Honolulu, Hawai‘i | March 9-13, 2028

Hawai‘i International Choral Festival

“Mele Ho‘okele” at the Waikiki Shell

Part of the Honolulu Festival

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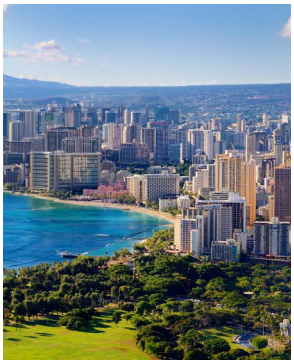

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Hawai‘i International Choral Festival

“Mele Ho‘okele” at the Waikiki Shell

Mele Ho‘okele is an original large-scale musical work that tells the intertwined story of Hawai‘i and Japan, two island cultures bound by ocean, history, conflict, and friendship. Created by composer Michael-Thomas Foumai, writer Ty Sanga, and show director/ producer Scotty Mearig, the piece unfolds in four cinematic movements inspired by creation myths, shared history, war, and reconciliation. Performed by mass choir, orchestra, guest artists, and immersive visual media, the work culminates in a powerful message of unity, healing, and aloha. In addition to the culminating performance, participants will engage in inspiring musical workshops led by distinguished conductors and clinicians, deepening the educational experience and strengthening the artistic journey that defines the Mele Ho‘okele experience.

Tour Itinerary

Thursday, March 9, 2028 - Arrive Honolulu + Welcome Dinner
Fly to Honolulu. Lei greeting, welcome dinner and overnight in Honolulu.

Friday, March 10, 2028 - Choral Cultural Exchange Festival, Clinics & Rehearsals
Choral Cultural Exchange Festival - individual choirs will perform for one another and for choral experts, sharing aspects of their cultural uniqueness and history. Following each performance, clinicians will comment and offer on-stage feedback. Rehearsal for the “Mele Ho‘okele” concert will be filled with opportunity to sing together and connect. Optional sight seeing for the remainder of the day. Mauka Warriors Luau tonight.

Saturday, March 11, 2028 - Beach Time + Dress Rehearsal + Concert
Beach time in the morning. Early afternoon dress rehearsal of the combined choir and orchestra at the Waikiki Shell. Time for dinner and change into concert attire. Evening “Mele Ho‘okele” concert event together with local artists.

Sunday, March 12, 2028 - Pearl Harbor Tour + Honolulu Festival Parade & Fireworks
Morning sightseeing with Pearl Harbor Tour and picnic lunch. Opportunity to watch the Honolulu Festival Parade on Kalakaua Avenue followed by the grand fireworks.

Monday, March 13, 2028 - Museum + Departure
Visit Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, designated the Hawaii State Museum of Natural and Cultural History. Transfer to the airport for flight home.

Included

- World premiere of commissioned original composition specifically for “Mele Ho’okele”
- 70-80 minute concert event at the Waikiki Shell with a full orchestra
- Choral clinics with world-class choral faculty including written comments
- Exchange with and observe choirs from around the world
- Optional opportunity to sing during Mass/Worship Service at a local church in Oahu
- Archival recording of the “Mele Ho’okele” event
- Opportunity to enjoy the Honolulu Festival activities such as the grand parade & fireworks
- Travel services (airfare, hotel, transfers, meals, sightseeing, etc.)

Schedule a Call >

The Musical Work

Mele Hoʻokele is a large-scale musical work that tells the intertwined story of Hawaiʻi and Japan, two island cultures bound by ocean, history, conflict, and friendship.

Created by composer Michael-Thomas Foumai, writer Ty Sanga, and show director/producer Scotty Mearig, the piece unfolds in four sweeping movements, tracing parallel creation myths, early alliances, devastating war, and the enduring work of healing and unity. Drawing from the Hawaiian Kumulipo and the Japanese Tenchi-kaibyaku creation stories, the work begins in mythic time, where wind and spirit give life to the world. From there, it moves into shared history, highlighting moments of diplomacy and cultural connection, before confronting the rupture of World War II and its lasting scars. The final movement lifts the story beyond history toward forgiveness, hope, and a vision of harmony shaped by aloha.

Performed by a mass choir, orchestra, guest artists, and immersive visual media, this high-production concert experience is designed on a cinematic scale, inspired by epic film scores and immersive storytelling. Traditional Hawaiian and Japanese vocal elements, language, symbolism, and movement are woven throughout the production, honoring both cultures with care and dignity.

As the culminating performance of the 31st Annual Honolulu Festival, this work invites performers from around the world to take part in something larger than a concert: a shared act of remembrance, reconciliation, and artistic collaboration. Set against the backdrop of Waikīkī Shell, the performance offers a powerful reminder that even after conflict, humanity can choose connection and that across oceans and histories, we share more in common than we are different.

In addition to the culminating performance, participants will engage in inspiring musical workshops led by distinguished conductors and clinicians, deepening the educational experience and strengthening the artistic journey that defines the Mele Hoʻokele experience.

Dr. Michael Thomas Foumai
Composer

Dr. Michael-Thomas Foumai (b. 1987, Honolulu, Hawai'i) is the Director of Artistic Engagement and the first Composer in Residence for the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra (HSO). His music, described as "vibrant and cinematic" (New York Times) and "full of color, drama, and emotion" (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel), encompasses an extensive catalog of symphonic music, spanning commercial arranging to the avant-garde, and focuses on the culture of his Hawaiʻi home. Dr. Foumai's orchestral works have been conducted and performed by Yannick Nézet-Séguin with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Lidiya Yankovskaya with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Lina Gonzalez-Granados with the National Symphony Orchestra, Sarah Hicks and the Seattle Symphony, George Manahan with the American Composers Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, Osmo Vänskä with the Minnesota Orchestra, and with Dane Lam, Mei-Ann Chen, JoAnn Falleta, Hans Graf, Earl Lee, Rei Hotoda, Anthony Parnther, Andrew Grams, and Scott Yoo with the Hawaiʻi Symphony Orchestra. In addition, Dr. Foumai designs and hosts the HSO education series Beyond the Music; he is the program notes annotator for the HSO Masterworks series and is the principal HSO arranger for guest artists who have included Yo-Yo Ma, Jake Shimabukuro, Raiatea Helm, Amy Hānaialiʻi, and Robert Cazimero. His honors include a Fromm Foundation Grant from Harvard University, the MTNA Distinguished Composer of the Year Award, the Jacob Druckman Prize from the Aspen Music Festival, and three BMI composer awards. Dr. Foumai is currently on faculty at the University of Hawaiʻi West Oʻahu and holds multiple degrees in music composition from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (BM) and the University of Michigan (MM, DMA).

Ty Sanga
Writer

Ty Sanga is a Native Hawaiian screenwriter and storyteller whose work centers Indigenous voice, history, and contemporary island life. His films and series have been featured on Netflix, PBS, and the Criterion Collection. He serves as producer and director of the Emmy Award–winning PBS food and travel series Family Ingredients. Sanga first gained international recognition as a writer-director with his short film Stones, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, making him the first Native Hawaiian filmmaker to achieve this milestone. His feature screenplay After Mele was selected for the prestigious Sundance Native Lab, further cementing his voice as an emerging screenwriter to watch.

Scotty Mearig
Producer

Scotty Mearig is a Hawaii-raised creative producer, music producer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist currently based in Los Angeles with his wife, Sayaka, and their two sons. He is passionate about bringing meaningful stories to life through ambitious creative productions, including live events, music, and film. He has worked alongside various Grammy-winning and nominated artists, and his credits include music for feature films, multiple Nā Hōkū Hanohano Award-winning albums, and Billboard #1 releases.

Workshops

As part of the Choral Cultural Exchange Festival, participating ensembles will take part in a live, on-stage workshop experience led by distinguished clinicians Alec Schumacker and Joshua Habermann.

Each choir will perform for fellow ensembles and receive immediate, practical feedback in a supportive and collaborative setting. Rather than a traditional adjudication, this session is designed as an interactive artistic dialogue that refines tone, ensemble cohesion, musical interpretation, and expressive communication in real time.

A hallmark of the festival is the opportunity for students to hear and learn from one another. By listening to other choirs share their unique repertoire, cultural influences, and performance styles, participants gain broader musical perspective and a deeper appreciation for the diversity of choral artistry. The learning extends beyond the stage as singers observe different approaches to sound, storytelling, and ensemble identity.

Because the workshop takes place in the performance space, ensembles can immediately apply feedback within the acoustic and visual environment of the stage. Directors leave with actionable strategies, and students experience the rehearsal process through the lens of professional artistry.

This exchange is not only about refinement. It is about connection. Through shared performance, thoughtful critique, and collective music-making, singers become part of a vibrant artistic community grounded in collaboration, cultural awareness, and shared purpose.

Faculty

Josh Haberman
Festival Clinician

Joshua Habermann is in his seventeenth season as Artistic Director of the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, one of the premiere American professional choirs. Since joining the ensemble, he has broadened its repertoire to include choral-orchestral masterworks, multi-media choral experiences, and led the Chorale in headliner performances at conferences of the American Choral Directors Association.

Habermann is a frequent clinician for national and international events, and has led honor choirs, festivals, and served on juries across North and Latin America, Europe and Asia. As a singer (tenor) he has performed with the Oregon Bach Festival Chorus, and Conspirare, where recording credits include Through the Green Fuse, Requiem, a Grammy nominee for best choral recording, and Threshold of Night, a Grammy nominee for best choral recording and best classical album.

From 2011-2022 Joshua Habermann was director of the Dallas Symphony Chorus, where he prepared the chorus for concerts ranging from Bach's St. Matthew Passion to Britten's War Requiem. International collaborations with Dallas include Bernstein's Chichester Psalms, and Duruflé's Requiem with the Swedish Radio Orchestra, and choral-orchestral performances in Spain, France, Sweden, Estonia and Finland.

Prior to his Dallas appointment, Habermann was Director of Choral Studies at the University of Miami Frost School of Music, where he led the graduate program in conducting and the Masterchorale of South Florida. He is currently chair of the ACDA Standing Committee for International Activities, which coordinates the International Conductors Exchange Program, connecting the rising generation of American choral leaders with their peers across the world.

Since moving with his family to Honolulu, Joshua Habermann was named Artistic Director of the O'ahu Choral Society and has led the ensemble's post-pandemic return to singing. He is a sought-after guest for university choirs, professional chamber choirs, and symphonic choruses, and has prepared choirs for the San Francisco and Houston Symphonies. A passionate advocate for music education, Joshua Habermann is a frequent guest lecturer, and teaches graduate choral literature remotely at the University of North Texas.

Alec Schumaker
Festival Clinician

Alec Schumacker is the Director of Choral Activities and Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He presently serves as the Vice President of the Hawai'i Chapter of the American Choral Directors Association. He completed his DMA in Choral Conducting at the University of Miami, where he studied with Joshua Habermann and Karen Kennedy.

An active educator and sought-after presenter, Alec delivered lectures at the 2023 and 2019 International Kodály Symposia in Los Angeles and Malaysia, the 2020 Western Division ACDA conference in Salt Lake City, the 2018 and 2016 Asia Kodály Symposia in Taiwan, the 2017 National ACDA conference in Minneapolis, and various others. His written work on incorporating popular music in the choral curriculum was recently published by GIA in the textbook Becoming Musical.

An award-winning composer and arranger, Alec's choral music is published by Alliance Music Publications, earthsongs, ECS publishing, Hinshaw Music, Santa Barbara Music Publishing, and World Projects.