DHT’s Popular Dance Class Thrives on Fun, Fitness and Friends

lt’s a typical Tuesday morning at Diamond Head Theatre. Dim sunlight filters in through the jalousie windows of the rehearsal hall, casting the room in shades of blue and gray. All is calm, silent, as the theatre sleeps during its dormant daytime hours. Then lights suddenly flood the room as the boisterous women of DHT’s Silver Stars dance class enter, banishing the silence with their laughter and conversation.

It’s impossible not to get caught up in the exuberance of the students—most of whom are 60 years old or more—as they joke with each other about life and the latest dance steps. And when it’s time for class to start, these “silver stars” channel their rambunctious energy into the fun and freedom of moving to the beat.

Taught by our multitalented artistic director, John Rampage (whom the ladies absolutely adore), the class is modeled as a seniors-exclusive version of his wildly successful Broadway Jazz class. It provides a fun and safe environment for students to dance without the pressure of keeping up with younger generations, and has attracted many new and happy faces to our vibrant theatre community.

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"If it wasn't for John, I wouldn't be here," says new student Candy Cassaro with a big smile. "It's great to expand beyond the people you know instead of sticking to your own safe group. Coming to class is my reward for the day."

For Aileen Kawakami, Silver Stars is the first dance class she has ever taken. "It's lots of fun," she says. "At my last class reunion, I couldn't get up and dance. I was a wallflower, so this class is very much my coming out experience."

The spirited women of Silver Stars agree that the friendships they build dancing together are the very best part of the experience. Whether they're putting the sultry slick and brassy sass of "All That Jazz" to movement, or laughing at the shared difficulty of dancing within their designated "swimming lanes" (as John likes to put it), this rowdy bunch always has a blast together. "It's never too late to start dancing," says something you wanted to do all your life, "so that's what I'm doing now."

"Set your own goals, and don't compare yourself to how someone else is doing in the class. Come into it thinking, 'This is my reward for the day.'" John points out once the class is over.

The Diamond Head Theatre is a magical forest of costumes. Floor-to-ceiling clothing racks tower like trees, caponised with anything from the sparkling purple of a fairy's dress to the patchy brown of a shipwrecked-pirate's trousers.

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"It's never too late to start dancing," says Aileen Kawakami. "If it wasn't for John, I wouldn't be here," says new student Mary Calantoc. "I'm looking forward to learning how to dance with John."

As expected, about 30 percent hail from nearby neighborhoods—Kahala, Kaimuki, Aina Haina and Hawaii Kai. Let's face it—we know people don't like to drive far in Hawaii! But what was surprising is how many do drive some distance to come to DHT. We have subscribers from as far away as Waimanalo, Hauula and even Hilo. Now that's devotion!

The report also divulged that many of our fans come from Kailua and Kaneohe (15 percent), another 4 percent from Aiea/Pearl City, and 3 percent from Waipahu and Wahiawa. We have folks coming in from Mililani (4 percent), Kapolei (2 percent) and Ewa Beach (2 percent). Non-resident subscribers comprise 4 percent of the total, but that could be because some people have their DHT mail sent to their offices (we have not yet dug deeper to find out). My next research project is to answer an American Association of Community Theatres survey as to how many of our patrons are baby boomers. I'm intrigued myself—and since it's not a matter of simply sorting zip codes, were going to ask you. It would be helpful to find out a few of these things so we can better know how to communicate with you (i.e., email or snail mail), pick shows, plan events and so forth. Please keep your eye out for our quick and easy survey.

In the meantime, as we approach the season when we remember to give thanks, I give thanks to you—our island-wide (and then some) family of subscribers and donors. And to that one subscriber from Molokai—you rock!
After absorbing the shock of the event and the realization that the U.S. would be at war, HCT’s leadership sat down to figure out what the theatre’s role would be moving forward. Many of the actors, staff and board members had quickly become scattered after taking military positions—such as Technical Director Norman Grant, who worked in the Army camouflage division on Oahu. Once Dillingham Hall was converted from a theatre into an office building for the United States Engineering Department, the company also lost its main performing space.

Honolulu Community Theatre decided to shift its focus to entertaining U.S. service personnel in Hawaii in addition to the private citizens of Honolulu. At the time, HCT President H.W. Boynton commented that “not only did we feel a responsibility to carry on the theatrical tradition that ‘the show must go on,’ but we also felt a moral obligation to utilize our talent and facilities in providing some measure of entertainment for the men in the Armed Forces stationed on America’s front line of defense.”

The company was soon staging public performances as well as touring shows for the servicemen stationed in Hawaii. From Dec. 21, 1941 until Dec. 31, 1945, HCT produced 14 shows that were performed throughout Hawaii. The show How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying was the first, opening just two weeks after the Pearl Harbor Blitz. The show ran periodically from Christmas of 1941 through July 5, 1942, touring to various venues. Of its 21 performances, nine were for Army personnel, four were for Navy; two were for Marines, four were for war workers and two were for civilians.

Performances were held in a variety of spaces in various camps, and the outdoor shows often led to much frustration and amusement. During productions at Pearl Harbor and Wheeler Army Airfield, actors sometimes had to wait for planes to pass overhead before delivering their lines. Occasionally, dogs would wander onto the stage for their own 15 minutes of fame. Plays were often performed in broad daylight, which made lighting cues (such as total blackouts to lend dramatic effect) quite difficult. Then, during the occasional evening shows, the lights would go off and the stage would have to be lit by flashlights.

The most successful HCT play performed during the war years was The Doughgirls, which ran for a total of 64 performances from March to June of 1944. Forty-nine of these performances were exclusively for servicemen. The company’s final wartime production was H.M.S. Pinafore, which opened June 21, 1945 at the Roosevelt High School auditorium. At the time there was an influenza epidemic in Honolulu, so the play was declared “off bounds” for members of the Armed Forces.

Special permission was granted for the service members in the cast to continue performing, as long as they didn’t mingle with the audience. Many servicemen who were denied admission stood in the doorway, which was guarded by military police, and listened to the show outside the auditorium.

HCT still performed for the Armed Forces after the war was over, but at last could bring the servicemen to the shows instead of taking the shows to the servicemen. The theatre continued to produce high-quality performances on Oahu and was even able to secure exclusive rights to many shows being produced on Broadway. Thanks to a relationship with John Halliday, a well-known screen and stage actor of the time, HCT was able to gain permission to perform shows whose rights were not typically given to anyone outside of Manhattan, such as Arthur Miller’s All My Sons, which the company staged in 1947.

John Halliday had moved to Oahu in the late 1930s and was very active in the theatre scene in Hawaii. He appeared in many HCT shows and participated in some way in every one of its productions during the decade. This gave HCT use of the theatre as well as a workshop near Fort Shafter in exchange for assistance with the Honolulu Guild’s productions, a promise to utilize military personnel in the cars and crews of HCT shows, and use of HCT’s equipment and stage settings. The lease states that they partnered “to assist each other in their common aim of furthering the fine-arts program available to both the military and civilian communities.”
Every fall, Diamond Head Theatre hosts its annual fundraising event, the ‘Ilima Awards, in partnership with the Honolulu Star-Advertiser. This year’s gala was held Oct. 13.
The ‘Ilima Awards honors Hawaii’s top chefs, as voted on by the newspaper’s readers and restaurant critics. The awards themselves are bestowed onstage with a song-and-dance extravaganza that this year left everyone laughing and applauding.

With tickets sales covering less than 45 percent of our theatre operations, the ‘Ilima Awards helps support the many wonderful productions and educational programs Diamond Head Theatre has been providing for our community for 100 years. Mark your calendars for Oct. 12, 2015, for the much anticipated 20th Annual ‘Ilima Awards Benefit.

Victor Jian, owner and head chef at Nagomi, found himself at DHT for the first time in 2004 while volunteering for the ‘Ilima Awards as a KCC culinary student. Students earn class credit by volunteering to help our staff get things set up for the event as well as serve and bus tables during the event. Victor took a look around at the ‘Ilimas and thought to himself, “Someday I’m going to cook at this event.” This year Victor’s vision came true when his restaurant was chosen as a Rave Review ‘Ilima Award winner. Victor and his enthusiastic staff from Nagomi were the first restaurant on the property the day of the event to get their tent set up and ready to go—including a portable teppanyaki grill, where the chefs cooked right in front of guests. Victor even brought with him Sous Chef/Master Teppan Chef Lance Aldan, a fellow KCC graduate who had also volunteered for the ‘Ilimas while a student. Nagomi's yaki soba was a huge favorite of the night, and we hope to have Nagomi back at another ‘Ilima Awards event soon.

Photos courtesy Honolulu Star-Advertiser

- MC
Flood at DHT!

But the Show Must Go On …

On Oct. 7, DHT’s staff received quite a surprise when they arrived at work. With the extremely heavy rains we’d been having over a very short period of time, the theatre had flooded.

The water had come in through the upstairs prop room and flooded the lobby, the floor of the audience chamber, the box office, the development office and even the ladies’ restroom. DHT Marketing Manager Lauren Lee was the first person to arrive at the theatre early that morning. “I entered the dark lobby and began to hear squishing noises as I walked to the box office,” she recalls. “I didn’t realize how bad it was until I turned on the lights and saw big puddles of water in the box office and at the bottom of the stairs!”

With Mary Poppins performances scheduled to resume in just two days, the staff went to work to get the theatre up and running. Professional water extractors arrived, and in just a few hours the theatre was abuzz with the sound of powerful fans and dehumidifiers. After 48 hours of frantic drying and cleanup, the show went on—and with no one in the audience the wiser. A great team effort by all involved helped Mary Poppins fly in to delight another weekend of theatregoers.

-MC