

Hawai'i Theater People Featured with 083126 Download & Email

Kapena Alapai is the Director of Arts and Culture at Lili'uokalani Center on O'ahu, and was born and raised in North Kona, Hawai'i Island, with deep roots in Pu'uana'hulu and Holualoa. He comes to the Lili'uokalani Trust after taking part in a 7-year project, ArtChangeUS, working to reframe the national arts conversation by embracing the cultural assets of U.S. demographic change. This unique snapshot into the field shaped Kapena's understanding of arts and social justice issues amidst a national funding crisis, multiple divisive presidential elections, and ongoing racial injustice. Kapena is of Hawaiian ancestry and fluent in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/kapena-alapai-91a20880/>

Mark Branner – Invites everyone to a five-person-only version of The Hobbit at the Kennedy Theatre at UH (www.hobbithawaii.com), running through September 6, 2026. Mark is a Professor at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Department of Theatre and Dance. Born in Hollywood but raised primarily in Taiwan, Mark returned to the U.S. to attend college, whereupon he quickly dropped a scholarship from UCLA to work as a clown with the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Mark eventually left the circus and now teaches courses at UHM in TYA (theatre for young audiences), puppetry, mask, and physical comedy. Previously Mark served as the director and producer of Theatre Arts at Antelope Valley College in Lancaster, California. He has toured nationally with various groups, including [Diavolo](#), and performed extensively in Asia, most notably in chuanju (Sichuan Opera), a regional Chinese theatre form. He and his family operate CiRCO Redempto, a community outreach program designed to benefit children from the Nosu Yi minority nationality of central China. www.branneruhm.space; www.circoredempto.org

Lisa Sanaye Dring - Born and raised in Hawai'i until age 7, now lives in Brooklyn, NY. Lisa's play SUMO was produced by Ma-Yi, The Public and La Jolla Playhouse. It was nominated for a 2025 Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding New Play and a 2023 San Diego Critics Award for Best New Play. Her play Kairos had a Rolling World Premiere with National New Play Network and was nominated for a 2025 Jeff Award for New Work. They are currently writing Public Record which will be produced in September 2026 by The Public as a part of Public Works. She has worked with Meow Wolf, was a member of The Geffen Writers' Room and was honored as a recipient of the 2020/21 PLAY LA Stage Raw/Humanitas Prize. Her work has also been produced by Contemporary American Theatre Festival, Actors Theatre of Louisville, East West Players, Circle X, Know Theatre of Cincinnati, Theatre NOVA, Rogue

Artists, Red Theater, Theatre of NOTE and Skylight Theatre. They have been commissioned by Ma-Yi, The Public, Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis, Rogue Artists. She writes, "I'm honored to be a part of this group!"

www.lisanayedring.com

Malia Stoner – Malia was born and attended school on Hawai'i Island. Currently, she is a regional Equity Stage Manager based out of Colorado and a resident SM for the Theatre Company at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. Additional theatrical experience includes: ballet, dinner theatre, children's theatre, technical direction, lighting and scenic design, costume and prop construction, and all technical house/running crews. With this background and a degree in technical theatre from the University of Northern Colorado- Malia enjoys being the central communication for collaboration between all the different departments in order to create a cohesive production. Fun Fact, Malia was Production Stage Manager for [The Chinese Lady at Denver Center](#), which was directed by fellow Hawaii theater person, Seema Sueko.

Tafa'i – Born and raised in Honolulu, Tafa'i graduated from the University Laboratory School in 1997. Tafa'i then made his community theatre debut at Kumu Kahua Theatre in Albert Wendt's "The Songmaker's Chair", directed by Dennis Carroll back in 2006. Since then, he has won a handful of Po`okela, namely a Po`okela for Best Featured Male in a play for his stellar performances as both Casca and Octavius Caesar in "Julius Caesar" for the Hawaii Shakespeare Festival in 2011. He has played varied roles including Chief Broom in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" at Mānoa Valley Theatre, Wilson in "Harvey" at The Actor's Group and The Queen of Hearts in "Alice in Chinatown" among others. He most recently was assistant director for "Clyde's" at Mānoa Valley Theatre. His first turn as AD. Mostly, Tafa'i is an actor at heart. But he hopes to direct his first show soon.

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