Makahiki 3

Mele Aloha - Ke Lei Maila ‘o Ka’ula I Ke Kai

This mele aloha is often referred to as “Oli Lei.” Today it is used by hālau hula (hula schools) as a adornment chant when putting on lei for a ceremony or performance. But it is also used as a lei-giving chant whenever one receives special guests. The chant is sometimes used in addition to giving lei, or sometimes is used as the gift itself.

The history of this particular mele comes from the story of Hi‘iakaikapoliopele, the youngest sister of the Pele family. In the early part of her journey to fetch her sister Pele’s lover, Lohiau, Pele and her companion Wahine‘ōma‘o happen upon a limbless woman named Manamanaiakaluea who is trying to pick limu and ‘ōpihi from the rocks. Taking pity on this woman, Hi‘iaka restores Manamanaiakaluea to full health, giving her back her arms and legs. Manamanaiakaluea is so overcome with joy that she composes this chant in Hi‘iaka’s honor as a means to thank her for everything that she has done.

This text and translation can also be found in Unwritten Literature by Nathaniel Emerson.

Ke lei maila ‘o Ka’ula i ke kai ē
Ke mālamalama ‘o Ni‘ihau, ua mālie
A mālie pā ka Inuwai lā
Ke inu mai lā nā hala o Naue i ke kai
No Naue ka hala
No Puna ka wahine
No ka lua nō i Kīlauea
‘Ae...

Ka’ula wears the ocean as a wreath
Ni‘ihau shines forth in the calm
After the calm blows the Inuwai wind
The palms then drink in the salt water
From Naue is the pandanus palm
From Puna is the woman
From the pit indeed at Kīlauea
Yes...

An audio clip is unavailable at this time due to the wide variety of styles available to chant this particular mele. Please consult your kumu ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i to learn the appropriate style according to their personal tradition.