

# Hawaii Tribune-Herald

## Local News

### Deaths stun hula world: Dottie Thompson, Rae Fonseca mourned by community *Rae Fonseca, 1953-2010*

[Print Page](#)

by **John Burnett**  
*Tribune-Herald Staff Writer*

Published: Sunday, March 21, 2010 8:24 AM HST

Prominent Hilo kumu hula Rae Fonseca died Saturday on Oahu of an apparent heart attack. He was 56.

Fonseca died less than 24 hours after the death of Merrie Monarch matriarch Dorothy "Aunty Dottie" Thompson. Fonseca's own kumu and Merrie Monarch patriarch Uncle George Na'ope died Oct. 26 last year.

According to fellow kumu hula Aloha Dalire, Fonseca collapsed after an afternoon performance of his Halau Hula 'O Kahikilaulani at Lanikuhonua Cultural Center in Leeward Oahu. He died a short time later at Hawaii Medical Center West.

Dalire said she got a phone call from Oregon to tell her of Fonseca's hospitalization.

"I rushed down there, and when I had gotten there, he had just passed," Dalire, kumu hula of Keolalaulani Halau 'Olapa O Laka, said Saturday night. "When I saw him, he looked so peaceful, as if he were only sleeping."

Dalire said Fonseca's sister, Jamie Russell, was at the hospital, and his mother, who lives in Hilo, was notified of her son's death.

The news spread quickly via electronic media and sent a shock wave through the hula community.

One of Fonseca's students, Emery Aceret, kumu hula of Halau Na Pua O Uluhaimalama, wrote on Facebook: "My heart feels like STONE. ... As he always told us...'Till Death do we Part'. I never thought it would be so soon!"

Also on Facebook, Tahiti Fete founder Pua Tokumoto wrote: "The world will miss this wonderful master of music and dance."

Dalire said that Fonseca is originally from Kaneohe, Oahu and as a child, he studied with her mother, Mary Keolalaulani McCabe Wong.

"He joined my mom's halau wanting to learn to become a Tahitian drummer," Dalire said. "He was taking lessons, and as the years progressed and he got better, he wanted to delve into other things. He was introduced to my older sister, and it was she who introduced him and Etua Lopes to Uncle George (Na'ope). And from that time, Rae and Etua studied with Uncle George until (Na'ope's death last year)."

Kumu hula Chinky Mahoe of Kawailiula, another of Na'ope's students, said he and Fonseca are "hula brothers."

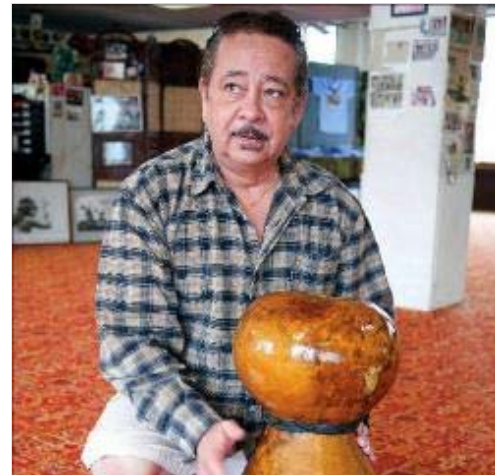
"He helped out everyone. It's just so sad," Mahoe said. "You know when Rae is on that stage, and you know when Rae is performing, because he has his own energy. He has his own voice and his own style, and he brings a certain excitement when you watch his halau, both kane and wahine. And I know he's just going to be definitely missed by the whole hula world."

Fonseca was a fixture at the Merrie Monarch Festival. His men won the hula kahiko, or ancient hula, competition in 1991 and the hula 'auana, or modern hula, title in 1993. His women took the hula 'auana competition in 1990.

Fonseca's halau was entered in this year's Merrie Monarch and one of his dancers, Ashlyn Aulani Tavares, is scheduled to compete for the coveted Miss Aloha Hula title.

Another of Fonseca's students, Sheldeen Kaleohano Haleamau, was crowned Miss Aloha Hula in 1988. Haleamau, who now lives in Las Vegas, is bringing her Halau Hula 'O Kaleimomi to the Merrie Monarch next month. Her husband, singer Gary Haleamau, said, "She's taking it hard."

Na'ope gave Fonseca the name "Kahikilaulani," which means "staff of heaven" by adding "lailani" to Fonseca's given Hawaiian name, Kahiki.



[Click Photo to Enlarge](#)

Kumu hula Rae Fonseca talks during an interview at his halau on Feb. 17. Fonseca died Saturday at a hospital on Oahu at the age of 56. - William Ing/Tribune-Herald

"Rae's contribution to hula was the continuation of Uncle George Na'ope's style, because he and Etua, to me were the chosen ones who ... are the keepers of Uncle George's style and Uncle George's lineage," Dalire said.

Fonseca's life was not without difficulty. In 2006, he was sentenced to six months in jail and five years probation after pleading no contest to negligent homicide for a Dec. 12, 2003, traffic collision on a private road in Eden Roc subdivision that killed Michael R. Spens, 58. Prosecutors said Fonseca tested positive for cocaine after the fatal crash.

Despite the controversy, Fonseca, who also taught hula in Japan and Mexico, remained popular in the hula community.

"He was a very wonderful person who loved hula," Dalire said. "He respected all of those who were before him and when he teaches, he gives himself completely. For me, it was comforting knowing that he passed doing what he enjoyed doing, which was hula.

"My heart goes out to his students because they were really, really close and it's hard for them. That was one very closely-knit halau."

Mahoe said that without Fonseca, Na'ope and Thompson, next month's Merrie Monarch is "going to be a sad time, but it's going to be even more special because the Merrie Monarch meant so much to them."

Funeral arrangements are pending.

E-mail John Burnett at [-jburnett@hawaiitribune-herald.com](mailto:-jburnett@hawaiitribune-herald.com).

Copyright © 2010 - Hawaii Tribune-Herald

[\[x\] Close Window](#)