

## The Star-Ledger **Ticket**

YOUR GUIDE TO THIS WEEK'S ENTERTAINMENT / OCTOBER 14-20, 2011

### DANCE



KAUHILONOHONUA PADILLA

Tori Hulali Canha will perform in "Kulanihako'i: Living Waters," at the Alexander Kasser Theater at Montclair State University.

## Traditional, not touristy

ENVIRONMENT-THEMED HULA SHOW WILL EMPHASIZE AUTHENTICITY

By Robert Johnson  
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

**H**okulani Holt says that when she was growing up in Hawaii, she never knew when she would get a hula lesson. The women in the household — her mother, grandmother and aunts — were hard to read, and unpredictable.

"Stand up, we're going to dance now," Holt says one of them would tell her out of the blue. "That could be 4 o'clock in the afternoon. It could be 8 o'clock in the morning. It could be 10 o'clock at night. It doesn't matter. When they're ready, you have to be ready."

This system proved to be an efficient way of passing on tradition. Holt grew so ready to dance that she eventually earned the title Kumu Hula (a hula master entrusted with preserving the sacred art).

Starting on Thursday, she and her associates will bring a full-scale hula production called "Kulanihako'i: Living Waters" to the Peak Performances series at Montclair State University. The troupe arrives in Montclair just a few days after its new show's world premiere in Maui.

Holt wants to be clear about one thing: "It is not a 'luau show,'" she says, meaning viewers should not come expecting to see girls in Day-Glo grass skirts. "Kulanihako'i" offers chants and dances performed in an authentic and sometimes severe traditional style.

The show borrows its plotline from Hawaiian legends of twin gods who govern the world's water cycle, but has a contemporary, environmental theme. The material has been selected to

draw attention to the need to conserve a precious natural resource.

"The importance of water cannot be minimized, because without water all living things die," Holt says. Population growth and tourism have taken a toll on Hawaii's water supply, but Holt says that these stresses reflect a problem looming worldwide.

Speaking of the current production, Holt says: "We're hoping people see a part that speaks to them about their relationship to land, their relationship to water, and their relationship to one another."

Holt says she began to collaborate with fellow Kumu Hula masters Keali'i Reichel and Pali Ahue in 1989, in the hope that theatrical productions would demonstrate hula's viability as a serious art form. They spent two years

### **Kulanihako'i: Living Waters**

**Where:** Alexander Kasser Theater at Montclair State University, 1 Normal Ave., Montclair

**When:** Thursday and Oct. 21 at 7:30 p.m., Oct. 22 at 8 p.m., and Oct. 23 at 3 p.m.

**How much:** \$15; call (973) 655-5112 or visit [peakperfs.org](http://peakperfs.org).

researching and preparing the current show, which employs 16 dancers and a dedicated chanter.

In an authentic hula performance, the dancing illustrates the words of the chants with percussive accompaniment. The dance never appears alone.

Although hula is an ancient art, Hawaii's native culture

was impacted by the arrival of Western missionaries in 1820. As a result, creating "Kulanihako'i" involved some imaginative reconstruction. Holt says she discovered some of the chants employed in the show in Honolulu's Bishop Museum, but the poetic verses had been written down without their corresponding music. She and her collaborators had to supply the music, and they choreographed new dances to accompany the chants in traditional style.

A narrator will guide viewers through the production, but Holt says the artistic team resisted translating the chants into English because they want people to focus on the movement. "We want people just to feel it," she says.

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