

**GUEST: ROBERT CAZIMERO 1**

LSS 122 (LENGTH: 27:25)

FIRST AIR DATE: 4/29/08

**Aloha no and mahalo for joining me for another conversation on L S S . I'm Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii. Robert Cazimero is familiar to us in Hawaii as half of the Brothers Cazimero, the award-winning and highly successful musical duo. He's well-known. But how well do you know him? When he speaks publicly, it's almost always about an upcoming May Day concert, new recording, new DVD, a planned performance. Or he's having a fundraiser for his all-male hula halau, Na Kamalei. Coming up next – we ask Robert to talk about the person, not public events. Part One of a delightful, two-part conversation with Robert Cazimero.**

**The Brothers Cazimero, Robert and Roland, were leaders in the 1970s resurgence of Hawaiian music and culture. More than 30 years later, they continue to record and they perform locally, on the Mainland, abroad. Robert is also kumu hula of the all-male Halau Na Kamalei.**

**I know you as a singer, a performer and a kumu hula; but where did all this start?**

Well, I don't know how far back you want to go, but I'll start with being born.

**Okay.**

Now, our parents, Roland and my parents were music people; they were entertainers. So we fell into that immediately because we were surrounded by it.

**Did they perform in Waikiki?**

Actually, not so much in Waikiki, although they did do that. Mostly for the military clubs and for private parties. And they played standards; the old mainland standards. So we learned to play that kind of music as well as Hawaiian music.

**What's an example of a mainland standard?**

Well you know like, Our Love Is Here To Stay, for example, and Please Release Me, and stuff like that. So we do that, besides Kane'ohe and Royal Hawaiian Hotel. And so it started there. And we thought everybody else did the same thing in all the houses that surrounded us there in Kalihi, until you know, we found out different. And then we went to high school, and we got more involved with that. In high school I met my kumu hula, Maiki Aiu Lake. And as she left the class that she had come to speak with, which was the class we were in, she told me; she says, You know, someday you're gonna want to teach hula, and you know, You'll want to take hula, she said; and I'm going to be that teacher. And I was like –

**Did she know anything about you?**

Well, I had just played the piano for her to sing the song that she had come to talk about. And so she – but no, she just told me that. And at the time, it didn't really register, the depth of what she had said. So I said, Okay; and then went to lunch. You know, sort of like today, actually.

**[chuckle]**

And then years later, I found myself at her door, of her school. So I went to the university, I took voice lessons when I was there. I would fight with my teacher every day. His name was Jerry Gordon, a really nice guy. I kept saying to him, There are a lot of people who sing your style, but not enough people who sing my style. So I'll do what you want in class, and then I won't do what you want –

**What's your style?**

I think it's more – at the time, I thought it was more laid back, island, floaty. You know, and what he wanted was something that was a bit more pronounced, more exact, full of history of a far-away land. I mean, Italy; when you're from Kalihi, you don't think so much about Italy. You know, so ...

**So it wasn't just how you sang, but what he wanted you to sing about.**

Yes. What he wanted me to sing about, and how it was presented. You know, because when I sang Hawaiian music, it was much more laid back and I would not say apologetic. But I mean, it was a step back. When I was taking voice lessons from him, it was definitely, you were out there. You know. So I was there with him for a few years, and then I left school because well, our careers started to take off with the Sunday Manoa, first, and then –

**Well, now, what happened to the 60s and rock and roll? Were you part of that?**

Of course. Yeah; yeah. Loved the rock and roll years. Yeah; I was definitely there. We thought that The Platters were cool. And Roland was a real big fan of Jimmy Hendrix; real big. And we got all into that. You know, I didn't – we didn't get so much into the drugs of it, as much as we did the music.

**M-hm.**

We really liked the music. And the fact that, you know, we're the original Flower People, so we were like out there.

**[chuckle] People talk freely about how you were instrumental in that Hawaiian renaissance; the music and language, and everything that came with it.**

M-hm. You know, people do speak freely about the fact that we were there at the start of the renaissance, and leading the way. We had no idea. We had no idea we were leading the way for anybody, or to anything. We were just there, having a good time. We were just so happy to have people standing in line out there at Chuck's Cellar in Waikiki, not to come for steaks, but to listen to us play music. You know, so we really had no time to think about this whole idea of the renaissance, until maybe like two or three years after we had already been in it, and someone brought it up and said, What was it like? And we were like, Oh well. You know, it was very interesting, and it was fun, and –

**Well, when you would go out for gigs, did you and Roland think about, you know, your marketing plan, and who your audience was and how to tailor your music? Anything like that?**

No. We were just as wild on stage as we were, you know, at home. We were doing what we were doing. Roland and I used to go to work in caftans and get on stage and change, and then on the breaks, we'd wear these caftans, walking around the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

**[chuckle]**

You know.

**They'd never seen anything like that before.**

Well, no. I would wake up in the morning, and cut my bedspread, and throw it on, and go to school at the university. 'Cause it was the '60s, and you were supposed to wear your bedspread to school, or something like that. So yeah. It was never really planned out or strategically, or any kind of game plan, or –

**But it was just who you were. You were doing what you were.**

Yeah. And we were still kinda deciding what we were, and what we were doing. You know. And lots of experimentation in so many different facets. Lots of experimentation. So –

**Did you do all kinds of music, or did you do just Hawaiian?**

Well, at the time, with the Sunday Manoa, we kinda like felt like we should stay in this niche of Hawaiian music, you know. But the influences of like big things that were happening on the mainland became a part of what was entwined with the Hawaiian music. Yeah. So ...

**So Chuck's Cellar was your Sunday Manoa time.**

Was – yeah – was the very beginning, when we became known. Yeah. And I was 19 years old at the time.

**Did you get all big-headed?**

No, because we were change – you know, if you thought – there we go again. Just to make sure you knew you weren't that important, we would change in the parking lot. There was no dressing room, you know, and you still got \$15 for the whole gig. You know, so yeah. There was no way you could get big head. As the career got to be better and better, some people would say, You know, you folks are getting to be so Waikiki, so mainland. You know, you're forgetting where you're coming from. Well, let me just say, there is no way you can ever, ever forget that you're from Kalihi, I don't care what you try to do in your life, you know. And after a while, it gets to the point where it's a time that is so beautiful, and so worth being a part of, that you never, ever want to forget. You know, I'm proud that I'm a Kalihi guy.

**What part of Kalihi were you raised in?**

We would say Waena. So it'd be like Kam IV Road, where you know, we were there before they built that monstrosity, the Kuhio Park Terrace. So in the old days, from the roof of our house, or the back porch actually, you could see the fireworks at the Ala Moana Shopping Center. You can't anymore.

**Wow; amazing.**

Yeah; yeah.

**And you always lived in the same place as you were growing up?**

M-hm. And I finally moved out, gee many, many years later. 'Cause our mom had Alzheimer's for something like 15 years. And I had come home one day, and she had washed all my silk clothes in Clorox. And I knew that it was time to go.

**M-m.**

So I left, and I never looked back. [chuckle] Roland still has the house.

**Both of the Brothers Cazimero, Robert and Roland, are masters of their craft and consummate performers. But you'd never mistake one for the other. Different lifestyles, different approaches; but as artists and businessmen, the same respect for each other.**

I really learned how to talk, to be comfortable in front of a crowd through Loyal Garner – watching her perform. Really too, the Society of Seven, as far as flow is concerned, in a show. And our friend Gramps, who was very influential, and my kumu, Maiki; watching them. Of course, now, there are the other influences, like Crosby, Stills and Nash, and Kenny Rankin, who I would listen to for hours. I'd play his records, and I would listen to his style, and try to mimic it. And if he was gonna hold it for these many measures, I was gonna hold it for that many measures, and one more. You know.

**And you always thought you would go into music professionally?**

No; because getting back to this brother and sister thing. The brother above me, Rodney, was the one who we considered the voice in the family. So it was very difficult, after he went into the service, for me to start singing, and then to have to sing in front of him. So that was something we all had to learn about; how to handle things like that.

**Because ...**

Just the whole respect thing; that he was the older one. And still is. And I still think that of all of us, he has the most beautiful voice.

**And how much does he sing now?**

Well, he's working on a new CD, my brother Rodney is. So I'm very excited for it.

**Well, Roland seems like chaos.**

[chuckle] He's uh –

**He's out there.**

That's a good way of putting it. You know, he's really reeled himself in, within the last maybe ten years. But you're right; he was out there to the max, and over the top, being Roland Cazimero. I mean, he was wild and wooly and the women were everywhere and the liquor and the drugs and the food; and that's making me sound like I was a prude.

**[chuckle] And he would probably be late, and you would be on time? Is that how it worked?**

Oh, yeah. Oh, big fights about that; I tell you. And it was really some difficult times there. But he – yeah; he had a tendency to come to work when he was ready to come to work. Yeah.

**How about musically; I sense there wasn't –**

Incredible.

**There was not any kind of schism about that?**

You know, the thing about Roland was that he would come with stuff, because of his life, where it was. It would be so far off of what I thought was Hawaiian but I liked it. You know. And so he would do stuff, and I was like, Okay, let's put that in and tape. Mind you, another thing about that too is, we had been with the Sunday Manoa, and Peter Moon was the leader at the time. And Peter and Roland got along really well. Because as much as I was grounded in the Hawaiian thing, those two boys were out in the world, and they liked other music and would bring it to the table. After we left Peter, then I had to listen a little bit more to Roland, because he would be the orchestra. I was just gonna be the voice; he was gonna be the orchestra. And it worked out quite nicely, actually.

**Sure has; and still going strong.**

Still going strong. And you know what? I can say now that it's much more fun than it's ever been. I've learned to relax a lot 'cause you know, I was the one on pins and needles, thinking that I had to like choke his neck to shut up so that I could do a show. And now it's just to the point where like it really – it sounds like such a cliché, but it's all really good when it's me and Roland. 'Cause we're just having a really good time, and it's terrific.

**Let's talk about Roland and you for a while.**

Okay.

**I mean, you've had this long career with him.**

Yes; very long. It's a marriage, you know.

**Long, and spectacular. And he's your brother. I mean, did you folks grow up fighting with each other? Like –**

All the time.

**Like most siblings do?**

Yeah; yeah. We fought all the time. But we got to a point – and I think – you know, we really started playing music professionally with our parents in the – well, I started in the latter part of the 60s, or middle 60s. Roland was already playing when he was eight years old. So when we went on our own, and by the time we got to like 1973 or 74, we had pretty much made up our minds that as much as this was show business, we were gonna concentrate more on the business part of it, than the show. I mean, the show would come along, so we knew that pretty much no matter what happened – believe me, dear, a lot has happened that we would stick it out. I mean, it's not like we haven't had full-out fights on stage, at the Waikiki Shell on May Day. I mean, not throwing blows, 'cause people could see that; but I mean throwing words back and forth, and yeah. So it's been a challenge, but it's been great all the way.

**Well, you two seem like such different personalities. I'm actually surprised that you are such an enduring and endearing duo.**

I think because we embrace two different worlds that we bring everybody in from those different worlds and meld them into the Brothers Cazimero.

**Well, how do the dynamics of the two of you work?**

Well, okay; here it goes. We come from a family of twelve kids; eight boys and four girls. And it was understood thing as we were growing up that if our parents were there, the oldest child always was the one who we would listen to. I'm older than Roland by just one year. So ...

**Were you the oldest? No, right?**

No, no, no; I'm number ten of the twelve, so there are nine above me. And so I would just tell them and they'd have to listen.

**But you could only boss two other kids.**

Yeah. Because if I said something, and my older brother or older sister said something over me I would say nothing after that –

**But you could boss Roland.**

I could boss Roland, and I could boss my sister, 'cause she's the twin to Roland. So although, I wouldn't call it – Roland would call it bossing. [chuckle] But I wouldn't.

**You're there in your nice aloha shirt and long pants, and he's in green tights and a sweatshirt sometimes, crossing his legs on the stage.**

Yes; yes.

**It's just – it's so funny, and so beautiful.**

He does wear some of those clothes. And I have to take credit for some of it, 'cause I did buy him a few of those things to get him into it at first. And as I grew out of them he just more and more into them. And it causes a lot of trouble for me in other places, I'll tell you.

**But he knows who he is, and you know who he is, and you understand each other.**

Yeah. So there's no problem there. You know. And we'll make fun of it, too. He'll make fun of it; and it's fine. I like him so much more now, and that's why we get along so much better.

**One year difference.**

Yes; only one year. But I always felt like I was tons years different than he was. Difference, as far as age.

**Did you always feel like you had to keep the duo together, because he was not disciplined?**

You know, I don't know that I felt that way, 'cause I knew – we had already decided on the business part, so I knew that late or not or whatever indecision, we were still going to be together. But it didn't mean it didn't give me heartburn or heartbreak or whatever. Because I was on pins and needles.

**How much does he surprise you on stage with his comments?**

Oh, I never really know what my brother's gonna say; I never do. And sometimes I will say something that will trigger, and I know that it's triggering something in my mind, and I think to myself, You stupid, stupid –

**Don't make eye contact, right?**

Yeah.

**Don't laugh.**

I shouldn't have said that; and sure enough, he picks it up, and he goes, and I tell you, I can't say anything, because the people are laughing so much, and it's really so good, and I'm so pissed off.

[chuckle]

But it's so funny.

**It works.**

Yeah. One time, we were on stage at the Shell; it was Roland, myself, and Israel Kamakawiwo'ole. I was between the two of them. And they started on this thing together, and I didn't know what the hell they were talking about. All I know is that the audience was dying outside, and I just said one thing, Leslie; I said just one thing, and I don't remember what it was. Well I was smashed down like a bug, and I was like, Okay, I'm so staying out of this one.

[chuckle]

Because Roland and Israel together they were amazing. They had a lot of fun, and a lot of history. So –

**And that's part of the fun of entertaining; the interactions, and you feed off each other, right?**

Yeah.

**And you become better than –**

Especially when they're –

**– the sum of the parts.**

– really good, talented people. You know. When you don't have to say anything or explain anything. So it's like you and I talking right now. You know, I'll just say, Okay, you take it, and then you say, You take it, then we'll both talk together, or finish each other's sentences. Happens all the time. That's why I said Roland and I have a relationship that is like, you know, we've been married longer than our parents were I think.

**You know how in Hawaii we tend to call people “Uncle” or “Auntie” as a sign of respect? Here's a tip, Don't do that to Robert. You're about to find out why. And Robert also explains the feeling he's had for some time, the one that drives him to sing every song like it's the last time.**

**You know, in terms of experience and achievement, although I don't know about in terms of age, you're a kupuna.**

**Are you treated as such?**

Um some people try.

**But you don't let them? [chuckle]**

No; I don't.

**What do you –**

Another thing I –

**– tell them? [chuckle]**

I just – actually, you know what? I I'm very lucky that way. No one sees me as really being a kupuna. But –

**And that's a good thing for you.**

And that's a –

**That's a –**

– really good thing.

**You know, that is a mark of respect, too.**

Yeah; yeah. I just I do have a rule, though, and it's, Don't call me Uncle. Which is my email address, don't call me uncle.

**[chuckle]**

Unless we're actually related; and if we are related, you gotta mention some names in the family line that I have to recognize. Otherwise, just call me Robert. You know. And I've gone through the gamut of people calling me Bobby from when I was a kid; Bobby and Bob, and god, I hate that.

**Neva Rego calls you Roberto.**

Oh, well; yeah.

**You don't correct her. The voice coach you go to.**

Oh, no; she can call me Roberto for the rest of my life. That's fine. But the Bobby one makes me a little queasy. But then you know which part of my life they're from. You know. And –

**Do you tell people, Call me Robert? I mean, just –**

Yes; I do.

**– straight out?**

Yeah. Hi, Uncle. No; just call me Robert. And you know, you know for Hawaiians, that's a hard thing, because part of the respect is that you call each other Uncle and Auntie. But I just tell them, like, Don't –

**That's because –**

Don't put any kind –

**– you don't see yourself as Uncle?**

It's because, you know, when you're in the entertainment business, there is no such thing as age. Once you get out of high school, we're all the same age. That's what I say. So, don't call me Uncle. And don't call me Auntie, either.

**[chuckle] What's your middle name?**

My middle name is Uluwehionapuaikawekiukalani.

**Which means?**

Which means the verdant – the abundance of flowers at the summit of the sky. And my mother was pregnant, and she didn't know she was, and my aunt, my Auntie Mary Sing who lives in Kalaupapa – that's a whole 'nother story – she called my mom and said, You know you're gonna, you're pregnant. And my mother said, No, I'm not. And she said, You're pregnant; and my mother said, No, I'm not. And she said, Just listen to me; you're pregnant, here's the name of the child. So she gave my mother my name.

**And she's calling from the Hansen's Disease settlement at Kalaupapa.**

Yes; she is. So my mother said, Okay. But because of the flowers in the name, o napua, she thought that I was gonna be a girl. Well, anyway; so but I got the name, anyway. And so yeah; sure enough, she was pregnant. She didn't know it, but she found out from my aunt. And I've had that name ever since.

**Do you think you live up to the name?**

Oh, I hope so; I hope so. Because the funny thing is, as I graduated kids from my school to their own schools, they've taken parts of the name.

**Oh.**

And they have it in their school. My niece is my namesake, and she has the same name. And then one of my dancers asked if he could name his son after me. And I said, Yeah; except take out the o napua, take the flowers part out. So this boy, Uluwehiikawekiukalani, is one of the newest members in halau now. He's dancing in the school. That's the kinda stuff just blows my mind. I'm just so glad I'm seeing it all happen. You know. It's really cool.

**Sometimes you look back at your life, and you go, Wow, if only this hadn't happened, where would I be.**

Yes.

**Was there any one of those moments for you?**

Yeah. Would have been my seventh grade; if I didn't go to Kamehameha, that would have been very different. I think that – because if not, I would have gone to Farrington. And for all I know, I could have ended up being a drag queen.

**M-m.**

Just scary, you know. For me. Another thing is that you know, I constantly worry about my voice, and in December I have a tendency to catch colds, in December. So I try and be really careful about that. And one year, it got really bad, and I lost my voice. And we were doing three concerts with the Honolulu Symphony. And I did a concert every night, without a voice. I talked my way through the whole thing. And thank God that the people were receptive. Because it was one of the best concerts, ever. So, and then I have to tell you about one other time. Roland and I were performing at the Holiday Inn in San Francisco, near the business district. And we were doing the show; it was Christmastime, and the whole electricity, within like about eight, ten blocks, went out. And the management said, You know, we need to cancel the show. And the people said, No, don't cancel the show. So they brought out this flashlight, a real big one, like this. And they stood at the back of the room, and they put the

flashlight on, and we played the show. And we did like –what would you call that? Like well, unplugged concert. It was one of the most beautiful shows in my life; it was just great. So you know, glad we did something that at first we weren't gonna do.

**What do you see as the future of your singing career?**

You know, it's kind of difficult for me to think of a future, as far as I'm concerned. Because I just made – well, I'm telling everybody I'm 62, but I'm not. It's just that they say to me, Wow, you look really good for 62.

**[chuckle]**

So that by the time I get there they can say, Well. But I don't see me being here that long, on this Earth, for this life. So what I really want to project is the fact that we just keep playing and doing the best in what we do. And if we can produce an album or a CD every year until the time of my demise, then I'll be totally happy.

**Okay; now, you've just shaken me up. You see yourself as having an untimely or early death?**

Well, I thought – from when I was a kid, I always thought that I'd be dead by 21. I think it's in a past life thing of mine. And the other thing was that if I stayed away from home longer than two months, that I would never return home. So that's why my trips have always been short, and coming back in time. And then the longest one was maybe a little over two months, when Roland and I went with Maiki to Europe. But I always felt that after 21, all these years are real gifts for me. You know.

**Do you think you, you live more fully every day, because have this –**

Absolutely.

**– thought that you might not have a lot of time?**

Absolutely. You know, when Roland and I were – I don't know that I've ever said this on, you know, for television or anything. But when Roland and I were playing with Peter Moon – this was before 1975; we were working at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and we would get bomb threats in the room. And we would just be playing, and all of a sudden, all the lights would come on. And they would – we'd have to have everybody taken out, and we'd go out, and the cops would come in, or the bomb squad or whatever they were, and they would check the whole room, and then they would say, Okay, it's okay. Now, this would happen sometimes three times a week. So but I'll tell you; if you were in the audience after that bomb scare had been nilled, you found yourself at one of the most amazing, amazing shows. Because we sang like it was the last time. So ever since then, I try – I do that now. That whenever I do sing or perform, I do it like it's my last time. Just in case; just in case.

**Wow.**

**You know, I really enjoy getting to know people on this program – especially people I did already know, like Robert. He's got much more to share, including what it takes to get into his respected Halau Na Kamalei, why he expelled his much-loved brother Roland from the halau, and his favorite music lyrics. Please join me and Robert Cazimero for Part Two of a two-part L S S next week on PBS Hawaii. I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou kakou.**

**I gotta ask you one more thing.**

Okay.

**The local thing with the [clucks tongue].**

Yeah.

**Can you tell me about that?**

**[chuckle]** We were at the Ala Moana Hotel; in those days, we were upstairs at the Summit, which is now called Aaron's, I think. And I was singing a song, and there was a man in the audience who was looking at me weird, and then he would say he was just looking at me, and so I said I said, What? He says, You're singing the wrong words. And I was like, Okay. Then he said, If you want, I'll teach it to you here by the elevator. So we just sat there, and he taught me the words. The next time I sing it, I'm downstairs at the – we called it the Cave at the time.

**M-m.**

The Kama'aina Room. And there was a woman in the audience, but this time she added that. She's going, like [clucks tongue]. And I was pissed off. So I said, What? And was like, You're singing the wrong words. I said, No, I'm not. I learned this from a guy who lives in Keaukaha. And she said, My mother wrote the song. So I sat with her, and I learned it.

**Again. [chuckle]**

Again.

**GUEST: ROBERT CAZIMERO 2**

LSS 122 (LENGTH: 26:46)

FIRST AIR DATE: 5/06/08

**Aloha no. I'm Leslie Wilcox. Mahalo for joining me for another L S S – another island program produced and broadcast by locally-owned, non-profit PBS Hawaii. When singer Robert Cazimero stopped by to talk with me, one on one, he wasn't alone. He mentioned that his ancestors, all those who went before, were right behind him. And part of the reason he is driven to meet high standards is the heavy obligation he feels to make them proud. Coming up next – Part Two of a two-part conversation with musical artist Robert Cazimero.**

**Robert Cazimero is more than a successful singer and recording artist. He's also a most-respected kumu hula – teacher of Hawaiian dance. His all-male hula school is called Halau Na Kamalei. The halau is the subject of a documentary being shown on PBS channels nationwide that explores expectations and stereotypes, following the halau as it prepares for competition. Produced and directed by Lisette Marie Flanary, N : M H shows us Robert Cazimero's exacting and sometimes harsh teaching style and it reflects his deep devotion to his kumu, the late Maiki Aiu Lake.**

I had a hard time with that, 'cause they wanted me to tell stories about my kumu. And you know, outside of the family, we don't tell stories, because it's just so personal. You know. I didn't want to tell stories. And then I said to Lisette, If this will help to show my respect for my teacher, then I'll do it. Not realizing that it was really gonna show a lot more, and that it was okay. And that what I found out about my students is that they love me like how I love my teacher. [Whispers] Sorry.

**How easy was it for you to control people's lives? I mean, you know, kumu hula –**

That's a really –

– **by definition is a –**

– good question.

– **control freak, right?**

Yeah.

**You know, it –**

Yeah.

**I'm not saying it very graciously, but –**

No, no, no; it's true, though. Yeah. And you have – there is such a power in being a kumu hula, you know, that is willingly given to you when the students come in. Because it's what I did with mine. You know. If she told me to jump off a building, I would have asked, Which one, and how much higher do you want me to go? 'Cause you just love them, you know. But I didn't really know how to become a kumu. It's like being a parent. You really don't know how to be a mother or father until you have kids, and they teach you how to be that way. It was the same thing with being a teacher. When I started, my kids were like 15, 16 years old, and I was like 23, 24. And the only way I knew how to do it was to scare the hell, to scare the –

**And you used those –**

– out of them.

– **words too, right?**

Yeah.

**You would swear?**

Yeah.

**You'd call them names?**

Yeah; I did. And they would say to me, You know, I don't even let my parents talk to me this way. I was like, I'm not your parent; I'm your kumu. So you just better get over it, or there's the door. And luckily, they stayed. Or luckily, they didn't beat me up.

**And by definition, you have to keep order and discipline. How did you decide how hard core you were gonna be as a disciplinarian, as somebody who punishes, or has control over –**

I just played by –

– **second chances, third chances?**

Yeah. I played that by ear. I set really – you know, some really heavy duty rules on them. And if they broke it, then you know, there was no second chance.

**What's an example of a heavy duty rule?**

Well, you know, I did not like drugs. I was never a drug person. I, well, sans liquor. Sometimes.

**M-m.**

But yeah. So it's like, you know, if I knew that you were coming to a performance, and if you were stoned then you're out, from the performance and the halau, too. You had to be a certain look, you know. No one could – I still say it, although I'm much more lenient now. No student could dance if they were bigger than me. And back then I was almost 300 pounds when I first started. You know. So they all had to make sure that I the clothes, they looked good. Otherwise – 'cause you know, people don't really want to see guys dance in clothes; you gotta wear those malo things, and the lawalawas. And I never could wear them, because well, 'cause you know. But they had to. You know, 'cause it was the look, and I wanted to make sure that people knew who we were.

**Well, at that time, you had the only male halau.**

Yeah.

**Is it still the only male halau?**

You know, I think it is. Because most people have both women and men dancing for them. But it was really Maiki's dream that I teach only men. And I'll tell you; like I said, I would have done anything she asked. So I had no problem saying, Okay; I'll do it. The thing that you need to know about, if you're gonna – Leslie, you're ever gonna teach men? You want to –

**Yes.**

– be a kumu hula. You'll be not making any money. And –

**As opposed to teaching women; you would make money?**

Women, you can make money. People buy houses by teaching women. Teaching men, you will not make money.

**Because?**

They're not gonna pay you to teach them how to dance hula. They're – and there go – it goes back my kumu again, who said, If a man dances for you, then it is a privilege that you should have them. So I you know, when I was in halau, I was constantly on scholarship. And so that's the way I've run my halau ever since; that it's all scholarship.

**You teach for free?**

Yeah; yeah. And then when we need money, then we have a fundraiser. Or, if it needs supplementation, I have my career. And I swear, my kumu knew that too. 'Cause I'm like her. She needs six of these things done, her daughter says, You can't have the money; she'll grab her money and do it herself. And I do the same thing. You know, it's like, Well, no one tells me no when it comes to the halau. But if I want something, and they're like, You know, we don't have that much money we're getting it. Yeah; we're gonna just do it.

**As successful as the halau has been, I've heard you say in the past that it's not easy to get men to dance.**

Yes; yeah. It gets harder and harder as the years go along. Although, a new revelation has come along for us; and that is that now, the sons of my students are dancing for me. And you know, I've graduated students as teachers. Four of them are teaching, even as we speak. And that's a legacy. That –

**M-hm.**

– really is. But as far as, for me, a real legacy and a continuation, so that I can actually see it myself; having the kids of my dancers with me. It makes me want to live longer. It really does. And it makes me want to be a better teacher, too.

**How does someone get into your halau? Can any guy get into your halau?**

Well, no. [chuckle] No, you can't. You have to be invited.

**And all of your dancers are part-Hawaiian?**

No.

**They're not?**

No. No; and I don't think that's really important, either. And that comes from my kumu. You know. Because it's more about the heart, I think, and the fact that once you become a member of my halau, then you are Hawaiian to me, because now you're not just a member of the halau, but a member of the family.

**Family; m-m.**

Yeah. And so all my family, all my brothers and sisters, and my nieces and nephews; they all know these guys. And they all know my family. So several years ago, we had a, a family reunion in Kohala, and they said, You know, we're all going. And I was like, No, you're not. They was like, Oh, yeah; we are. 'Cause sister Jean and sister Gerry told us, and cousin Momi, that we're family. So they all came. We all went to Kohala together and –

**What's more important; heart or dancing ability?**

Oh, right now, today, at this very moment with you and me; heart.

**But tomorrow, dancing ability?**

Tomorrow, if we have a show to do and it's time to get on the stage; dancing ability. But for right now, heart. But it doesn't mean I'll get rid of you. You know. Where before, I would get rid of people much faster. Today, I'm much more lenient.

**Among your students in your halau, you've admitted your brother.**

Yes. Roland came to halau for a while; I think it was a little over a year. And I kicked him out of halau because he was given an assignment and he didn't finish it.

**What was the assignment?**

He had to learn two chants. And we laugh about it today, because had he learned, especially one of them, we'd be – we do it all the time in our lives, you know; all the time now. But I give my brother a lot of credit. You know, we're born as brothers in this lifetime, and then he goes and puts himself, again, in my life by being a student. That's a difficult thing to do.

**Well, you could give him a second chance.**

Well, the second chance is that he's no longer a student, but he is a kokua. So my brother is there all the time. And I think in being the kokua now, it's better than being a student. 'Cause you still get the lessons, but you don't get too much of the same pressure that happened. And what's happened is, I've learned from that lesson too, and because of him, I've learned to be able to give chances to others. Where before, I would have [SNAPS FINGERS] got rid of 'em, like how I did him. You know.

**And –**

And the other thing is, you can't talk back to me.

**[chuckle]**

You can't talk back to me.

**He would have to stop talking back to you.**

You can't talk back – no. And Roland would like – you know, you can't talk to me. Not in front of my students; you can't talk back to me. That's just the way it is.

**But he can as a kokua?**

Yeah. Yeah.

**So he worked it out.**

Yeah; he did. And I'm really glad he's the kokua. And yeah. I love him; he's a good guy. I've never said that before on camera, either. That took a bit.

**[chuckle] He's gonna want copies.**

I think so too. He'll be sending out to the family.

**In birth order, Robert and Roland are number 10 and number 11 in a family of 12 children from Kalihi. The two men are family for life and highly successful musical partners for more than 30 years now. Appreciating family and health became more important than ever to Robert in 1990. That's when he found out he has diabetes.**

**You were 300 pounds at one point?**

Oh, yeah. Yeah. It was a long time ago, but still, it was a part of my life. I look at those pictures, and I go, Who is this monstrous person?

**Had you always been heavy as a kid?**

Yeah; yeah, I always was. And then in 1990, my doctor said to me; he says, You know, you gotta watch out, 'cause you're a diabetic now. And I was like, Oh; okay. So he said, You have to really think about this, and you know, you have to cut down, and you have to do this, and you have to exercise, and stuff. And I was like, Oh, jeez; what a bummer. And I started walking in 1990, and it's been my companion for that long now, and it's kept me down so that I'm now – I fluctuate between 197 to 204 pounds. And it helps with everything; you know, the heart, the blood, the breathing; stuff like that.

**That's right; breathing. I mean, you have to have good breath control, or you'll lose your occupation.**

And that's why, you know, I never liked cigarettes. My father was real adamant about us smoking. You know. So I never liked that, 'cause I thought, Okay; I'm gonna tell you another story.

**Shoot.**

When Peter, Roland and I were recording our second album called Guava Jam, no; sorry, Guava Jam was first, Crack Seed was second. I had just finished singing a song called The Queen's Jubilee, from a family songbook of the laukea's. And I was sitting in the studio, and Peter and Roland and the engineer were in that small room that they are over there, and Peter said, Okay, we're gonna play this back to you. I was like, All right. So there were two big speakers here, and they started playing the song, and I'm singing along with it. Well, there was a mirror on the floor on the side over here, and I just happened to glance over it. And I was looking at myself in the mirror, and I thought, I found it very difficult to believe that the person I was looking at in the mirror was the owner of this voice that was coming through. Because I didn't feel that person matched the beauty of the voice.

**M-m.**

And that, for me, was – what's that word; epiphany.

**M-hm.**

It was an epiphany for me, and I kind of realized that this voice was something special; and that's when I decided that I'd better take care of it. So all these years, you know, losing the weight and keeping it down and exercising and watching what you eat ...

**And continuing to take voice lessons.**

And continuing to take voice lessons with my dear kumu leo, Neva Rego, who I love to pieces. Both Roland and I went to Neva at a time where our voices were beginning to fade a bit. We weren't aware of it. Well, maybe we were, and that's why we went. But she added so much to what we needed to remember and do. And still does, you know. I don't go as often as I used to, but she has spies. And they'll come, and they'll see us, and they'll call her. And then she'll call me and she'll go, Roberto ...

**[chuckle]**

Can you come see Auntie Neva?

**And it's all about getting the best of your voice at any time in your life.**

Yeah, and to keep it going. You know. My doctor, Kalani Brady, who is also a student of Neva's – you know, we're all kinda like intertwined. So there's Neva and me, and there's Kalani, and there's Roland, and all of us, and stuff like this, and they always

say to me, you know, This is something special; you have to take care of it; we're gonna help you the best we can. So it's an obligation too, you know.

**You mentioned the beauty of your voice, which is so true. How do you look at that? Do you see that as a gift you take care of, or do you think uh, of something you created, or ...**

No; I think it was a gift. I really do. And I find that as I get older now, and as much as I love to sing, I think singing makes me beautiful. I also think that it's one of the most honest and scariest things that I do in my life. Because when I'm on stage, or I'm at home, or at a cousin's party, and if I'm singing, it is the most honest I could possibly be. I am as wide open as a book; and you can read all the chapters, 'cause nothing [chuckle] nothing's been blocked, or censored. It's just honestly, blatantly there.

**Well, funny you should say that. Because I was reviewing what's been written about you over the years, but, you know, I didn't really see a lot about who you are. Just what you do. Is that because you keep it close?**

Yeah. You know, it's not that I do that conscientiously; it's just, I've always felt when we were talking to anybody, being interviewed, you know, that has a game plan. We're talking about the CD, we're talking about this May Day concert, we're talking about entering Merrie Monarch and why we're doing it. And so I did that. You know. Someday, someone will. And maybe it'll happen; I'm not real sure.

**I mean, well, you could do it now.**

Okay; go.

**[chuckle] I would just like to know what drives you, what moves you, what ...**

I think, first of all, my family. And my kupuna, the ancestors, and the fact that I feel that the – my heaviest obligation is to make them proud. To not make them embarrassed. Because – and I've said this before, and I love this image. That even as I'm here speaking to you, there are thousands of people behind me right now. Some I know, and some I don't.

**From generations back?**

From generations before, from countries that I don't even know about; they're just here.

**And you don't want them rolling your eyes.**

Yeah.

**Their eyes. [chuckle]**

Yeah; uh-huh. Or this thing; [clucks tongue]. You know how local people do that [clucks tongue] thing. And that would just kill me. But they're all here, and I feel an obligation towards them, and you, and our people and this land. And then I think if I'm gonna do that, then I have to have an obligation to my health. Even as last night, I'm at a restaurant eating stuff that maybe I shouldn't have, you know. I didn't have the dessert, but okay, I had the pasta. And then when it comes to the hula, I have an obligation to my teacher and to my students. And I just want to be good for them. I want to really be good for them. And if it means that my personal life – my personal life does not suffer from anything; it suffers from me, if I want it to suffer. Okay. But my personal is really the family. And it's a real broad use of the word family, because it encompasses the ones that I'm related to by blood, and those that I'm related to by heart. And it just keeps getting bigger. Sometimes I feel like I have no control over this; and at the same time, maybe I'm not supposed to. So I live my life now in a – I love to say this; a perpetual state of gratitude. I wake up every morning, and I just say thank you to everybody, and everything. You know, we're from Kohala, on the Big Island.

**North Kohala?**

North Kohala. My mom is from Hawi, and my dad's from Niulii. And my mother used to say, When you go to Hawaii Island, she says, you must say hello to everyone – the people, the rocks, the ocean, the trees; because they're related to all of us. You know. It's how I feel with uh, with everybody that we meet now, you know. That there is a purpose, and nothing is by accident; that I'm there to learn the lessons that are happening. And that I'm really, really grateful.

**It's been such a long haul for Hawaiians, who still populate our prisons and are represented on the poverty lists and many haven't had access to Hawaiian homelands. I mean, how do you see the Hawaiian condition today?**

Oh, I think it's appalling. At the same time, though, I'm one of the lucky ones, you know, who Hawaiians will look at me and say – well, sometimes they'll say, you know, You sold out. I don't – I'm not so sure how I did that; I was just working. But the other they say is, you know, I want to be like you. And I'm thinking, Oh, I don't know whether you want to do that either. You know. But if I can help in any way I can and I think of Don Ho. 'Cause he said to me one night when we were at you know, he used to go to McCully Chop Suey all the time.

**M-hm; at 3:00 a.m. [chuckle]**

Yeah, yeah; there you are. Okay; order all that food.

**Yeah.**

And Don said to me; he says, You know, when people ask for money, I give them money, our people. He said, Are you gonna do the same thing? I said, I don't know that I can give them money, but I'm gonna give them what I can. You know. And if it's the voice, or if it's just being there then I'll do it.

**Do you what you can with what you have.**

Yeah. Yeah. God, I can't believe I said some of that stuff.

**I forgot Don Ho used to go to McCully Chop Suey in the middle of the night. No, but it's true; you've got to decide you know, how far you're willing to go, and how much you're willing to give.**

Yeah. And you cannot just talk it; if you said something already, you know, people remember. They can go back now – especially with the internet; they can go back and see what I said 20 years ago. [chuckle]

**Yeah. Well, that's interesting. He was trying to get you to do the same thing he was doing.**

Yeah. Yeah. And you know, Don was one of our greatest supporters.

**Wow. He didn't feel a competitive deal?**

No. He just liked what we did. And his mother liked us. So you know, it's a Hawaiian thing. You know.

**Yeah; yeah.**

You're a local girl; you understand that.

[chuckle]

You know, I used to always say I don't know that I would go to war for the United States of America. I don't know that I would kill someone for the United States of America. But if they're threatening Hawaii I would stand out front. And years ago, we had this – there was a kue. there was a march of all Hawaiians. It started at the Aloha Tower, and it came up to the Palace. Several – Ala, myself. Mapuana, maybe Vicky; we were there at the front, and our job – Manu. We were to chant all these people as we came in, continuously; it was to be hours and hours of our chanting these people in. And just before they were gonna open the gate, someone had told us that there might be something happening. That would include, you know, guns and stuff like this. And Roland had told Ala; If anything happens, you grab my brother, and you folks go in here. And you can talk the talk but if you can't walk the walk, then what's the purpose of it? I said, You know, if anything is gonna happen, then it's meant to happen, and I'm putting it out there right now. So if anything happens, I ain't going; I'm staying right here. I think it's how you – when you believe in something, whether it's our world, or peace or just another person, we have to do what is best for ourselves, and hope that it's best for everyone too.

**You know, you mentioned that lyrics really speak to you in song. What are the most beautiful lyrics that you sing, and in what language are they?**

Well, there's – if I had to pick an English song it would be two. One would be David Gates from Bread – he wrote a song called If. And my favorite line in that song is, And when my life and when my love for life is running dry, you come and pour yourself on me. When I sing that line, it's like, to me, the heavens open up, and I am just drenched with all this love from the people who know me. The other one is from Carousel, I think. If I loved you, da-da longing to tell you, but afraid and shy I let my golden chances pass me by. And I've let many a golden chance pass me by. But there's no regret. You can't have regrets; I refuse to have regrets.

**What about in Hawaiian?**

In Hawaiian, too many; too many. You know, for me, the most simplest things have the deepest meanings. So oh, gee; god, what's the – there are so many. I can't even think of – okay, there's a song what was written by Lei Collins, and it's called – they call it Kealoha. And it goes, [sings]. In the third verse, it says [sings]. That I become very relaxed and I am comfortable when the scent of my lover is present. I love that line. Because no one knows that scent, except you, you know. And whether they're there with you or not, physically, that scent that you remember can put them right in front of you. And I think that's powerful; that's – you know. And then another one is from Pua Ahihi, written by Kawena, and it says [sings] No, no, no, no. There's this one verse, and it talks about there's a flower, okay, so it's you know Lanihuli? Lanihuli is that mountain there at the Pali; when you're standing at the Pali lookout, it's the one on the left hand side. And what it says is that you're – this person that you love is like a lehua flower up there, but it is pretty much unreachable. And the reason that person is unreachable is because you put that person there. That that's how much your love is extended to the fact that you would take this person that you love, and put them so high out of reach that it's worth the love. That's what it means to me.

**Beautiful lyrics, lovely sentiments. Speaking of sentiments, I'd like to thank our viewers who've sent kind thoughts and encouraging words as PBS Hawaii works to deliver quality, local programming that inspires, informs and entertains.**

**Mahalo to you and to Robert Cazimero for sharing your time and joining me for this L S S . I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou kakou.**

**You know, we've lost some just treasures of Hawaiian music, and just recently too.**

Yeah.

**And of course, you know that you've earned a place in that vaulted place; I mean, you're already there, where you're a treasure. Do you ever think about how people will receive news sometime long from now, I hope, when you pass away?**

I think that's why I work so hard when we do an album to make sure that it's the best that it can be. Because really, it's that music that's immortal. It's not this; it's that music. So I try hard, and I wonder how they'll receive it. You know, I wonder.