

Song Title: MELE KALIKIMAKA

Rating: YES: Caution

REVIEWERS' NOTE

Reevaluation: Dec 23, 2023 : change from YES: Note to YES: Caution

Christmas was not celebrated in Hawai'i until the arrival of Protestant missionaries and is believed to have started after 1820. It coincides with Hawaiians' 4 month (Nov - Feb) festival of *Makahiki*, honoring the god, Lono.

Mele Kalikimaka is a *hapa-haole* (half-white) song--a genre that emerged from American colonial expansion to Hawai'i. This music has been criticized for solidifying and perpetuating U.S. mainland caricatures of Hawai'i as a place of grass shacks, white sandy beaches, lovely hula maidens, and happy dancing natives. ([reference](#))

Some *hapa-haole* songs can be offensive. While *Mele Kalikimaka* is among the more innocuous *hapa-haole* songs, some do find this song to be offensive in that ***Mele Kalikimaka* is gibberish**, a made-up phrase meant to sound Hawaiian and that works well in the song and is fun to say. ([Mele Kalikimaka - Wikipedia](#))

CAUTION REQUIREMENTS

- Please review and discuss with ensemble members the details [in this document](#) (with more about *hapa haole* music and additional references).
- **COSTUME/PROPS:** Non-indigenous performers must not use Hawaiian costuming or props. (Leis are ok.)
- **CHOREOGRAPHY:** As hula is not merely a dance but also a significant cultural practice for native Hawaiians, performers must be respectful of its history and importance to the Hawaiian people. (See "The Hula" section of [this document](#).) Therefore, movements that evoke the hula must not be included unless it is by performers who have formally learned the dance. Performers should never add hula-like movements in a stereotypical manner because it reflects a lack of respect for Hawaiian history and culture.

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What year was this song written? 1949

Who wrote the lyrics? Robert Alexander Anderson

What did your research tell you about the lyricist?

Born in Honolulu in 1894, Anderson, a White man,, became one of the most popular composers in the hapa haole ("half-white") genre, which describes music with a Hawaiian tune, styling, and/or subject matter but lyrics that are mostly or entirely in English. Over his long career Anderson composed nearly two hundred songs, several of which became popular standards, and he was posthumously inducted into the Hawaiian Music Hall of Fame in 1998. "His ear for Hawaiian music's special sound and rhythm was exceptional," the HMHF wrote, "and he was regarded as a successor to Charles E. King in maintaining the melodic and lyrical qualities which are Hawai'i's musical identity."

[hapa haole – Art & Theology](#)

What other material has been written by this lyricist?

Anderson wrote more than 80 popular hapa haole songs including "Lovely Hula Hands", "Haole Hula", and Malihini Mei"

Who is the composer of this song? same as lyricist

Who and what is this song about, as originally intended by the composer and earlier performers?

In 1949 Anderson was in his office in Honolulu when his secretary, a woman from the mainland, mentioned that she had never heard a Hawaiian Christmas song. Thus, he composed Mele Kalikimaka and it became an enduring classic. Bing Crosby and The Andrews Sisters made one of the earliest recordings on 78 rpm and 45 rpm phonograph records in 1950.

<https://genius.com/Bing-crosby-and-the-andrews-sisters-mele-kalikimaka-merry-christmas-lyrics>

Share a link to the earliest performance of this song that you can find.

[Mele Kalikimaka - Bing Crosby - HD Audio](#)

What historical or social events were happening at the time this song was written?

In the four years before the writing of this song, these were the major events in Hawaiian history:

- 1945 – Hawai'i marked V_J Day with a 3-day holiday. Curfew and gas rationing were lifted.
 - Princess Kawanakoa, last heir to the Hawaiian throne, died.
 - Pan American Airlines resumed commercial operations to Hawai'i.
- 1946 – The 442nd Regimental Combat, most decorated unit in US history, returns to Oahu.
 - Trans Pacific Airlines (later became Aloha Airlines) was founded.
 - Tsunami caused tremendous damage to Hilo.
- 1947 – Oahu Railway service ended.
 - Jaycee Oldtimers presented the first Aloha Week.
- 1948 – Hawai'i had seven Olympic medalists in weightlifting and swimming.
 - Tripler General Hospital was dedicated.

Does any illustration or other characteristic of the original sheet music reflect an inappropriate theme? No

Did this song, originally or subsequently, demean a marginalized racial/ethnic group (a group considered at a social disadvantage) through idiomatic expressions, metaphors,

jargon, or message? And/or does the song present a sanitized/idyllic or false narrative regarding the American South and the life of the enslaved or newly freed OR of other marginalized racial/ethnic groups and their history? No

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

Hapa haole music incorporated such popular U.S. mainland idioms as jazz or ragtime into traditional Hawaiian music, telling stories of the islands and people of Hawai'i while retaining tempos appropriate for dancing hula or poetically expressing the lyrics. The songs often contained more English than Hawaiian lyrics, facilitating the promotion of Hawaiian music and tourism to mainland audiences. (Use of the Hawaiian language was discouraged after an 1896 law required English in schools, and did not see a revival until the 1970's.)

Hapa haole music has been criticized for solidifying and perpetuating U.S. mainland caricatures of Hawai'i as a place of grass shacks, white sandy beaches, lovely hula maidens, and happy dancing natives. While some of the songs are not outrightly offensive, and some view the genre as a part of Hawaiian cultural heritage that demonstrates adaptation to contact with the outside world, it should be noted that **this "adaptation" was forced and came at the immense cost of lost lives and culture.**

- [Nostalgia And Hapa Haole Music In Early Twenty-First Century Hawai'i A Thesis Submitted To The Graduate Divis](#)
- [Hapa Haole Music](#)
- [Ethics in Song: Becoming Kam'āina in Hapa-Haole Music / Aiko Yamashiro](#)

Please supply the links to any additional sources you used for this section of research.

En.wikipedia.org>wiki>Robert_Alexander_Anderson

En.wikipedia.org>wiki>Mele_Kalikimaka

Additional Questions to Consider (do not pertain to Admissibility)

The remaining questions pertain to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion issues other than those of race. As such, **THESE QUESTIONS DO NOT AFFECT A SONG'S ADMISSIBILITY.** They are provided to encourage your group to consider factors that may affect members of your audience and/or your performers with regard to religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and more. ***Please refer to the Music Choices section of [Chapter Choices to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) (in the [Chorus Toolkit](#)) for details and strategies related to these factors.***

Could the message/lyrics of the song, original or subsequent, limit any singer or audience member's ability to engage, related to the following? A YES answer does not imply that the song is demeaning or exclusionary. [Please see instructions here.](#)

Age: No

Disability: No

Gender: No

Religion: **Yes**

Sexual Orientation: No

Visible Physical Difference: No

Other? No

Please explain your reasoning for YES/UNSURE answers and any NO answers you wish to explain.

This song references a religious holiday, Christmas.

Are there any adjustments to the lyrics that would make it more inclusive or current to our chorus culture or societal norms? *

No, lyric changes will not address the identified category.

Write any suggested changes to the lyrics (if applicable) or explain why changes to lyrics will not address identified categories (if applicable). *

While secular in nature, the holiday references occur throughout this song and are inherent to its message.

***These decisions are left to the discretion of ensembles based upon their assessment of member and audience sensibilities.** Please consult the *Music Choices* section of [Chapter Choices to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) (in the [Chorus Toolkit](#)) for details and strategies related to these factors.