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Kani Ka Pila Grille Names Four Finalists for 19th Annual Talent Search Competition



2025 KPG Talent Search Winners 'Ōlauniu – who took their name from the wind of Kapālama from L-R with Luana Maitland – Keali'iokalani Kalima (guitar), Kyle Moriguchi (ukulele) and 'Elia Akaka (bass).

HONOLULU – OUTRIGGER Resorts & Hotels is proud to continue its nearly two-decade commitment to supporting Hawai'i musicians through the annual Kani Ka Pila Grille (KPG) Talent Search, now in its 19th year. The program's impact was on full display at this year's 49th Annual Na Hōkū Hanohano Awards, where each of the last four Kani Ka Pila Grille Talent Search winners – 'Ōlauniu, Rickey Kamai, Kahiau Lam Ho and Anthony Pfluke – earned a Na Hōkū Hanohano Award nomination.

Ei Nei, the 2017 Talent Search winners who perform every Wednesday night at KPG, captured six Na Hōkū's, including Album of the Year, Group of the Year, Island Music Album of the Year, Song of the Year for "Hawai'i Forever" and Favorite Entertainer of the Year - the only award selected by public vote. 'Ōlauniu, 2025 Talent Search winners, won Hawaiian Language Performance of the Year with Kyle Kamalani Moriguchi receiving Haku Mele (Composer) of the Year for "Nā Pu'u 'Ekolu." Anthony Pfluke, 2022 Talent Search winner, earned Contemporary Acoustic Album of the Year for Ku'u Lei Lokelani. Kala'e Camarillo, who performs Tuesday evenings, received Contemporary Album of the Year for Drifting On Island Time and Glen Smith of Ho'okena, who performs Saturday evenings, was honored with the prestigious Kī Hō'alu Legacy Award.

The 2026 Talent Search continues that legacy, following an extensive review of submissions from across the Hawaiian Islands. Four finalists have been selected to compete for the opportunity to earn a one-month paid performance contract at Kani Ka Pila Grille, the home of Hawaiian music at OUTRIGGER Reef Waikiki Beach Resort, along with a personalized social media marketing package featuring an electronic press kit and promotional audio and video clips recorded at Honolulu Community College's Mike Curb MELE Studios.

The 2026 finalists are Makana Arce, Moon Kahale, Keawe Kaluhiwa and 'Ālewa, a next-generation Hawaiian music quartet. The four finalists will perform live before a distinguished panel of Hawaiian music industry professionals during the Made in Hawai'i Festival on Saturday, August 22, from 2 to 5:30 p.m. at the Hawai'i Convention Center.

The judging panel includes Kawika Kahiapo, award-winning musician, singer-songwriter and slack key award winner; Milton Lau, CEO of the Ki-Ho'alu Foundation and founder of the Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar Festivals; Bobby Moderow Jr., award-winning musician, singer-songwriter and slack key award winner; and Eric Lagrimas, assistant professor of Music & Entertainment Learning Experience (MELE) at Honolulu Community College.

With Billy V and Bruddah Wade serving as emcees, each finalist will perform three songs or for up to 20 minutes. The 2026 winner will be announced at 5 p.m., followed by a final performance from the new champion.

"Each year, we are reminded of how much talent and heart exists within our Hawaiian music community," said Luana Maitland, OUTRIGGER's Area Director of Cultural Experience. "The Talent Search gives musicians a stage, professional support and the encouragement to continue developing their craft. We are honored to welcome this year's finalists and excited to see how each one shares their unique voice, mana'o."

Under the leadership of Maitland, the Kani Ka Pila Grille Talent Search has grown into an artist development opportunity with finalists and winners gaining mentorship, paid performance opportunities, marketing support and professional exposure – helping them build experience and connections to continue their musical journeys.

"Seeing so many Kani Ka Pila Grille artists recognized on Hawai'i's biggest music stage is incredibly rewarding because it reflects the great work by Auntie Luana, years of creating opportunities for musicians and sharing authentic Hawaiian music with millions of guests from around the world," said Sean Dee, Chief Commercial Officer of OUTRIGGER Hospitality Group.

About the 2026 Finalists

'Ālewa represents the next generation of hula musicians, rooted first and foremost in hula. Comprised of Kamaha'o Haumea-Thronas, Kainalu Jacang, Hayden Kaaialii and Kamalu Tupou, each member began their musical journey as a hula dancer, developing a deep understanding of the relationship between mele and movement. Formed in 2025 from the legacy of Kūkalahale, 'Ālewa specializes in traditional Hawaiian music, with a particular love for mele hula. The quartet is dedicated to preserving, perpetuating and celebrating Hawaiian music through performances grounded in 'ike, 'ōlelo Hawai'i and aloha.

Makana Arce is a multi-instrumental vocalist whose first passion was rooted in choral music. While attending Kamehameha Schools, he joined the Concert Glee Club and participated in Song Contest, where he also discovered a love for Hawaiian music, particularly Hawaiian falsetto. He earned a degree in music education and vocal performance from Brigham Young University–Hawai'i, where he studied music composition, piano, classical singing and 'Ōlelo Hawai'i. Makana plays 'ukulele, piano, guitar and bass and possesses a wide vocal range.

Moon Kahale is a solo artist, U.S. Army veteran and retired Department of Justice employee who resides in East Kapolei Hawaiian Homestead. A lover of "old-school" hits and original songs, Moon accompanies himself on 'ukulele and slack key guitar. He is also passionate about sharing his skills with others who share his enthusiasm for Hawaiian music and culture.

Keawe Kaluhiwa, from Kāne'ohe, describes Hawaiian music as his first love. Inspired by the gift of making beautiful music, Kaluhiwa says the Talent Search has ignited a renewed passion and desire to make his debut as a performer.

2026 Kani Ka Pila Grille Talent Search Run of Show

Saturday, August 22, 2026 | Hawai'i Convention Center

2 p.m. – Performance by 2025 Kani Ka Pila Grille Talent Search winner 'Ōlauniu

2:30 p.m. – Contestant #3: Keawe Kaluhiwa

3 p.m. – Contestant #2: Makana Arce

3:30 p.m. – Contestant #1: Moon Kahale

4 p.m. – Contestant #4: 'Ālewa

4:30 p.m. – Tally and performance by 'Ōlauniu

5 p.m. – Announcement of and performance by 2026 winner

About Kani Ka Pila Grille

Located poolside at OUTRIGGER Reef Waikīkī Beach Resort (2169 Kalia Road, Honolulu), Kani Ka Pila Grille is a gathering place for nightly live Hawaiian music, serving guests and locals in a relaxed, open-air setting. The restaurant is open daily from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., with award-winning Hawaiian musicians taking the stage nightly at 6 p.m. The regular lineup includes Kawika Kahiapo, Sean Na'auao, Ho'okena, Nathan Aweau, Kala'e Camarillo, Ei Nei and Ka Hehena, with occasional special guests and impromptu kanikapila.

For reservations, call (808) 924-4990 or visit outrigger.com.

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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 and OUTRIGGER Honua Kai Resort & Spa while also managing select properties from top international hotel brands including Embassy Suites by Hilton®. Find out more at [OUTRIGGER.com](https://outrigger.com) or visit @OUTRIGGERResorts on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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