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***Kumu Hina* Premieres on *Independent Lens* Monday, May 4, 2015 on PBS**

Film About a Transgender Teacher in Hawaii Brings an Ancient Cultural Perspective to National Debate on Transgender Rights

"In high school, I was teased and tormented for being too girlish. But I found refuge in being Hawaiian. What I hope most to leave with my students is the true meaning of aloha: love, honor, and respect. It's a responsibility I take very seriously." — Kumu Hina



Credit: Qwaves, LLC

(San Francisco, CA) — At a time when transgender and gender nonconforming people across the U.S. and around the world have achieved unprecedented visibility in popular culture, but continue to suffer extreme violence, harassment, discrimination, and isolation, *Independent Lens* presents ***Kumu Hina***, a moving film from Hawaii that offers a bold new perspective on gender diversity and inclusion through cultural empowerment. Directed and produced by Dean Hamer and Joe Wilson, *Kumu Hina* premieres on *Independent Lens* Monday, May 4, 2015, 10:00-11:00 PM ET ([check local listings](#)), as part of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month programming on PBS.

Kumu Hina is the inspiring story of Hina Wong-Kalu, a transgender native Hawaiian teacher and cultural icon who brings to life Hawaii's traditional embrace of *mahu* — those who embody both male and female spirit. The film traces Hina's evolution from a timid high school boy to her position as a married woman and cultural director of a school in one of Honolulu's grittier neighborhoods. As she contemplates who should lead the school's all-male hula troupe in their final performance, a surprising candidate presents herself: Ho'onani, a sixth grader who is proud to be seen as a mixture of boy and girl. As Kumu Hina helps Ho'onani to negotiate the mixed reactions of her classmates and her family, the power of culture to instill a sense of pride and acceptance becomes clear.



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The film also delves into Hina's pursuit of a dream of her own — a fulfilling romantic relationship. Her tumultuous marriage to a headstrong Tongan man offers insight into the universal challenge of loving somebody outside the norm, and a glimpse of Hawaii never before seen on film.

“This film introduces us to an unforgettable and courageous woman whose life is simultaneously grounded in ancient tradition and on the forefront of one of the most contemporary movements in society today,” said Lois Vossen, founding and deputy executive producer of *Independent Lens*. “Gender fluidity is a concept that has been understood for thousands of years in Polynesian culture, but is only now beginning to be accepted in the West. *Kumu Hina* teaches us all how to love and accept ourselves as we are.”

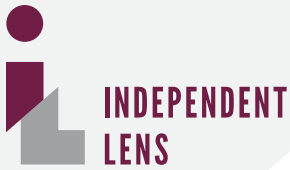
Hamer and Wilson wanted to break new ground with this film project by focusing on the abilities, accomplishments, and contributions of a transgender woman rather than on the prejudice and hostility she has faced. “*Kumu Hina* portrays a world where instead of transgender people being marginalized because of who they are, they are actually visible, honored, and included,” said the filmmakers. “A world where youth who are searching for their own creative forms of gender expression are embraced and encouraged to be themselves rather than to hide in fear or pretend they are just like everyone else.”

In conjunction with the national broadcast premiere, the film team is launching an education campaign that includes a special children's version of the film, distributed for free on PBS LearningMedia, PBS's destination for educators and students. The film tells Ho'onani's story through her own words and colorful animation. “Young people deserve to see a school where everyone is accepted and included,” said Kumu Hina. “That's why it's so important to also have this short video, *A Place in the Middle*, that kids as well as teachers and parents will enjoy watching.”

Visit the *Kumu Hina* companion website (<http://www.pbs.org/kumu-hina/>), which features information about the film including an interview with the filmmakers, preview clips, and a discussion guide, plus links to *A Place in the Middle*, and how viewers can make their schools and communities more welcoming and inclusive by taking a #PledgeofAloha.

About the Participants

Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu (Kumu Hina) is a *kanaka maoli* (Native Hawaiian) teacher, cultural practitioner, and community leader. Born in the Nu'uano District of O'ahu Island, Kumu Hina was educated at Kamehameha Schools and the University of Hawaii. She was previously a founding member of Kulia Na Mamo, a community organization established to improve the quality of life for *māhū wahine* (transgender women), and Cultural Director at a public charter school dedicated to using native Hawaiian culture, history, and education as tools for developing and empowering the next generation of warrior scholars. Kumu Hina is currently a cultural advisor and leader in many community affairs and civic activities, including Chair of the Oahu Island Burial Council, which oversees the management of Native Hawaiian burial sites and ancestral remains. In 2014, Hina



announced her bid for a position on the board of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, the first transgender candidate to run for statewide political office in the United States.

Haemaccelo Kalu, Kumu Hina's husband, was born on Niuafu'ou, a small island in the Kingdom of Tonga, and currently lives in Honolulu where he works at 'Iolani Palace.

Ho'onani Kamai, a sixth grade student at the school where Kumu Hina taught, rises to become leader of the all-male hula troupe.

About the Filmmakers

Dean Hamer (Director, Producer) is a National Institutes of Health scientist emeritus, bestselling author, and Emmy Award-winning filmmaker with a long history of communicating complex and controversial ideas to diverse publics. In 2004 he formed Qwaves with partner Joe Wilson to produce insightful and provocative documentaries about often-overlooked social issues. Their films were part of the pioneering days of citizen-generated content on the Internet and cable television, won numerous awards, and have been used as outreach and educational tools by many community and educational organizations. *Out in the Silence*, the first feature film from Qwaves, premiered at the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival at Lincoln Center to great critical acclaim. Hamer is also known for his research on the genetics of sexual orientation, which was described in his *New York Times* Book of the Year *The Science of Desire*. In 2011, he and Joe moved to Oahu, Hawaii to work on *Kumu Hina*, first in a series of films about Hawaiian lives and voices.

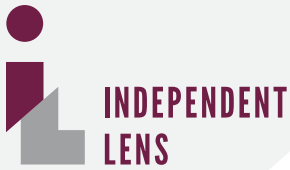
Joe Wilson (Director, Producer) got involved in documentary filmmaking through his professional work and social activism on human rights issues. Frustrated by the limitations of traditional organizing and advocacy, he picked up a camera with hopes of reaching broader audiences with stories that would inform and compel people to act. Together with Qwaves co-founder Dean Hamer, his films on controversial and often ignored human rights issues have won jury and audience awards and official selection at more than 100 film festivals around the country and the world, and received widespread attention for their role in promoting social change. In 2004, Wilson returned to his small hometown of Oil City, Pa., to direct and produce the Sundance-supported, Emmy Award-winning PBS documentary *Out in the Silence*. Through more than 700 grassroots screenings across the country, this film has become part of a national movement to open dialogue, counter school bullying, and support fairness and equality for all. Wilson and Hamer are currently living and working in Hawaii.

CREDITS

Written, Produced and Directed by	Dean Hamer and Joe Wilson
Editor	Nels Bangerter
Co-Producer	Connie M. Florez
Original Score	Makana



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Animation	Jared Greenleaf Jed Henry Ryan Woodward
Camera	Dean Hamer Joe Wilson Connie M. Florez Fred Vanderpoel John Kuamoo Cindy Iodice

Kumu Hina is a co-production of Qwaves, LLC and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) in association with Pacific Islanders in Communications, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: facebook.com/independentlens and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

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