

I Land

WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY

Keo Woolford

DIRECTOR

Roberta Uno

LIGHTING

Josh Bradford

SOUND

Elton Lin

CHOREOGRAPHER

Rokafella & Robert Cazimero

STAGE MANAGER

Annette Verga-Lagier

SETS & COSTUMES

Clint Ramos

PROJECTIONS

Zachary Borovay

PRODUCING COMPANY Ma-Yi Theater Company



Pictured: Keo Woolford in a scene from I Land (photo © LaFrances Hui)

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Martin Denton · May 1, 2007

The ugly obverse side of the Great American Melting Pot is the leveling of cultures that the Europeans who colonized and founded the USA undertook without regret or hesitation. The indigenous people they found wherever they chose to live in America weren't just wiped out, their civilizations and customs disappeared as well. In our nation's first brief imperialistic phase at the turn of the 20th century, these habits migrated across thousands of miles of ocean to Hawaii, where another culture almost lost its identity to the encroaching mainstream American one.

Keo Woolford tells us in a program note to his important and often electrifying new solo show *I Land* that the native Hawaiian language had been decimated by the 1950s. (It is now enjoying a renaissance.) Near the end of the show, in a powerful and passionate rhythmic monologue, he says

Oh, thank you king Elvis
For bringing jungle drumming to my life
For killing the pulse of the gods and kings before me....
Thank you
For making it practically impossible
To dispel the images you have imprinted
In the minds of my fellow Americans
Who regard our sacred ritual as irrelevant kitsch

Such a valuable perspective to share with us mainlanders, who, if they're like me, will find themselves forced to admit they've never thought about this subject at all.

I Land is, in fact, all about perspective. Most of its running time traces Woolford's own path toward understanding what it means to be a man; in particular, the proud Hawaiian man that he has become. He shares stories of growing up in Hawaii; learning hula kahiko, the ancient traditional national dance of his homeland; his career in a popular boy band; and his decline, on the mainland, into drugs and despair. In one especially powerful segment, he talks about "Kill Haole Day," when he and some of his buddies terrorized some of the Caucasian kids at their high school—a jolting account of unexpected racism.

The last section of the show is all about the adult Woolford sharing all that he's learned in his life and his aspirations for a "hula nation" where individuality and diversity can be celebrated openly and fully. This part of *I Land* culminates in Woolford's performance of the hula in traditional costume. It's stunning.

Woolford is an extraordinary dancer—graceful, limber, and deliberate in all of his remarkably detailed moves. He's glorious to watch. He's also a persuasive actor and writer, and if parts of his one-man show are more confessional than absolutely necessary, the cumulative power of this work is undeniable. Woolford has something significant to communicate to his audience, and I know that I'm glad to have heard it.

I Land is very funny in places, and filled with movement and dance (choreography is by Robert Cazimaro, a kumu hula artist, and Rokafella, the hip-hop dance pioneer; it's all spectacularly good). Clint Ramos's set and costume design is simple but tremendously effective; I love the show's backdrop, a huge stylized question mark that sets the stage for the inquiries within and beyond the self that Woolford undertakes in this compelling and necessary play.

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