



Theater

A Lei of the Mind

Ma-Yi Theater valiantly defends the hula dance

by Alexis Soloski

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Don Ho has now gone the way of so many tiny bubbles before him, leaving the world stage ripe for a new Hawaiian entertainer. Keo Woolford—an actor, singer, and dancer—auditions for that role in *I Land*, an autobiographical show created with Roberta Uno. The piece has three goals: to relate Woolford's life story, to display his various skills, and to reclaim the art of hula from "my fellow Americans who regard our sacred ritual as irrelevant kitsch (just some coconut-bra-wearing-hip-shaking-twirly- twirly-hula-hoop meaningless movement)."

Woolford has had some success in films, and also sang in the 50th-state boy band Brownskin. His fans dotted the Culture Project audience, palpably sympathizing with his tales of woe and laughing heartily at even the dopiest of his jokes. But for those who do not have glossies of a younger Woolford scotch-taped to their bedroom wall, it's indeed the hula dancing that really shakes the show. Like many a solo performer before him, Woolford isn't equally gifted in performance and playwriting—here his dancing easily trumps his writing. Tales of his schoolboy misdeeds or coke-addled years in L.A. fail to impress, but when he finally dons the ceremonial ruffs and cuffs and grass skirt, gesturing forcefully with his hands, shoulders, and hips, Woolford's a powerful and seductive presence. His highly muscled bare chest may also contribute—good thing he left off that coconut bra.