

LooChoo nu Kwa: Children of LooChoo

August 24, 2008 (Sunday), 2:00pm

Dr. Richard T. Mamiya Theater (St. Louis HS campus)

LooChoo nu Kwa is a unique presentation of traditional Okinawan music and dance aimed at awakening the desire for finding one's cultural identity and the need for preserving things of the past. The show begins with the story of a grandson who returns home to Hawai'i for his grandmother's funeral. Being brought up by both his Hawaiian *tutuwahine* and his Okinawan *baban* (grandmother), only after going away to the continent does he begin to realize the special treasures that were showered upon him. Once at home, he is flooded with memories of his grandparents, but filled with regrets in not knowing more. By recalling the music and dance that surrounded him in his youth, he begins to understand the true meaning of *baban's* sacrifice and wisdom.

Featured in this production will be dances seldom performed outside Okinawa which were once reserved for the royal court and visiting Chinese dignitaries. Exquisite costumes used during the kingdom period will be worn and exhibited. The show ends with a musical tribute to generations of Hawai'i's *kupuna* whose love and sacrifice passes on to this generation the obligation of preserving our heritage.

This production aims to stir memories of times which are being quickly forgotten, and arouse a hunger for stories which need to be passed down. *LooChoo nu Kwa* premiered in 2007 at the Uruma City Performing Arts Theater in Okinawa. Sparking dialogue between the old and young who were present, the production helped to reinvigorate a realization that much of the traditional culture is being lost, and the vital time to try to preserve it is now. The Hawai'i premiere of this performance took place in March at the Maui Arts and Cultural Center and stirred similar reactions and received a standing ovation. No matter what cultural background, the audience will connect with the grandson and hear the voices of the past generations come to life.

LooChoo nu Kwa is produced by the Ukwanshin Kabudan, a not-for-profit troupe dedicated to preserving and perpetuating Okinawan traditional performing arts. Ukwanshin features some of Hawaii's best artists, most of whom have achieved recognition and certification from Okinawa. This presentation will highlight the talents of three of the main members of the troupe, all of whom were born and raised in Hawai'i and have been long-time members of the performing arts community: Eric Wada (dance), Norman Kaneshiro (*uta-sanshin*), and Keith Nakaganeku (*uta-sanshin*). They will be joined by dancers Takako Miyazaki, Shizue Afuso, Keith Shimabukuro, and Hitomi Takahashi, and musicians Allison Yanagi on *kuucho* (snakeskin fiddle), Lynne Miyashiro on *fanso* (bamboo flute), Terry Higa on *teeku* (drums), and Heather Shiroma on *kutu* (13-string zither). The show will be narrated by Jaime Oshiro and by Devin Kawamura, who will play the character of Kaleo, the grandson.

Featured Artists' Bios:

Eric Wada, artistic director and co-founder of Ukwanshin, is the first male outside Okinawa to have passed all levels of the prestigious Geino Konkuru, a series of performing arts tests administered in Okinawa. He graduated from the Okinawa Prefectural Performing Arts University with a scholarship from the Okinawan government. Bearer of the title of *kyoushi* (instructor), Wada heads the Hawaii branch of the Tamagusuku Ryu Shosetsu Kai, teaching traditional Ryukyuan dance in Honolulu. On Maui, he teaches Okinawan musical instruments, Eisa, and *shishimai* (lion dance), history, culture, and language. He was a featured dancer in David Ward's Dancequake which was presented at the Maui Arts and Cultural Center, and also toured Hawai'i Island and Honolulu. He is currently researching and teaching the obscure arts and traditions of Okinawa villages. In addition to the American English language, Wada is fluent in Japanese and functional in Okinawan and Hawaiian.

Norman Kaneshiro, musical director and co-founder of Ukwanshin, is the youngest US-born Okinawan musician to achieve the rank of *shihan* or "master instructor" in the art of *uta-sanshin*. He has been a student of Harry Seisho Nakasone for the past 19 years and was a two-time apprenticeship recipient through the Hawai'i State Foundation for Culture and Arts' Master-Apprentice Program. Kaneshiro teaches private lessons in Honolulu and is also a lecturer in the Ethnomusicology Program at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Additionally, he teaches monthly in Maui, instructs two free Okinawan music clubs, and holds distance-learning sessions with students in Seattle and Pittsburgh. Kaneshiro was recently recognized by the Rising Phoenix Jaycees for his commitment to preserving the culture and for his work in the community.

Keith Nakaganeku began *uta-sanshin* at the age of eight under his grandfather's tutelage and by the age of fourteen, was one of the first US-born Okinawan musicians to earn the first-level certificate in the Geino Konkuru in Okinawa. He currently holds the title of *kyoshi* (instructor) and is the chapter president of the longest-standing Okinawan music association in Hawai'i, the Nomura Ryu Ongaku Kyo Kai Hawaii Shibu. Also a student of Harry Seisho Nakasone, Nakaganeku is not only a former recipient of the SFCA apprenticeship, but also served twice on its selection committee. He teaches private lessons in Honolulu, but also has students on Hawai'i island. A versatile musician and vocalist, Nakaganeku is the lead vocalist and ukulele player for his multi-genre/cross-culture band, Calabash. He produced and released the band's first album, "Hawaiian Jazz Done Asian Style", which features four different languages and his award-winning Hawaiian falsetto.