawaiian

culture stay alive and find its place in the present time and make a place for it in the future.

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