

Green Tea and Sweet Biscuits with Uluwehi Guerero

BY ALMA TASSI

Uluwehi Guerrero opened the door with a warm smile and motioned for me to come in as he finished up a phone call. Standing in the kitchen waiting, the first thing I noticed was the grand piano in the living room. He later explained that he was coordinating the dressing of a dancer in a kimono for his upcoming performance at the Nā Hōkū Hanohano Awards.

Nominated for multiple awards—and ultimately winning Best Hawaiian Album of the Year—Guerrero performed “Nani Kamakura” at the event, spotlighting traditional Hawaiian side by side with a traditional Japanese dance.

For such an accomplished musician, it was surprising to hear Guerrero can’t read music and he never went to music

When asked what he enjoys the most, he confesses, “Singing is my first love.” Dancing did not come as easily. At that point, he realized, when you join a hālau, it’s not just about being a dancer. “It helps you find what purpose you serve in Hawaiian culture. It can be chanting, singing, language, lei making.” Guerrero believes being part of a hula community can help uncover those gifts.

As Uluwehi prepared green tea brought from Japan and a plate of sweet biscuits, he asked me where I was from. When I told him New York, his eyes lit up. The stately figure before me suddenly became very animated. He giddily recounted going to the opera the last time he visited. “We did it up. A car service, box seats, even the little glasses!” These types of productions inform Guerrero’s choices in costumes and stage presentations for his own shows. To bring hula to the world stage, he emphasizes the need for his work to feel current and entertain as well as educate.

In his upcoming show *Nā Mele O Ku’u Pu’uwai*,

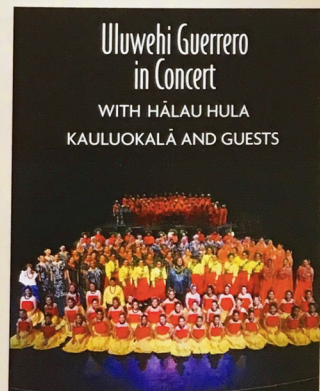
learning the life of a farmer, understanding the uses of plants and identifying things in the ocean. When we stay connected in this way, we become more careful and take care of what brings us life.”

Guerrero emanates the wisdom and heart of a man tirelessly dedicated to the perpetuation of the Hawaiian way of life. He says, “Whatever I do in my life, I ask myself one thing—How can I take this feeling, story, moment and share it with everybody? The more I do, the more experience for everyone.” With a jam-packed schedule ranging from teaching, to making music or performing with his hālau, Uluwehi Guerrero stays true to this mantra.



Uluwehi — winner of the Nā Hoku Hanohano “Hawaiian Album of the Year” award

or *Songs Of My Heart*, Guerrero celebrates his many years of teaching hula. Made with the hula dancer in mind, there will be no solo instruments. The heavenly voices of the community choir “Nā Leo Lani o Maui,” one hundred dancers plus a full Hawaiian band and string section, will share the stage with Guerrero to perform songs from his latest album *Uluwehi Sings Nā Mele Hula Aloha*, as well as stories that he says, “come from my heart.” ■



Uluwehi Guerrero in Concert

WITH HALAU HULA KAULUOKALĀ AND GUESTS

Saturday, September 4
7:30 p.m.
Castle Theater
Maui Arts & Cultural Center

Tickets: \$25, \$30 and \$40
808-242-SHOW (7469)
or visit MauiArts.org