

Hula Lullaby

By Erin Eitter Kono
Published by Little, Brown and Company



Reviewed by
Holly Deuel
Gilster

The nights are sultry and the air is balmy. The ocean waves whisper in the background. The night stars glow as if they are a stone's throw away. Little Keiki rocks in the ample lap of his adoring mama or auntie, his makuahine, while his uncle or dad, his makuakane, plays a gentle lullaby on traditional instruments.

This provides a sense of Erin Eitter Kono's book, *Hula Lullaby*. Published by Little, Brown and Company in 2005, it is a timeless look at authentic Hawaiian culture. This is not a slick Hollywood version of the island state but a deeply respectful portrait of a people and a culture. There is a truth and richness to the pencil and acrylic paintings. The characters seem to glow from within. The colors are earthy and yet vibrant. I recently traveled to Hawaii and was astonished at the particular shade of red in the dirt. Erin Eitter Kono has captured those colors perfectly.

The rhythm of the language is soothing, as a lullaby should be. We hear the refrain return, mimicking the ipu, or gourd drum: "Come little keiki, nestle in my lap, listen to the ipu, thump tap thump-a-tap." Little keiki crawls, then nestles, then snuggles, and finally sleeps in his makuahine's lap. It is unimportant whether the central female figure is mother or auntie because the Hawai-

ian word is the same for both. This culture of a loving extended family shows on the face of keiki.

In Erin Eitter Kono's art, we see a love of the sacred hula dancers with their rounded arms and broad shoulders. Their faces seem lost in a blissful trance as they play the split bamboo sticks, or *pu'ili*. Kono explains that the *aloha* spirit is one of wellness, kindness, harmony, and humility. We can see this in the musicians playing the double gourd drum, or *ipu heke*.

Kono evokes Paul Gauguin's painting "Matamoe," with the same vibrant

colors. This rich palette manages to create a nightscape that glows with an internal light. Coupled with the warmth of the language, this is a very satisfying and gentle lullaby book.

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