

# Aloha, Paris

An arts festival aims to further strengthen the cultural bond between Hawaii and France

By Nina Wu

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Kumu hula Kilohana Silve, front center, and dancers from her Halau Hula O Manoa demonstrate a dance at her Manoa home. Silve and the dancers are heading to Paris for the first Festival Arts d'Hawai'i, which is being hosted by the kumu hula's nonprofit organization.



Kilohana Silve had some explaining to do when she was called into the dean's office at the American University of Paris after telling her art history students she danced hula.

Even though it was the mid-1990s, the Hawaiian dance was still perceived by many Parisians as a vaudeville act complete with cellophane grass skirts and coconut bras — something entirely unbecoming of a university instructor.

Silve quickly cleared up the matter, informing the dean that hula was a cultural art and dance form reflecting her heritage.

During her 28 years in the City of Light, Silve made it her duty to help the French understand hula as the heartbeat of Hawaiian culture and to give it proper recognition as a respected dance form encompassing language, chant, myth, storytelling and the craft of making lei and implements.

That objective included establishing what Silve says is the first and only halau in France, Halau Hula O Manoa, in 1992.

"It was almost like doing missionary work to change the misconception of what Hawaiian culture is," she said.

Since moving back to Manoa, where she was born and raised, in 2005, Silve has continued to forge cultural ties between Hawaii and France. Her latest effort is the first Festival Arts d'Hawai'i in Paris, from Wednesday to July 7.

Association France-Hawai'i, a nonprofit Silve founded to promote Hawaiian culture in France, is hosting the festival,

which coincides with her halau's 20th anniversary.

"I think hula is just a beautiful way to create that bridge," Silve said. "Living in a city like Paris, people feel a need to connect with nature. To enter a dance studio and describe rainbows, soft, gentle rain and the wind, you really have to visualize and enter that space."

Silve, who studied hula with Emma Bishop, Ellen Castillo, George Holokai and other kumu, said there is growing interest in Hawaiian culture in Paris, particularly in Hawaiian music.

Many of her 45 hula students in Paris have come to visit her on Oahu. Now she will be taking 15 kupuna dancers from her halau here to the festival.



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Kumu hula Kilohana Silve and kupuna dancers in her Halau Hula O Manoa stand in her attic alongside photos and paintings of the halau in Paris. Silve spent 28 years in Paris, where she helped reshape the French view of Hawaiian culture. One of her accomplishments included establishing Halau Hula O Manoa in 1992.



COURTESY PHOTO

The first and only halau in France, Halau Hula O Manoa, was started by Kilohana Silve in 1992. Silve says many of her students in Paris have come to visit her on Oahu since she moved back in 2005.

An hour before their weekly hula class at Kapiolani Women's Center, Silve, 60, has been teaching the dancers "survival French" and greeting protocols (like a bise, or kiss, on each cheek).

Halau member Laxmi Moore, who is of French descent but has made Hawaii her home the past 30 years, is excited about traveling to Paris for the first time — to dance hula.

"It's taking me back to my roots," she said.

A highlight of the festival will be a special hula performance of "La Vie En Rose," a classic French love song by Edith Piaf. Hawaiian arts practitioner Patricia Lei Murray sings it first in French, then English and Hawaiian.

The song was translated into Hawaiian by Sam Ohu Gon, an ecologist and professor at the University of Hawaii who will deliver a lecture on Hawaiian ecosystems at Paris' Natural History Museum on June 30 as part of the festival.

One of Silve's student teachers in Paris, Maile Kaku, choreographed the hula.

"The halau was born in France and it seemed natural to show how we embrace French culture as well as how (the French) embrace Hawaiian culture," Silve said. "It's a wonderful cultural exchange."



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"The halau was born in France and it seemed natural to show how we embrace French culture as well as how (the French) embrace Hawaiian culture." --Kilohana Silve, Kumu hula

According to Silve, the Festival Arts d'Hawai'i will be the first time many Hawaiian arts are being brought together in Paris. Silve said it was in that European city where she discovered hula's appeal to people around the world.

"All humans seek a connection to nature," she said. "It crosses all cultural boundaries. People come to embrace it. They become Hawaiian at heart."

THE FESTIVAL will be held at various venues throughout Paris. Among the events will be hula workshops, lomilomi demonstrations, a performance by ukulele virtuoso Taimane Gardner, who will also appear at ukulele workshops, and a July 5 concert at which both the Paris and Honolulu dancers will perform "La Vie en Rose." The show will also feature a contemporary dance performance about Hopoe (a friend of Pele's younger sister Hiiaka) choreographed by French dancer Anne-Laure Rouxel.

The festival concludes July 7 with a reading by Murray of her children's book, "I Choose You," about a little girl's trip from Honolulu to Paris with her auntie, along with a storytelling performance about Pele and Hiiaka by Silve, and Pele dances by Halau Hula O Manoa.

Besides teaching art history, Silve had a career as an art critic in Paris and organized numerous art shows.

In Honolulu, she put together "In Paris: The Art of Hula," a 2005 exhibit at the Honolulu Museum of Art.

The show featured the works of contemporary artists who made hula the subject of their art. The collaboration between hula dancers and artists became the subject of "Aloha from Paris," a 2005 documentary film by Arnaud Dufour that will be screened at the festival July 3.

**On the Net:**

» [www.festivalartshawaii.com](http://www.festivalartshawaii.com) <http://www.festivalartshawaii.com/>