

Liliuokalani

Reflections of Our Queen

REVIEWS & UPCOMING SCREENINGS



PHOTO COURTESY STATE OF HAWAII
Queen Liliuokalani.

FEATURES

Filmmaker Lee debuts new Lili'uokalani documentary

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By Jason Genegabus November 13, 2017 Updated November 13, 2017 3:29pm

Hawaii-based filmmaker Edgy Lee is commemorating the 100th anniversary of the death of Hawaii's last monarch, Queen Lydia Kamaka'eha Lili'uokalani, with the debut of a new documentary, "Reflections of Our Queen."

Sponsored by the Queen Lili'uokalani Trust and local nonprofit Hui Hanai, the 78-minute film provides a glimpse into the personal life of the queen through stories and memories shared by kupuna and their descendants. Shot on location at 'Iolani Palace, the documentary is narrated by award-winning local musician and kumu hula Robert Cazimero, with celebrated Hawaiian entertainer Marlene Sai providing the voice of Queen Lili'uokalani.

"Through the film, we begin to understand the 'kaona,' or hidden meanings, behind her lyrics while her published and personal writing vitalize our appreciation of her spirit," Hui Hanai president Stacy Naipo said in a statement. "Her story is one that continues to inspire Hawaiians and the broader community because her leadership and vision have created a legacy that endures today."

Added Lee: "This project has been an amazing and inspirational process for our team and we are grateful for having the opportunity to provide insight into who the Queen was as a person and an artist.

"We hope that this perspective of our Queen illustrates the depth of her aloha and compassion, traits she embodied until her passing exactly one century ago."

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STARPOWER

Director weaves rich tapestry of Queen Lili'uokalani's life

Veteran filmmaker **Edgy Lee**, director of "Lili'uokalani: Reflections of Our Queen," likens Queen Lili'uokalani's story to a Hawaiian quilt.

"This film is kind of a tapestry, like the 'Queen's Quilt' sewn during her incarceration at Iolani Palace," said Lee, who also co-produced and co-wrote the film with **Marc Cohen**. "It's full of glimpses into the queen's personal and private life, and we focus on her music and lyrics, her writings, and through the remembrances from our (kupuna) storytellers, we attempt to bring to life a portrait of a woman who was a prolific writer, composer and an innovative thinker."

The documentary, screened at an invitational premiere Nov. 19 at the Kahala Hotel & Resort.

Like a quiltwork, the documentary embraces the fabric of community — descendant and kupuna remembrances, inspiration from the Queen Lili'uokalani Trust (the key sponsor of the 78-minute work), and cooperation and participation of Hawaiian cultural luminaries eager to properly pay tribute to the legacy of the monarch on the 100th anniversary of her death.



HAWAII STATE ARCHIVES

SHOW BIZ



WAYNE HARADA

"Lili'uokalani was an exemplary woman for any time period, but given hers was the Victorian era, and that the written Hawaiian language was only 20 years old when she was formally schooled, her intellectual accomplishments were remarkable," said Lee. "Her understanding of intellectual property rights and international politics was also an unexpected discovery."

Lee launched the project 18 months ago, tapping resources of Hui Hanai (publisher of books on the queen's life and music), but was challenged by the scarcity of kupuna who had first-person



COURTESY PHOTO

Edgy Lee

tales of the queen and could provide vivid firsthand recollections.

What this project is not: "a film that delves into the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom," Lee said.

What this film is about: "(Lili'uokalani's) inner strength and ability to weather political, economic, social and spiritual challenges, to remain 'onipaa' (immovable, steadfast) in her aloha and compassion."

Her compassionate leadership is detailed in storyteller **Watters Martin Jr.**'s reflection that "the queen sold everything, even her jewelry, to create a trust that was left to benefit the Hawai-

ian children."

Contributors include **Robert Cazimero** (narrator), **Marlene Sai** (who voices the queen) and chanter **Puka Asing**, who "have displayed a commitment, throughout their careers, toward the preservation and perpetuation of their native culture," said Lee, who collaborated with **Robert Wehrman** on the original music. Also featured throughout is music by Queen Lili'uokalani performed by the Galliard String Quartet.

Cazimero has embraced Lili'u's music throughout his career, and Sai has portrayed the monarch in stage and on film, here and abroad, galvanizing her legacy. ...

Cabaret, ol' chum

It was all about style, sentiment and substance when **Loretta Ables Sayre** converted Blue Note Hawaii into a genuine New York-style cabaret club Nov. 15. She served up swing in different forms: soft and sultry ("The Look of Love"), torchy and touching ("A House Is Not a

Home") and sweetly and seductively ("The More I See You"). In short, in spite of her laurels as stage actor and a Broadway Tony nominee, she was the joie de jazz. ...

Hana hou

Tickets to **Diana Ross'** return to Blaisdell Concert Hall Jan. 12 are \$45.50 to \$255.50 here; when she plays at the Wynn resort in Las Vegas Feb. 7 to 24, tariffs are \$60.50 to \$296, by comparison. Her Lifetime Achievement laurels bestowed Nov. 19 at the American Music Awards should buoy sales. And hurray to local boy **Bruno Mars**, who earned six AMAs, including artist of the year, though he was absent and on tour. ...

"Allegiance," the filmed Broadway musical starring **George Takei** and **Lea Salonga**, will have encore isle screenings: Dec. 7 at Dole Cannery, Pearl Highlands and Maui Mall; and Dec. 9 at Dole, Windward Mall and Pearl Highlands. Go to fathomevents.com. ...

And that's "Show Biz." ...

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Ahead of Her Time

Among her many achievements, Lili'uokalani helped create a bank for women

BY JEFF HAWE



Queen Lili'uokalani is well known as a courageous advocate for

Hawaiians. Less known are some of her efforts to improve the lives of women and children when she was still Princess Lili'uokalani. That included a bank for women at a time when married women traditionally held no rights to finances or property.

Filmmaker Edgy Lee researched Lili'uokalani

Lili'uokalani

“They organized a way for women to pool their money together, creating Hui Ho’okuono’ono, which was so ahead of its time – a lending group for women so they had access to money.”

— MARION LYMAN-MERSEREAU
GREAT-GRAND-NIECE OF ISABELLA LYMAN,
A FRIEND OF LILI’UOKALANI

have been all too much for the Victorian sense of a woman’s place in society. The bank did not thrive but clearly this did not deter the Hawaiian women.”

Soon after, a second savings hui of women was launched in Hilo. “My great-grandaunt was Isabella Lyman,” Lyman-Mersereau says in the film. “She was friends with Lili’uokalani. So in Hilo, Lili’u and Isabella got together with other women and they organized a way for women to pool their money, creating Hui Ho’okuono’ono, which was so ahead of its time – a lending group for women so they had access to money.”

Isabella Lyman, a prominent missionary in Hilo, wrote a letter to Lili’uokalani in September 1886 describing Hui Ho’okuono’ono’s founding meeting, at which 24 women signed up. “Several of the women took (bank ledger) books and paid down the money for their daughters – others wish to join also but there are not enough books,” Lyman wrote.

The Kumukanawai o ka

Lili’uokalani Hui Ho’okuono’ono laid out the group’s constitution. It was governed by a board of six officers: a president, treasurer and secretary, each with a deputy. Members deposited \$5 on the second day of every month. The treasurer chose trusted individuals who held collateral to lend to at interest of 10 percent annually, then reported quarterly to members. Members were tasked with keeping personal records of deposits and required to keep funds in the bank for a full year. Any directorial changes needed a two-thirds majority vote.

The structure of Hui Ho’okuono’ono set it apart from more informal lending groups forming at a time when banks didn’t exist in Hilo. Lyman explained in her letter to Lili’uokalani that once the women understood the bank’s potential, interest was great. “They would like to have you send us one dozen more (ledger books). I feel quite sure they will soon be filled,” Lyman wrote.

Sadly, both the Honolulu bank and the Hilo savings

hui were short-lived. There are few records for the bank. Hui Ho’okuono’ono began keeping records in March 1886 and the last available ones at the Hawai’i State Archives are dated October 1887, with 25 members still listed. But the concept of small loans for women and other underprivileged people championed by Lili’uokalani are common today and well known as microfinancing.

HER LEGACY

Lili’uokalani understood education and financial resources would be crucial to protect the well-being of Hawaiians amid the rapidly changing Hawai’i of her time. In 1886, she began an educational society devoted to the betterment of Hawaiian children through education.

Among her greatest legacies is her trust. Astute management of her money and property resulted in a substantial estate, most

of which was put into the Queen Lili’uokalani Trust established in 1909. The trust’s mission is to support orphaned and destitute children through focused efforts to end the cycle of poverty for Hawaiian families. Its programs on the six main islands offer youth development services, family counseling and strengthening, financial coaching and ‘a’ina based service projects.

More than a century after its founding, it remains a powerful philanthropic force, ranked 115 among the state’s Top 250 organizations by *Hawaii Business*. It focuses these resources on Native Hawaiians, who are overrepresented in the justice and welfare systems. But rather than simply give, the trust says, it equips them with the skills needed to enable themselves to create better lives – the same ideas that Queen Lili’uokalani sowed over a century ago. □



A photo taken by John H. Wilson in 1891 shows Queen Lili’uokalani, center left, with other women. Compliments of Hawai’i State Archives.