

# Cape

# Librarian

ings; conversely, as we begin  
right into a dance on a  
understanding the culture that  
t. This is the basic theme  
a for *Dancing* was born in  
1978. Perched in a gallery of  
Museum in Honolulu, I  
small group of musicians and  
perform a series of traditional  
Kanahele, seated on a pan-  
beat out a rhythmic pattern  
gourd shaped like an hour-  
she chanted ancient songs  
Hawaiian language honoring the  
the volcanoes, Pele. The  
f, performed by four students  
Kanahele and her mother Edith  
e, startled me. As director  
ce program of the National  
nt for the Arts, I was in Hawaii  
the annual meeting of the  
Dance Guild/Conference on  
on Dance. I had spent most of  
in the American professional  
ne, and had seen literally  
of dance performances from  
ballet companies to small  
le groups performing in drafty  
overheated garages. But noth-  
experience had prepared me

n with, the space allotted  
ncing was about fifteen square  
ly room enough for a small  
y case, the dancers' feet  
the ground. This hula was  
like the "hulas" I had seen in  
d movies. Instead of rapid  
ons, the dancers' movements  
aturally and gracefully out of

the feet rocked gently from a flat-on-  
the-ground position to a heel-lift with  
the weight resting on the ball of the  
foot. Instead of a Dorothy Lamour  
sarong or grass skirt, the dancers wore  
loose-fitting skirts and tops. Finally,  
they were both—by the standards that  
had informed my own life—very, very  
big women (each weighed more than  
two hundred pounds). I had no idea of  
what I was seeing, but I was determined  
to find out.

During the rest of the conference I  
saw many kinds of dance from the Pacif-  
ic region, ranging from the exquisitely  
refined Balinese wayang wong, with its  
articulated finger movements, highly  
expressive eyes, and glorious costumes of  
red, green, yellow, and gold brocade, to  
a ceremony called Obon led by members  
of the Japanese community in Hawaii.  
Obon is an annual event to honor the  
souls of ancestors. The dancers form a  
large circle and perform simple steps  
more or less in unison to the beat of a  
single large drum. I have never felt more  
a part of something than when I fell in  
step with about two hundred other  
people dancing in homage to the gener-  
ations that came before us.

Before I left Hawaii, I learned that  
the dances I had seen served many  
functions beyond entertainment. The  
aesthetics of each were completely  
strange to my Western eyes. Though the  
large hula dancers initially appeared to  
be unattractive, I learned that their  
shape is, in fact, a highly desirable sign  
of beauty and status in traditional  
Hawaiian culture. Clearly, there was a  
lot to learn. Upon my return home,

in a direction of exploration  
this book and series.

Until recently, serious dance  
arship in the West took forms  
proceeded in isolation from o  
et dance criticism/history (w  
tended to evaluate dance qua  
according to aesthetic judge  
dance ethnology/anthropolog

## Kaapse Bibliotekaris

mer disciplines were usually a  
the dances of the Western wo  
latter to the dances of the no  
world. The challenge of *Danc*  
to combine these two approa  
apply them to dance throug  
world. In pursuit of this goal,  
avoided the typical presentat  
nized historically or geograph  
Instead, we have identified a  
important ways in which dan  
tions in human societies—al  
keeping in mind that while  
universal human activity it d  
play the same role in every c  
functions we settled on were  
ted a chapter in this book:

Dance as an emblem of cultu  
ty, with a focus on clashes b  
societies;

Dance as an expression of re  
worship, with a focus on Nig  
Europe;

Dance as an expression of so  
and power, with a focus on r

Dance as an expression of cu  
with a focus on gender-speci

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