

DATE August 24, 2026 RELEASE NUMBER 37|26

‘Ālewa Crowned 2026 Kani Ka Pila Grille Talent Search Winners

Kainalu Jacang, Kamaha‘o Haumea-Thronas, Kamalu Tupou and Hayden Kaaialii receive performance contract for four shows in 2027 at Kani Ka Pila Grille - Waikīkī’s home for Hawaiian music



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HONOLULU – On Saturday, August 22, 2026, ‘Ālewa won the 19th Annual Kani Ka Pila Grille Talent Search competition, held live on the main stage of the Made in Hawai‘i Festival at the Hawai‘i Convention Center. The competition will celebrate its 20th year in 2027.

Formed in 2025 from the legacy of Kūkalahale, ‘Ālewa specializes in traditional Hawaiian music with a focus on mele hula. The quartet - pictured above from left - includes Kainalu Jacang, Kamaha‘o Haumea-Thronas, Kamalu Tupou and Hayden Kaaialii, all students at Kamehameha Schools Kapālama.

Their 20-minute set featured a medley of songs celebrating O‘ahu, including “Makee ‘Āilana,” “Kaimukī Hula,” “Pauoa Liko Ka Lehua” and “Kāne‘ohe,” before closing with the crowd-favorite, “Magic Island.”

As the 2026 winners, ‘Ālewa will receive a performance contract for four shows in 2027 at Kani Ka Pila Grille, Waikīkī’s home for Hawaiian music. The prize also includes a customized social media marketing package, professional electronic press kit and recording session at Honolulu Community College’s Mike Curb MELE Studios.

“‘Ālewa represents exactly what the Kani Ka Pila Grille Talent Search is all about — creating opportunities for the next generation to carry Hawaiian music forward and share it with new audiences,” said Sean Dee, Chief Commercial Officer of OUTRIGGER Hospitality Group. “Our tradition of presenting Hawaiian music seven nights a week in Waikīkī began 19 years ago with Uncle Cyril Pahinui and remains an important part of who we are today. Under the leadership of Luana Maitland, OUTRIGGER’s Area Director of Cultural Experiences, the Talent Search has continued to nurture emerging artists and provide an important stage for Hawaiian music. We’re proud to welcome ‘Ālewa into a growing ‘ohana of talented performers who are carrying this tradition forward.”

The Talent Search has become a proven launching pad for Hawaiian music talent. Each of the competition’s four most recent winners — ‘Ōlauniu (2025), Rickey Kamai (2024), Kahiau Lam Ho (2023) and Anthony Pfluke (2022) — earned nominations at the 2026 Nā Hōkū Hanohano Awards. This year also marked a milestone for Ei Nei, the 2007 Kani Ka Pila Grille Talent Search winner, which took home six Nā Hōkū Hanohano Awards, including Album of the Year, Group of the Year and Favorite Entertainer of the Year — a testament to the lasting impact of a program that has been cultivating Hawai‘i’s musical talent for nearly two decades.

For ‘Ālewa, the win carries special meaning. “Kani Ka Pila Grille and Luana and her team have created a home for Hawai‘i’s musicians,” the group said. “Many of the artists we see winning Nā Hōkū’s today started in this competition. It is an honor to carry on the legacy they left for us.”

This year’s other finalists, Keawe Kaluhiwa, Makana Arce and Moon Kahele, also impressed audiences and judges with their heartfelt performances, highlighting the diversity and talent of Hawai‘i’s next generation of musicians. Each performed four songs or played for 20 minutes and were scored by an esteemed panel of judges that included:

- Kawika Kahiapo – Na Hōkū Award-winning musician, singer-songwriter, slack key award winner
- Milton Lau – CEO of Ki-Ho‘alu Foundation and Founder of the Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar Festivals
- Bobby Moderow Jr. – award-winning musician, singer-songwriter, slack key award winner
- Eric Lagrimas – Assistant Professor, Music & Entertainment Learning Experience at Honolulu CC

All-Time Kani Ka Pila Grille Talent Search Winners:

2026 – ‘Ālewa	2016 – Pu‘uloa
2025 – ‘Ōlauniu	2015 – Waimānalo Sunset Band
2024 – Rickey Kamai	2014 – Kaiao
2023 – Kahiau Lam Ho	2013 – Na Pali Trio
2022 – Anthony Pfluke	2012 – Kamakakehau Fernandez
2021 – Kekoia Correa	2011 – Ke‘Oahu
2020 – Hui Mele	2010 – Pule Ohana
2019 – Hawaiian Blend	2009 – Kūpaoa
2018 – Ke Olu	2008 – Manoa Voices
2017 – Ei Nei	

Located poolside at the OUTRIGGER Reef Waikiki Beach Resort, Kani Ka Pila Grille is Honolulu’s premier venue for nightly live Hawaiian music. Guests can enjoy ono local fare in an open-air setting while listening to award-winning musicians such as Kawika Kahiapo, Sean Na‘auao, Ho‘okena, Nathan Aweau, Kala‘e Camarillo, Ei Nei and Ka Hehena—with special guests and impromptu jam sessions always a possibility. Open daily 11am–9pm, with live music starting at 6pm. For reservations, call (808) 924-4990.

OUTRIGGER’s support of Hawaiian music continues this Saturday, August 29, 2026 at the 44th annual Slack Key Guitar Festival at the Waikīkī Aquarium at 5pm. On Sunday, August 30, 2026, Henry Kapono’s Duke’s on Sunday Summertime LIVE Series tribute to Jimmy Buffett can be enjoyed in-person at Duke’s Waikīkī at the OUTRIGGER Waikīkī Beach Resort or on YouTube [@OUTRIGGERResorts](#) starting at 4pm HST (Live online from 5-6pm).

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ABOUT OUTRIGGER RESORTS & HOTELS

For more than 75 years, OUTRIGGER has charted a journey of discovery — expanding from Hawai‘i to premier resort destinations including Fiji, Mauritius, Thailand and the Maldives. The privately held hospitality company invites guests to ‘Come Be Here’ with authentic Signature Experiences and the [OUTRIGGER DISCOVERY loyalty program](#) — a member of the award-winning Global Hotel Alliance (GHA). OUTRIGGER’s multi-branded portfolio includes OUTRIGGER Resorts, Hawaii Vacation Condos by OUTRIGGER®, The Kapalua Villas Maui & OUTRIGGER Honua Kai Resort & Spa while also managing select properties from top international hotel brands including Embassy Suites by Hilton®. Learn more at [OUTRIGGER.com](#).

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