

Ka U‘i o Maunawili

An Essay by Kīhei de Silva

Haku Mele: David Ka‘io: words and music. Hawaiian language: Dwayne Kaulia.

Date: 1990.

Discography: Anuheia Band, “*Kahiau ‘ia ke Aloha*,” Mana Pa‘i AK47-1CD (1993).

“Nani Ko‘olau” describes an on-again, off-again, young man’s fling: a cold night of hot pinches and crazy water, followed by locked doors and rejection, followed by a new proposal to resume the old, alcohol-fueled affair. In contrast, David Ka‘io’s “Ka U‘i o Maunawili” describes the process by which a wiser man arrives at a genuine, long-term relationship with the woman he loves.

Maunawili means “twisted, winding mountain,” a name that probably refers to the circuitous trail system that weaves in and out of the many sub-valleys, pali, ihona, feeder streams, spring-fed pools, and hau thickets that still define the deepest reaches of this Kailua valley. The old confusion of trails – to the malihini, anyway – gave rise to the humorous proverb:

Ua pi‘i paha i ka ‘ulu o Maunawili.

Gone, perhaps, to fetch the breadfruit of Maunawili.

A play on *wili* (twist, turn about), said of one who is confused.¹

There is none of this confusion in Ka‘io’s “Maunawili.” It is, instead, a song of quiet patience, determination, and joy. It acknowledges the difficulty of knowing Maunawili and gaining access to its wai o uka (upland waters), and it affirms, in Ka‘io’s typically understated way, the value of process and result, trail and destination.

Ka‘io’s first verse introduces the key word of his song: *ho‘okama‘āina* – “to make familiar.” He suggests to the careful listener that his mele aloha is about long-term effort, not instant gratification. His second verse lingers on the image of the rising sun as it sparkles in the mist of Maunawili Falls. His metaphor is that of dawning knowledge, of growing appreciation for the beauty of the ‘āina and the woman it represents. His metaphor is also that of male-female union, of the coming together of light and water to produce new life.

Verse three offers a juxtaposition of hau grove and refreshing stream. Anyone who has attempted to pass through the former will recognize the rewards of the latter. Ka‘io’s metaphor here is of journey and partnership – *māka‘ika‘i kāua* – we two, you and I, will make our way through the inevitable snarls in our relationship; we two, you and I, will quench passion’s thirst in cool mountain streams. There is an obvious climactic quality to this verse, but its medial position in the song gives additional evidence of Ka‘io’s wisdom. Love-making isn’t the end point of the mele or the relationship it describes.

Verses four and five bring this thought home with a subtle reference to the Ko‘olau mountain range that looms above, with a call for continued closeness in Maunawili’s uplands, and with a restatement of the song’s ho‘okama‘āina intent. The presence of the Ko‘olau suggests a backdrop of additional, not-in-their-control difficulties – stormy weather of various sorts – that cannot be ignored or made to go away. The answer, Ka‘io suggests, is an upland commitment – the constant return to and reaffirmation of love – that will give them the strength to ride out all the storms that life will inevitably send.

His song’s conclusion involves a subtle shift in the meaning of *wili*; where it first refers to the circuitous, *wili*-like route to love, it now stands for the unassailable, *wili*-like binding that the journey has accomplished. Ka‘io quietly tells us that the answer to trouble is unity, that the answer to Ko‘olau is Maunawili. The song’s ending also involves a subtle shift from the opening *ho‘okama‘āina* to its closing *kama‘āina*. The first expresses action on Ka‘io’s part: I cause familiarity. The second expresses the consequence of interaction between Ka‘io and his U‘i of Maunawili: I am in the state of familiarity. The shift in verb-form from causative to stative encapsulates the poem’s meaning. Ka‘io quietly tells us that he has gone from *making* to *being*. He also suggests, in an even softer voice, that the journey to mature love is shared and ultimately self-effacing: he has gone from *making* to *being made*.

“Maunawili” is a song inspired by experience. Ka‘io worked in Maunawili Valley for eleven years as a member of the State Department of Agriculture crew assigned to maintaining the ditch and tunnel system that carries water from the Maunawili uplands through Keanini Ridge to the Waimānalo Reservoir.² His descriptions, then, are neither generic nor malihini; he didn’t make them up from stock images; he didn’t base them on a couple of morning hikes into the valley. The same holds true for the woman that Ka‘io honors in his mele. He composed “Maunawili” for his wife Jeana when they had been married for a little more than two years, and it predicts, with amazing foresight, the enduring nature of their relationship and the wisdom with they have celebrated life’s blessings and weathered its storms.

David Ka‘io has been singing “Maunawili” to our hālau for almost fifteen years, and we have all suspected, almost from the start, that it would be Maya Saffery’s “Miss Hula” song i ka wā kūpono (when the time is right). Maya is Maunawili-raised and tied. She is, without doubt, our “youthful beauty of Maunawili,” but she dances this song from a perspective of love and grief, life and death, innocence and maturity, that belies her youth and identifies her as kanaka makua. The meanings of certain Hawaiian songs have the capacity to shape and be shaped by those to whom these mele are closely attached. Songs and people sometimes evolve together. “Maunawili” and Maya are a case in point. In “Maunawili’s” hands, Maya is defined as one familiar with the journey to upland waters; in her hands, “Maunawili” takes on the additional dimension of home kulāiwi and embraces an unseen audience. *Aia i ka wā kūpono* includes, now that the right time has finally arrived, considerably more *kūpono* than we had anticipated.

Ka U‘i o Maunawili

He mele kēia o ke aloha no Maunawili
Ua ho‘okama‘āina au i kou nani

‘O ka noe i ka wailele i ka pi‘ina
O ka lā ‘ālohilohi i ka wai o uka

Māka‘ika‘i nō kāua i ka ulu hau
Hō‘olu i ka poli, hō‘oni i ke kahawai

Kū ha‘aheo i luna ‘o ke Ko‘olau
E ho‘i kāua e pili i ka uka o Maunawili

Ha‘ina ke aloha o ka u‘i o Maunawili
Ua kama‘āina au i kou nani.

This is a mele of love for Maunawili
Where I have grown accustomed to your beauty

The waterfall is misty as the sunrise
Sparkles in the upland water.

We journey through the hau grove
And cool our hearts, stirring the mountain stream

Ko‘olau stands high above
Let us be close once more in the uplands of Maunawili.

Tell of my affection for the lovely one of Maunawili
For I have grown accustomed to her beauty.

Notes:

1. Mary Kawena Pukui, *‘Ōlelo No‘eau*, #2844.
2. David Ka‘io, Personal Communication, February 9, 2005. Ka‘io worked as a laborer for the first three years and as supervisor for the last eight.

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