

TRUE LIVES

A New Limited Series from the Producers of *P.O.V.***For Immediate Release**

Contact:

Cathy Fisher, cfisher@pov.org, 212-989-7425Neyda Martinez, neyda@pov.org, 212-989-7425**“American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawai’i” Discovers a Renaissance
In Hawaiian Culture***A Co-presentation with the Independent Television Service (ITVS)
And Pacific Islanders in Communications (PIC)*

“American Aloha,” Part of “True Lives” Series Distributed by NETA,
Available for March 2008 – December 2009 Scheduling by PBS Stations

Few American icons are as well-known for their popular kitsch as the hula dance. From old Hollywood movies to entertainment for tourists, the hip-swaying girls in grass skirts and colorful lei have long masked an ancient cultural tradition. Now, after years of being shadowed by stereotypes, the hula is experiencing a rebirth that celebrates Hawaiian culture. As revealed in **American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawai’i**, an award-winning documentary airing on the *True Lives* series, Hawaiians – wherever they live – are challenging misconceptions to redefine the evocative storytelling art of the hula dance across the American mainland.

Lisette Marie Flanary and Evann Siebens’ **American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawai’i** airs on public television stations as part of *True Lives*, a series presented by American Documentary, Inc. and the National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA). *True Lives* is a new programming initiative from the producers of *P.O.V.* **American Aloha** is a *Diverse Voices Project* co-production, made possible through major funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

For Hawaiians, the hula is a way of life. Since ancient times, hula has preserved history through oral tradition and expressed the soul of Hawaiian spirituality. The sacred chants communicated with the gods, recorded genealogy, honored the chiefs, exalted nature, and celebrated humanity. Yet by the early 20th century, many of the unique cultural traditions of Hawai’i were in danger of disappearing – especially the hula. Denounced as a “heathen” practice with the arrival of American missionaries, the hula was soon outlawed and forced underground. Hawaiians were discouraged from being proud of their ancestry and soon even the language was banned. Nearly lost after decades of assimilation following the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, the hula emerged as a symbol of fierce ethnic pride during the Hawaiian renaissance that swept the islands in the 1970s.

American Aloha shows that the hula continues to grow beyond the islands. With the cost of living in Hawai’i estimated at 27 percent higher than the continental United States, large numbers of Hawaiians have left the islands to pursue professional and educational opportunities. Today, with more Native Hawaiians living on the mainland than in the state of Hawai’i, the hula has traveled with them. From the suburbs of Los Angeles to the San Francisco Bay Area, the largest Hawaiian communities have settled in California, and the hula continues to connect communities to their heritage on distant shores.

Sounding a universal note of cultural adaptation and renewal, **American Aloha** takes us on a tour through the practices and philosophies of some of those at the forefront of hula's renaissance on the mainland. The film focuses on the work of three *kumu hula*, or master teachers of hula, in the largest Hawaiian communities in California. The three teachers, who have all resided on the mainland for over 20 years, represent very different – and sometimes controversial – approaches to preserving the integrity of ancient hula while carrying the art form into the future.

Sissy Kaio, who lives in Carson, a working-class suburb of Los Angeles, has been teaching hula for over two decades. She is the most traditional of the three and is the center of a *halau*, or school of dance, that runs like a large family of over 100 men, women and children ranging in age from four to 75. Her students seek to rediscover their connection to their roots, their bond to the *'aina* or land of their ancestors. Struggling to perpetuate the ancient *kahiko* traditions in a very different modern world, Sissy says, "We make wherever we live our own Hawai'i. So, we may be in California, but we make it *our* Hawai'i."

In contrast, Mark Ho'omalulu, an Oakland resident, is a hula teacher who is both acclaimed and criticized for bringing innovations to hula traditions. Rebellious and confrontational, Mark's cutting-edge chant style and unique rhythms in his music have challenged traditionalists back home in Hawai'i to question the boundaries of the time-honored dance. "Here in California, it's not the blood quantum that will be passed on," says Mark, "but the culture that will be carried into the future."

Patrick Makuakāne, just across the bay from Mark in San Francisco, has stirred even more controversy in the Hawaiian community. In addition to teaching hula, Patrick is a DJ and has braved new waters by setting traditional hula movement to non-Hawaiian music. In shows such as "The Natives Are Restless," he uses his progressive approach to address political issues such as the arrival of Christian missionaries and the overthrow of Hawai'i's last sovereign ruler, Queen Lili'uokalani, by American businessmen. Blending the contemporary and the traditional, Patrick's work shows the hula is a living and evolving art form. "I do everything with hula," he says. "Hula in Hawai'i is sort of the last bastion of tradition. You don't touch hula."

With the disappearance of pure Native Hawaiians predicted within a generation, today's revival of the ancient art of hula is a creative response to the challenges of cultural survival. A powerful testament to the vibrant community of Hawaiians living far from home, **American Aloha** is a wonderfully entertaining celebration of Hawaiian culture as well as a proud tribute to those who will carry traditions into the future.

About the Filmmakers:

Lisette Marie Flanary Producer/Co-Director

As a filmmaker and a hula dancer, Lisette Marie Flanary creates documentary films about the hula dance that celebrate a renaissance of Hawaiian culture. She is the writer, producer and director of Lehua Films. Her film **Nā Kamalei: The Men of Hula** premiered at the Hawai'i International Film Festival in October 2006 and received the Audience Award for Best Documentary and the Hawai'i Filmmaker Award, as well as the Audience Award at the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival, the Special Jury Award for Best Non-Fiction Feature at the VCFILMFEST in Los Angeles, the Emerging Director Award at the New York Asian American International Film Festival, and Best Documentary at the San Diego Asian American Film Festival. The film will be broadcast on the *Independent Lens* series on PBS in May 2008.

After receiving her bachelor of fine arts degree in film and television from New York University in 1995, she co-founded bluestocking films, inc. Lisette has worked on many independent productions both in the United States and abroad, as well as her own 16mm short film **Kill Kimono** about mixed-race Japanese women in New York. She received her MFA in creative writing at the New School in

2000 and continued her traditional hula studies under master hula teacher Patrick Makuakāne in San Francisco. She teaches classes that perpetuate the art of the hula in New York City.

Evann Siebens

Director/Co-Producer

Evann Siebens specializes in making films about dance. A former dancer with the National Ballet of Canada and the Bonn Ballet in Germany, she has filmed dancers such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Bill T. Jones, and Lucinda Childs. She is also a graduate of New York University and co-founder of bluestocking films, inc. Evann has been the videographer for numerous documentaries on dance including **State of Darkness** and **From the Horses Mouth**. Her short films **POTHEAD** and **do not call it fixity...** have screened at film festivals and on arts networks worldwide. Evann co-directed **The Breach**, a dance film series for DV Republic, and was commissioned to direct a documentary on the José Limón Dance Company in 2000. She recently completed a net.dance project entitled **PORTAL** and a dance media installation with Ballet Frankfurt in Germany.

Credits:

Producer/Co-Director:	Lisette Marie Flanary
Director/Co-Producer:	Evann Siebens
Editor:	Dena Mermelstein
Contributing Editor:	Linda Hattendorf
Videographer:	Mark Eby

Running Time: 1 hour

Awards & Festivals:

- *CINE Golden Eagle Award*
- Chicago International Television Festival. *Silver Hugo Award*
- WorldFest Houston. *Bronze Award in Cultural Documentary*
- Visual Communication's Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film & Video Festival
- Pacifika: The New York Hawaiian Film Festival. Opening Night Feature
- Maui Film Festival
- Asian Cinevision's New York Asian American International Film Festival
- Hawai'i International Film Festival
- Native American Film and Video Festival
- World's Fare, Reel World Film Festival, Toronto, Canada

Co-presenters:



ITVS funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the PBS series *Independent Lens*. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences.

Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. For more information, please visit www.itvs.org.



Pacific Islanders in Communications is based in Honolulu, Hawaii and was created to support, advance and develop Pacific Island media content and talent that results in a deeper understanding of Pacific Island history, culture and contemporary challenges. Primary funding for PIC is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). For more information about PIC, visit www.piccom.org.

The *Diverse Voices Project* is a partnership of P.O.V. and CPB, working with the five publicly funded Minority Consortia, which include Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB), Native American Public Telecommunications (NAPT), National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA), National Black Programming Consortium (NBPC) and Pacific Islanders in Communication (PIC). *Diverse Voices* is designed to support the work of emerging filmmakers with creative and compelling stories to tell. The *Diverse Voices Project* is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.



CPB, a private, nonprofit corporation created by Congress in 1967, is the steward of the federal government's investment in public broadcasting. It helps support the operations of more than 1,000 locally owned and operated public television and radio stations nationwide, and is the largest single source of funding for research, technology, and program development for public radio, television, and related online services.



National Educational Telecommunications Association (www.netaonline.org)

The National Educational Telecommunications Association is a professional association based in Columbia, S.C. It serves public television licensees and educational entities in all 50 states, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico by providing quality programming content, educational resources, professional development, management support, and national representation.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

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