

# THE MOST UNIQUE THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE IN HAWAI'I

## 'Ulalena

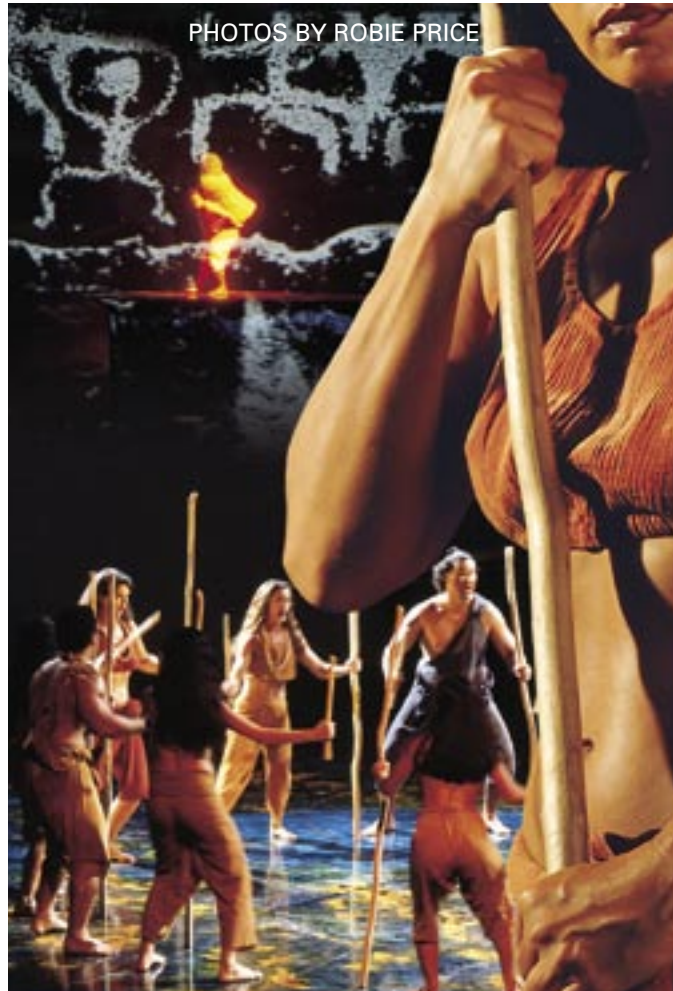
BY ARRA

There is a wind peculiar to Maui that rises sometimes at twilight. Borne on the wind is a gentle rain. It creates a golden red mist as the evening light shines through the falling rain and drifts, shimmering, across the landscape. It whispers of other places and other times, both mythic and real. It blows between daylight and night, between times and worlds. It is at once hopeful and cleansing. The ancient Hawaiian name for this rain is 'Ulalena. It is also the name of the most amazing stage production to come from Hawai'i in decades.

The colorful production shimmers onstage before the audience like the rain. The unforgettable live music rolls over and engulfs them, and it draws them into a place of wonder.

The story is born from a mythology populated by spirit beings who are larger than life, representing a natural landscape alive with volcanoes, stars, vast oceans and primeval rain forests. It begins with the mythic creation of the islands and rolls through successive waves of voyagers who have found their way to these shores – from the first brave Polynesians to Captain Cook, and finally to us.

This is a unique and compelling story. One worth telling. And Maui Theatre presents a theatrical



PHOTOS BY ROBIE PRICE

experience as impressive as the story. The live original music and powerful vocals are mixed and delivered in 8-channel surround sound. Traditional Hula is blended with modern dance. Classic Butoh theatre is combined with stunning acrobatic feats of strength and beauty. Rich costumes, lighting and stage design are woven together into a parade of fantastic images drawn from Hawaiian legend and history, inviting viewers out of time and into a place where they can experience with awe the spirit-filled landscape of the ancient Hawaiian story tellers.

This is definitely not the normal Hawaiian Luau, and it is not a documentary. This is an artistically innovative modern retelling of the ancient

Hawaiian story from the cultural point of view of the Hawaiians. It is powerful, funny, beautiful, and will leave you with a new and deeper experience of Aloha. In viewing 'Ulalena, the audience is not simply a witness, but is included in the story. Acknowledged. Welcomed, just as almost every visitor has been since the first bare feet touched Hawai'i's golden sands.

Critics agree, 'Ulalena is a feast for the senses and a must see! ■



# ‘Ulalena

BY ARRA

## STAGING AND PROPS

The first drafts of the designs for the original scenography, the props and the characters were created using computer technology. At first, the creators drew the stage in 3 dimensions on which they integrated various scenographic elements, such as props and characters, building a storyboard. Again, computers were needed using image processing software.

The backstage has very little space, with almost no possibility for storage. Therefore, the stage requires scenography which can rapidly be put together.

The stage in itself is one of a kind. Built in Montreal and moved piece by piece to Maui, the stage possesses many characteristics which are unique to ‘Ulalena and Maui Theatre:

- 4 built-in elevators which can retract when not in use
- 1 turntable
- The brilliant color is obtained by putting on numerous layers of paint and varnish usually used for cars. This particular paint gives the stage its richness and color depth, achieving the desired effects.

Aside from the built-in elevators, other elements of scenography used include yards of fabric which require limited storage space.

Movable screens supporting image projections are also used as backdrops throughout the show. The screens, along with all moveable elements, have integrated electric motors, which can be controlled by computer.

All props were created in workshops based in Montreal, Quebec, Canada and by artists in Hawai‘i. ARRA-Montreal relied on the talents and experience of more than 20 artists in order to create 85 unusual props.

‘Ulalena requires 40 costumes for the cast and musicians and more than 20 specific costumes. All of them were fabricated



using multiple materials and fabrics, such as synthetic and natural fiber, latex and foam. Some designs printed on the fabrics were created by computer, others were hand painted. There are costumes which are considered

an important part of the scenography. Because of particular techniques used during their creation, they have an ability to undergo transformation on stage before the audience.

The masks used for the show were created following a very old Italian process found in the “comedia del arte” tradition.

## LIGHTING

Maui Theatre is a state-of-the-art theatrical environment. Using the newest in computerized technology (colors and position), ARRA-Montreal created a unique lighting system using the following:

- 24 moving lights over the stage
- 12 spotlights on moving tracks on the ceiling over the stage
- 4 moving pantographs on the sides of the stage

## PROJECTIONS

Backdrop images are a big part of the ‘Ulalena production, adding atmosphere to the show. The technicians of ‘Ulalena use the following:

- 2 high powered projectors manufactured by Ludwig Pani (Austria)
- 2.5 kilowatt HMI lamps
- 2 ETC single stroller units using 183 millimeter wide of perforated film
- Although some images were done using a computer with Photoshop® software, most images were hand-painted with water color

## SOUND

The Sound system installed in Maui Theatre follows the criteria of the best in high technology entertainment. It is composed of the following elements:

- Two different sound systems with 8 speakers for atmosphere and sound effects
- 5 live musicians routed through a 40 channel mixing console
- Up to 16 automated channels for FX and atmosphere on digital recording
- State-of-the-art wireless microphones and in-ear monitors
- Specific selection of microphones for ethnic percussions and musical instruments





PHOTOS BY ROBBIE PRICE

# The Maui News Opinion

*An Authentic Must-see*

*by Charles Kauluwehi Maxwell Sr.*

I was privileged to have been invited to view the show 'Ualena at the new Maui Theatre.

Having studied over the past 4 years the Kumulipo (Hawaiian creation chant) and the history of ancient and modern Hawai'i, I was very interested to see what would be presented live on stage.

I was mesmerized by the production and by the choreography that went into the making of this



show. The actors portrayed their parts, which perfectly correlated with the mystical ancient history of our people according to our chants, or oral history. This feat was accomplished in a mere 75 minutes.

I would recommend strongly that local people, especially Native Hawaiians, see this production. It truly represents our oral history, which totally will entrance the viewer with the beauty of our past. The children of Hawai'i also should have access to this production.

Seeing the production would be a must for tourists who want to experience the culture of these islands.

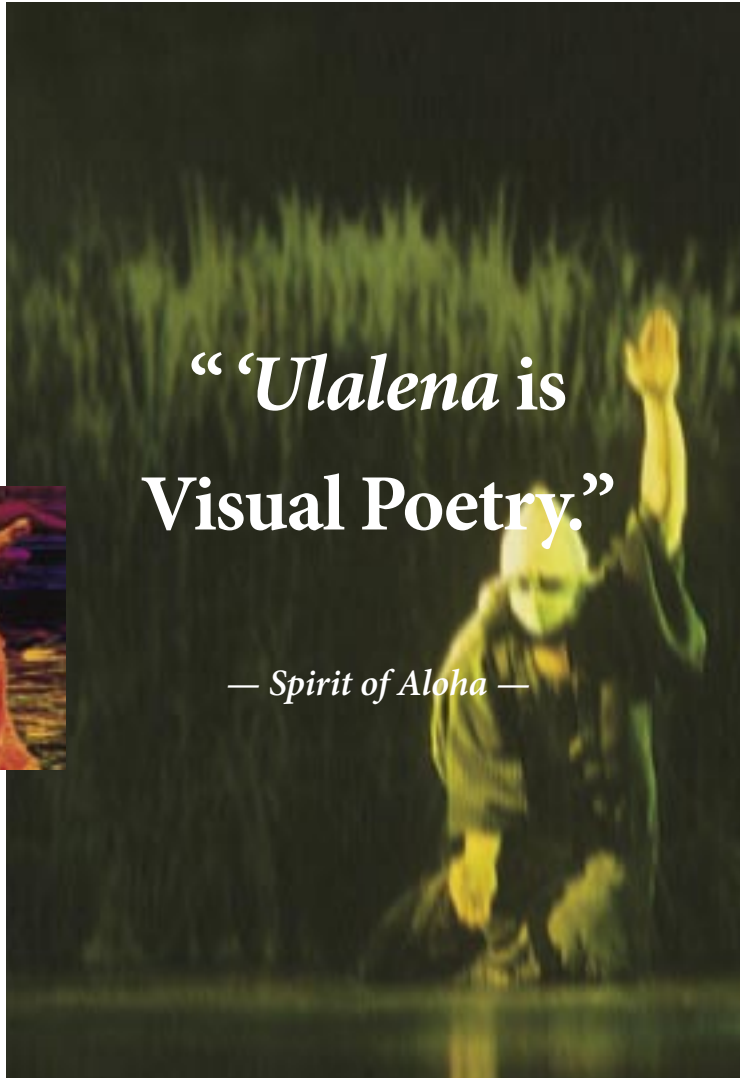
Mahalo to Keola Beamer and his staff.

# Travel+Leisure

*(November 1999)*

'Ualena, a show about Hawaiian mythology and history, proves there's a life beyond the luau. In one act, an acrobat gives the illusion she is a lizard swimming up a waterfall that cascades from the rafters to the stage. More than 20 of the island's

most talented musicians, actors and directors – along with ARRA-Montreal, developer of the original Cirque de Soleil – banded together to create the spectacular production.



“‘Ualena is  
Visual Poetry.”

— Spirit of Aloha —

## Honolulu Star Bulletin

*by Dave Donnelly*

“I go out of my way to not call 'Ualena (at Maui Theatre) a show. It's theater. It's art. It's wonderful. 'Ualena is one of the most brilliant pieces of theater I've seen in Hawai'i in more than 40 years.”

## Frommer's Maui 2002

People are still agog over 'Ualena, an extraordinary production that tells the story of Hawai'i in chant, song, original music, acrobatics and dance, using state-of-the-art technology and some of the most creative staging to be seen in Hawai'i. There's nothing like it in Hawai'i.

# The Boston Globe

by Vera Vida, Globe Correspondent  
(February 2001)

In Lahaina, on Maui, we recommend seeing the 'Ulalena show, a total departure from the often-mindless "Hawaiian" productions aimed at tourists. Here is exciting theater that's so Hawaiian – dealing with the Hawaiians' history, culture, myths, and legends – that it may surprise theatergoers to learn it was



produced by the Montreal people who created Cirque du Soleil. But there are strong similarities, and if you loved Cirque, you will love 'Ulalena, with its dreamscape acrobatics and alluring spectacles. At one time, for example, when Pele, the volcano goddess, unleashes her fury, red lava (depicted by masses of fiery red fabric) flows from the stage into the audience.



— [nationalgeographic.com](http://nationalgeographic.com) —

## Scene

### National Geographic Society Taps 'Ulalena To Showcase Hawaiian Culture (2001)

A traveling cast from the 'Ulalena production in Lahaina will be performing and conducting workshops on Hawaiian culture and hula Dec. 6 and 7 in Washington D.C. in

a program conducted by the National Geographic Society.

"It's an honor and we're extremely excited about it," said Maui Theatre's General Manager. "It's not just an 'Ulalena program, but we're going as representatives of Hawai'i."

He said the cast was approached early this year by a representative of the National Geographic Society, which will publish feature articles on



Hawai'i in both the *National Geographic* magazine and the

companion *National Geographic Traveler* magazine in December. The concept was to have a Hawaiian production at the National Geographic Theater in Washington to coincide with the magazine articles on the culture and history of Hawai'i, he said.

There will be two performances on Dec. 6 of an abbreviated version of the 'Ulalena show that is performed at the Maui Theatre in Lahaina, he said. On Dec 6., the performers will conduct several workshops on Hawaiian

culture and the hula that will include performances of segments from the show.

The general manager said the traveling company is something the *‘Ulalena* production group has been preparing for some time, to provide for performances outside the Maui Theatre, including presentations in the schools.

The troupe will involve 10 musicians, dancers and acrobats, plus coordinator Pono Murray. The troupe will spend three days in Washington, take a side trip to New York City and be home on Dec. 9.

“This isn’t just about *‘Ulalena*. It’s really going to present a view of the culture of Hawai’i,” said Maui Theatre’s General Manager.

For more information, call 661-9913.

**Honolulu  
Advertiser**  
*by Wayne Harada  
(July 1999)*

“In the annals of Island show business, *‘Ulalena* will be the buzz of the millennium and a yardstick by which future productions are measured.”

**The Maui News**  
*Curtain Call – ‘Ulalena Redux*  
*By Paul Janes-Brown*  
*(January 2002)*

Last Saturday night, at the conclusion of *‘Ulalena*, a near capacity audience of several hundred stood and applauded in grateful appreciation for what they had just experienced

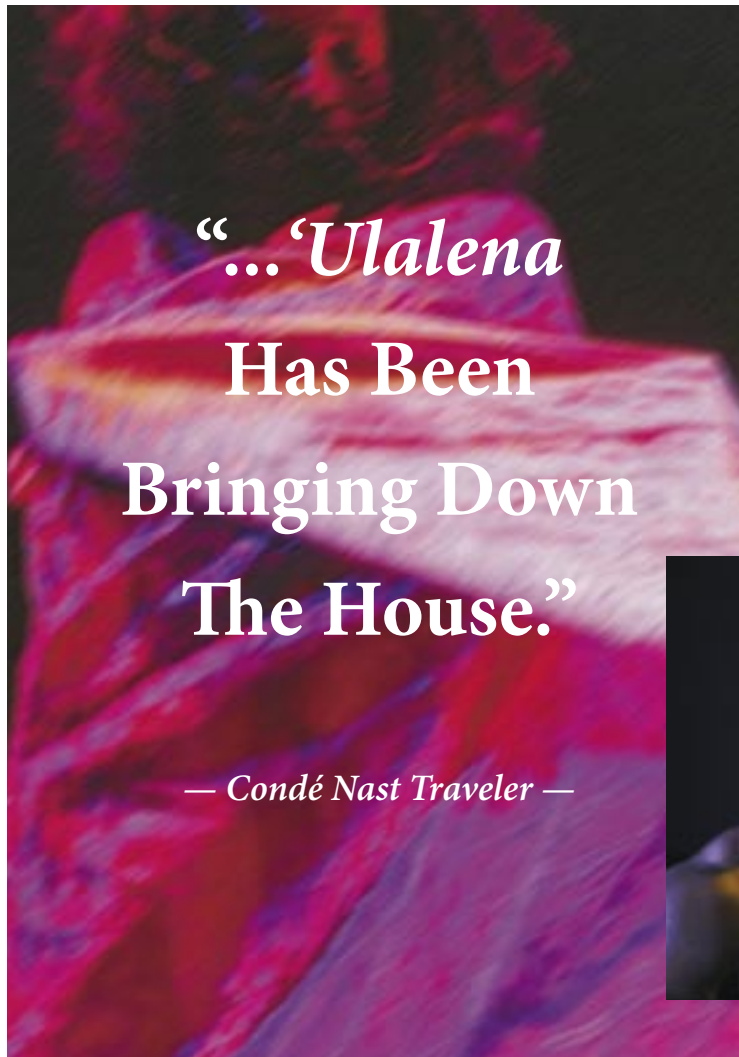
in Lahaina’s magnificent state-of-the-art Maui Theatre.

*‘Ulalena* is to Maui what the “Follies Bergere” is to Paris or the “Phantom of the Opera” is to New York – a must see. However, unlike these famous tourist attractions, *‘Ulalena* is for kama’aina and malihini as well, because it is the most long-running, professional, beautiful, dignified theatrical telling of the Hawaiian myths and legends there is.

The story is told in chant, dance, movement, song, music, acrobatics, and theater magic.

It has changed since it opened in 1999. Those who have not seen the show since then may want to revisit it. Looking at the very mixed audience on Saturday night, it is clear this show is not just for tourists.

A who’s who of Hawaiiana have ensured the accuracy of not just the stories, but also



the way they are told. The list includes consultants from University of Hawai’i and Bishop Museum as well as experts such as Keola and Nona Beamer. A creative team from such an unlikely place as Montreal has produced a show which truly honors Hawai’i.

In a series of scenes, the show starts with the creation chant, “Kumulipo,” moves through the ocean where sea creatures are projected on a scrim and wonderful animated fish are carried into the audience on sticks by cast members, transforming

the theater into an underwater world without getting wet. Then to a forest inhabited by living trees expertly depicted by actors on stilts; next, a village scene where poi is pounded and cloth is made in rhythm and dance.

The arrival of Europeans is greeted with awe and delight by the Hawaiians, but the choreography graphically demonstrates the contempt with which they are held by these foreign guests. The clash of cultures is further accentuated by the introduction of two European gifts, the gun and smallpox. The Hawaiian monarchy is depicted unsympathetically waltzing through the devastation of their people. Finally, Pele, erupts in an explosion that literally covers the entire theater in red cloth.

Among all the spectacles and terrific dancing – especially by the anthropomorphic taro dancer – the aerial work is the most spectacular. An acrobat performs upside-down splits and death-defying acrobatics in a virtuosic, breath-taking aerial ballet 30 feet above the floor on two pieces of cloth representing a waterfall early in the show. Another acrobat performs on rings as Hina, the moon goddess, toward the end.

The music is first-rate and the audience will leave the theater humming the haunting final anthem *‘Ulalena*. The dancing is as good as there is, and the show is still the best continuous production on Maui. For a night not soon forgotten, go. The show runs Tuesday through Saturday, times may vary by season so call 661-9913 for exact schedules and reservations.

## Frommer’s

### *‘Ulalena: Hula, Myth & Modern Dance*

The highly polished *‘Ulalena*, staged in the Maui Theatre, 878 Front St., Lahaina (808/661-9913), is the talk of the town, a riveting production that weaves Hawaiian mythology with drama, dance, and state-of-the-art multimedia capabilities in a brand-new, multimillion-dollar theater.

A local and international cast performs Polynesian dance, original music, acrobatics, and chant to create an evocative experience that often leaves the audience speechless. It is interactive, with dancers coming down the aisles, drummers and musicians in surprising corners, and mind-boggling stage and lighting effects that draw the audience in. In one



scene, sugarcane is shown growing on the stage, projected on mesh curtains as if by time-lapse photography.

Some special moments: the goddess dancing on the moon, the white sail signaling the coming of the first Europeans, the wrath of the volcano goddess Pele (the stage effects depicting lava are unforgettable), and the despairing labors

of the field worker immigrants. The effects of the modern choreography and traditional hula, fusion of genres, are surprisingly evocative and emotional. The story unfolds seamlessly and at the end, you are shocked to realize that not a single word of dialogue has been spoken.

surprised. She says that when MVB talks about Hawaiian culture on the Mainland, the questions show a level of interest “you wouldn’t believe.” Weinert also believes the show has successfully navigated the touchy subject of authenticity. From what she hears, island kupuna are satisfied, even enthusiastic. (Not surprising, considering how many notable Hawaiians are on the consultant list.) Wienert says she has

hoped for something like this for years. The island doesn’t need to just sell sun and beaches. “Been there, done that,” she says. Now, island residents “need to relay who we are and what makes us unique.” As for the possibility of ‘*Ulalena*’ becoming a “must do,” Wienert says, “We need to make sure that residents say (to visitors), ‘You need to see this to understand who we are.’”



## The Best Publishing (March 2002)

“*Ulalena* is a must-see  
– simply dazzling!”

## The Maui News ‘*Ulalena* Has Ingredients To Be A Must-see by Harry Eagar (July 1999)

A casual survey of first-nighters indicated that ‘*Ulalena*, at the Maui Theatre, has the potential to become a “must do” Maui attraction. Marsha Wienert, executive director of Maui Visitors Bureau, says the show of Hawaiian legends and history “piqued the interest” of visitors in the party, who were ready to buy books and learn more. Wienert was not

## Awarded “Best Show” and “Best Attraction”

— *Hawaii Visitors &  
Convention Bureau* —



# Theatre Journal

by Tom Smith, New Mexico State University  
(December 2002)

*‘ULALENA*. By ARRA-Montreal and Cove Entertainment  
Maui Theatre, Hawai‘i. 11 April 2002.

ARRA-Montreal is a company specializing in producing high concept productions. Together with Cove Entertainment, they have created



“Powerful.”

— Daily News —

Maui Theatre, a \$10 million, 700-seat theatre located in Lahaina on the island of Maui. It is in this theatre that they house their production of *‘Ulalena*, an original theatre piece that illuminates Maui’s myths through music, dance, puppetry, Butoh, and impressive special effects.

*‘Ulalena* is the ancient Hawaiian word for both the “hopeful and cleansing wind” that blows across Maui and the red-yellow rain that comes at twilight. It is a word that resonates deeply among a people entrenched in mythology that connects man and nature. *‘Ulalena* explores these ties,

eliciting both memories of Maui’s past and a rejuvenating spirit onward its future. It explores the intricate and sometimes disruptive relationship between Hawai‘i’s people and the islands themselves. Integrating authentic Hawaiian chants and dances, original music, acrobatic choreography, special effects and projections, *‘Ulalena* dramatizes the birth of a culture.

*‘Ulalena* consists of ten episodes of Maui’s history and mythology. The first, fittingly entitled “In the Beginning,” opens with the first verse of the Kumulipo: the Hawaiian creation chant. A lone man is seen carrying a ka‘ai, a woven burial basket used to hold the bones of ancient ruling chiefs. As he passes, he seems to bring life to the barren landscape as taro, a



plant staple of the Hawaiian Islands, emerges out of the ground, dancing joyfully. This is followed by “The Ocean,” an episode in which migrators to Tahiti pursue their vision of Pele, the volcano goddess, and her brother Kamohoali‘i, the shark god. The stage fills with fog and mist as men with shark fins glide by on unseen carts, creating a mood that is both ominous and spiritual. “The Mythical Forest” brings a touch of humor to the proceedings,

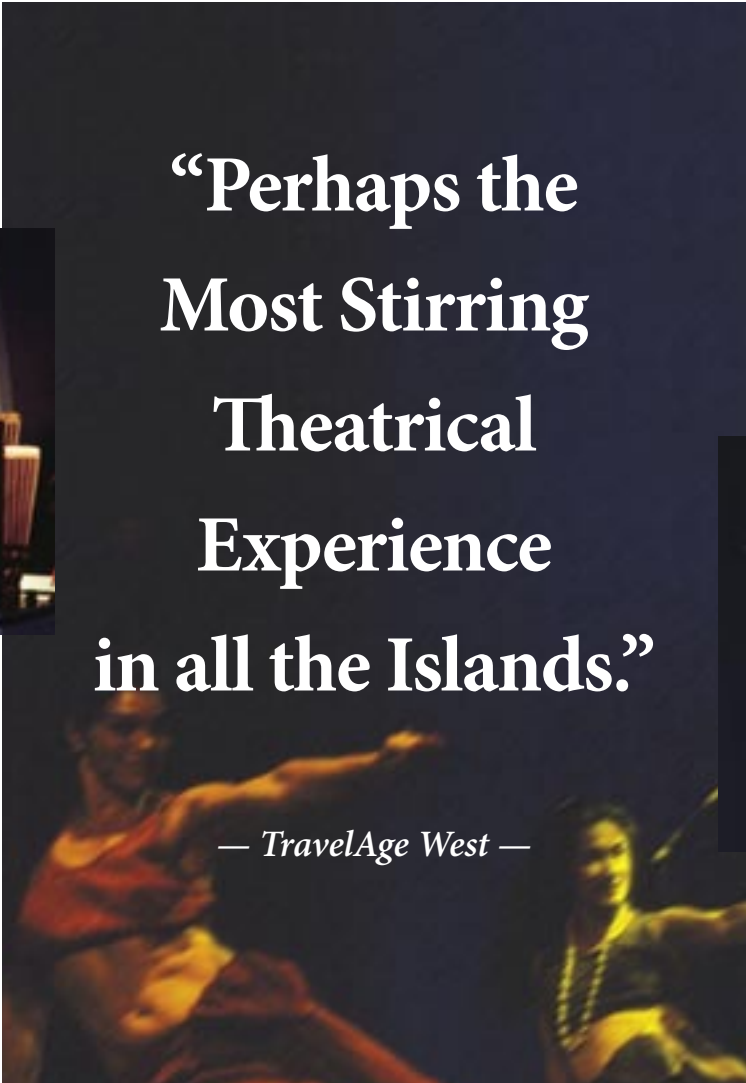
as trees in the rainforest come to life and Kamapua‘a, half-hog/ half-god, pursues the uninterested Pele.

As Maui begins to populate, we see “The Village” pounding poi from taro roots. “The Makahiki” celebrates the annual celebration of Lono, the god of agriculture. Soon “The European Explorer,” Captain Cook, arrives and interrupts the festival. The natives, seeing the white sails of his ship similar to the long white tapa they use to praise Lono, believe their god has arrived in human form. Suddenly populated by Europeans,

a time of contemplation, under the peaceful light of the moon goddess, Hina, who dances with hoops symbolizing the rings of the moon. Finally, ‘*Ulalena* arrives, embracing Hawai‘i’s people, their essence and spirit molded into a way of life that is tightly integrated with nature.

‘*Ulalena* incorporated epic storytelling devices to recount its myths. Utilizing a cast of twenty performers and

musicians, ancient Hawaiian chants are interspersed with more contemporary rhythms; yet the overall effect sounds tremendously authentic. Five musicians, all percussionists, flood the theatre with tribal riffs, adding a bamboo nose-flute,



“Perhaps the  
Most Stirring  
Theatrical  
Experience  
in all the Islands.”

— *TravelAge West* —

“Shadows” exposes the differences between the two worlds and the introduction of foreign elements. After the death of King Kamehameha, the kapu system is overthrown, leaving Hawai‘i in conflict between traditional and new values.

“The Hawaiian Monarchy” witnesses the events of the nineteenth century, including the immigrants who are brought over to harvest sugar cane. Angry at the abuses of power, in the “Regenerating Forces of Nature,” Pele, the volcano goddess, explodes. Lava is represented with yards and yards of red silk, which is ultimately pulled from the stage and over the audience. After Pele’s devastation comes

due to their proximity to the audience, at times they are visually a bit distracting and pull focus from the events unfolding onstage. This is a minor complaint overall and it is likely the music, particularly the rousing title song, that the audience keeps with them after the performance.

guitar and keyboards to supplement the drums. While one can viscerally feel the percussive vibrations

Julie Taymor-like puppetry and masks also play important roles in the production. In “The Ocean,” giant fish puppets visibly manipulated by performers are used to bring the ocean to life. Native tropical fish swim off the stage and into the audience, reminiscent of the opening sequence to *The Lion King*. Kamapua‘a, is in a half-body puppet, the hog head and torso around the actor’s waist, the actor’s own legs being used for motion.

Captain Cook is in a traditional commedia mask, delineating the Europeans from the Islanders. Pele



walks with a mask on a stag, similar to the device Taymor implemented in her production of *The Tempest*, to demonstrate flight and movement. Shadow puppetry, albeit with live actors, makes an appearance in “Shadows” as we witness the European ways changing traditional Hawaiian life forever.

Butoh and acrobatics mark the acting style since minimal dialogue is spoken (most of the story is told through chant, song, and dance). “The Mythical Forest” incorporated vertical

silk trapezing, where a performer dressed as Mo‘o, a guardian lizard spirit in a waterfall, moves effortlessly around a giant loop of white silk. There is also a percussive *Stomp*-like number consisting of the company pounding poles against the earth; creating their own rhythmic chanting praising their gods. Traditional hula and lua, Hawaiian martial arts, also are integrated into the production.

If it seems like ‘*Ulalena*’ comes across as a “best-of” pastiche (best of the *Lion King*, best of *Cirque du Soleil*, best of *Stomp*, etc.), that is partially true. There is a feeling of using current theatrical storytelling devices to recreate the mythology of Maui. However, it is done

“The Show  
Will Leave You...  
More In Touch  
with the  
Aloha Spirit.”

— *Travel.Yahoo.com* —



in an earnest and ultimately compelling manner. It is a modern-day equivalent to what it must have been like

to see Greek plays in their time: one leaves the theatre not only artistically satisfied, but feeling as if one has a better sense of the innate ties between Hawai‘i’s people and the land itself.

*All Photography by Robie Price.*

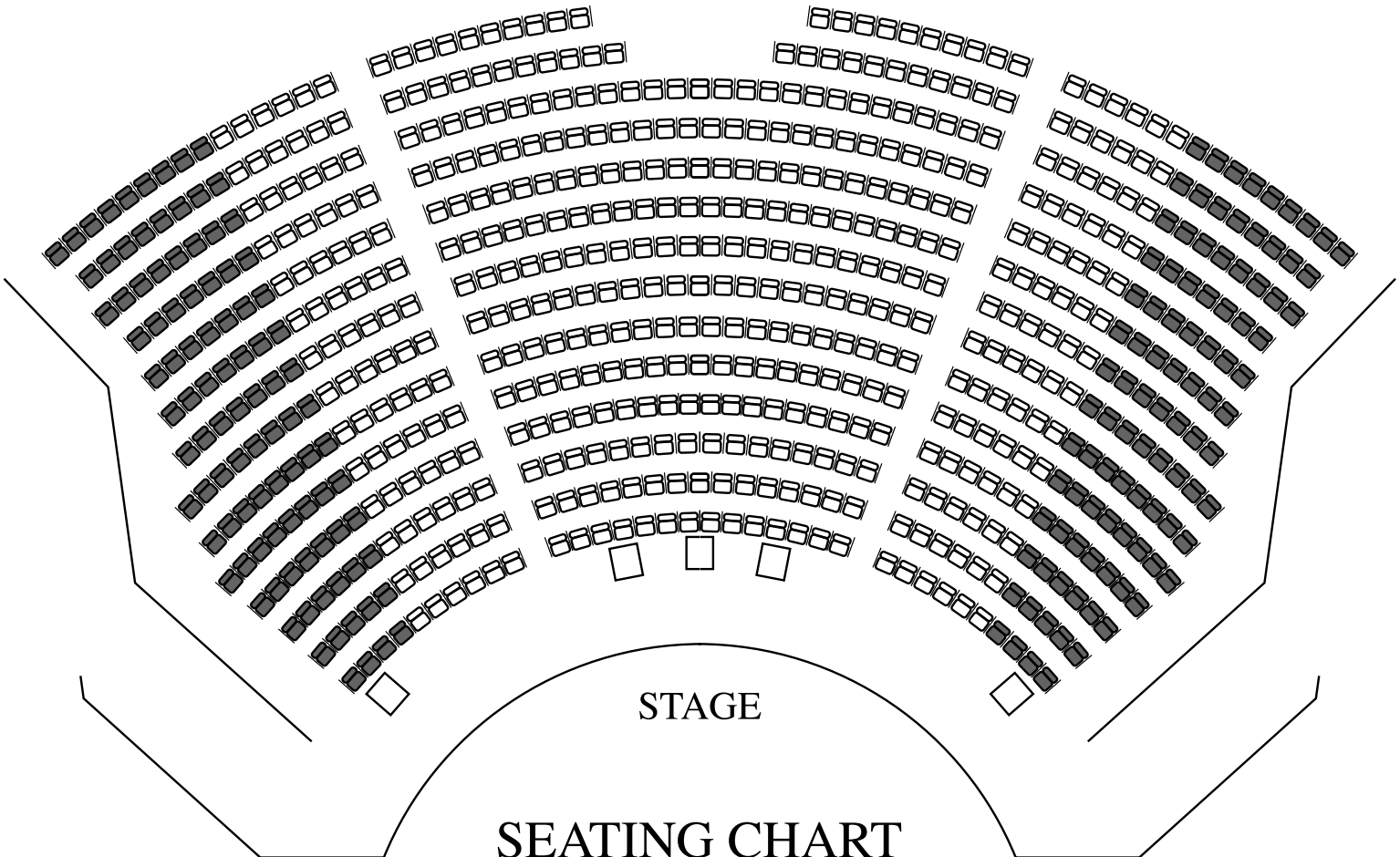
*All excerpts and quotes are from 1999 to 2002.*

*For further media coverage please contact Maui Theatre.*





M A U I T H E A T R E S E A T I N G C H A R T



**White** indicates those seats in the Premium Section  
**Gray** indicates those seats in the Standard Section



MAUI THEATRE

OLD LAHAINA CENTER

878 FRONT STREET, LAHAINA, MAUI • 808-661-9913 • (877) 688-4800

[WWW.ULALENA.COM](http://WWW.ULALENA.COM)