

# Haunani: hardly humdrum

Amanda C. Gregg

SPECIAL TO THE GARDEN ISLAND

An escape from the daily grind, Haunani Kauai, Hawaiian entertainer, guitarist and singer of local music and hula mele alike, offers soothing memories alluding to those of a backyard lu'au.

A 40-year veteran of music, Kauai got her start with her family, owners of the well-known Smith's Motor Boat Service in Wailua, playing with her grandpa and grandma. After that, it was high school and then playing for American Hawai'i cruises in 1980.

"I was on the Constitution and the Independence," Kauai said, recalling the names of the cruise ships that have since retired. Following that, Kauai played for the Celebrity Cruise line for five years before coming home to take care of grandma in 1998.

"She asked me, 'When are

## Wanna go?

If you would like more information about Haunani's schedule or would like to book a gig, call 652-9050, e-mail her at [humbug@hawaiiantel.net](mailto:humbug@hawaiiantel.net) or visit her on the Web: [www.haunanikauai.com](http://www.haunanikauai.com).

you going to come back home and take care of me?" Kauai said.

Following her grandmother's passing in 2008, Kauai has been able to accomplish something many aspiring musicians dream of: Becoming a career artist.

"This is now my main job," Kauai said, noting she's recently upped her shows to four days a week, including a recently successful bid to play Saturday nights at Lihue Airport — a highly competitive venue.

"Seventy-eight musicians went for it," Kauai said, noting



there are a mere seven nights per month on which to bid.

One of the reasons Kauai looks forward to "playing the airport," she said, is spotting the tourists who have seen her play around the island.

"It's like the icing on the cake," Kauai said, noting she enjoys recognizing visitors and remembering from where they're visiting.

No doubt the tourists remember her, too, for her sing-a-longs and penchant for covering the staples oft' listened

to by Hawaiian-music lovers, such as "Uhupalukua," "Hene hene ko aka, and the "Hawaiian Wedding Song."

But Kauai is hardly just for the tourists — ask her enough and she will admit humbly that she has a local following, fans for which she keeps "early-gig hours," from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

"I take the earlier set because by the later set, everyone who comes would be home

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asleep already," she said. Truly devout fans make it all the way from Anahola, Princeville and Kalaheo, she added.

Regulars who came to see Kauai May 13 had an added bonus, as her show was followed

by belly dancers.

Of the belly dancers, Kauai said it's more often than not that she's paired up with talent.

Fans come back not only for their fix of traditional Hawaiian tunes, but also her sets made up of various duos, including "Auntie Elaine," hula talents Irene Yoshida and

songwriter Lei Contrades.

Of course, her ongoing repartee with the audience doesn't hurt either.

Her signature song, Kauai added, is the "Hawaiian War Chant," (Kaua i Ka Huahua 'i). "I get the audience to participate, and then they sing along and I pick my guitar at the end," she said.

Amanda C. Gregg/Contributed photos

Pictured from top: Haunani Kauai and Lei Contrades are seen here performing for guests recently.