

On a December day in 1970, Charlotte Mitchell-Windle, the librarian at Lihue Public Library at the time, declared it “ridiculous” that Kaua’i didn’t have a community theater group and called a meeting at her Poipu shore home. Among those present were Arnold Meister, Wil Welsh, Bob George, and Bob Miller. By 1971, Kaua’i Community Players was officially established. The group followed an earlier organization known as The Kaua’i Players from the late 1950s and early 60s, among whose productions were *The Heiress*, *The Matchmaker*, and *The Solid Gold Cadillac*.



KCP's debut production was *The Teahouse of the August Moon* in 1971, directed by Russell Sus (Kaua’i High’s librarian at the time - what is this librarian/theater correlation?) at the Lihue Parish Hall. It featured live goats and a real jeep. Most performances during the 1980s and 1990s were held here but, without a permanent venue, KCP has creatively used various spaces over the years, from hotel banquet rooms to outdoor pavilions. One of the most memorable productions of the Parish Hall era was *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, directed by Arnold Meister in 1986, which packed over 200 people into the small space and had a cast of about 50.

A standout moment in KCP's history was when actress Estelle Parsons, known for *Roseanne* and her Oscar-winning role in *Bonnie and Clyde*, played Lady Macbeth in their 1978 production. Her involvement came by way of a spontaneous invitation from a community member after reading her lament about the declining frequency of Shakespearean plays in a newspaper article. Parsons returned in 1990 to play Mama Rose in *Gypsy*, further cementing her warm relationship with the group.

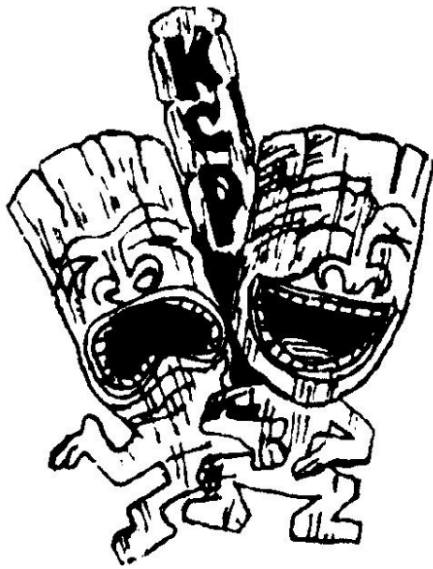


KCP has continued for over 50 years with more than 200 productions. The organization fathered a number of other theatrical institutions on Kaua’i, including The North Shore Players (1992-1996), led by Joan and Lloyd Miller and Pete Groesbeck, and the children’s theater arm Kauai Kids at Play (1990-1996), which eventually split off to become Hawaii Children’s Theatre under Bobbee Downs. NSP and KCP often organized vans and buses of folks to travel to see each others’ shows. Collaborations have been a KCP hallmark over the years, partnering with groups like Kaua’i Chorale, Hawaii Opera Theatre, and Honolulu Community Theatre (now Diamond Head Theatre), as well as showcasing local playwrights and inviting guest directors from across Hawaii and the mainland.

In the late 1990s, an informal group of theater organizations joined to form Kauai Alliance for the Performing Arts (KAPA). It included Kaua’i Community Players, Hawaii Children’s Theatre, Kauai Performing Arts Center, and Women in Theater. They pooled their resources to lease a warehouse in Puhi which was used for costume storage, set construction, and rehearsal space. In 2002, it became the permanent home of KCP and Hawaii Children’s Theatre. Now

known as the Puhi Theatrical Warehouse, this cavernous, empty space was transformed into a fully functional black box theater seating just over 50. Many people made this transformation possible, with special mention to Debra Blachowiak, Poppy Shell, and Steve Whitney.

KCP's commitment to community-driven, non-professional theater is embodied in its member-based structure. Local volunteers fill the roles of directors, actors, set designers and builders, costumers, and crew. Annually, the Board of Directors selects four plays proposed by potential directors, to run over the course of its January-May season. Despite changes and challenges over the years, KCP has survived, prospered, and remains a celebrated institution in Hawaii's theater community.



Top: A KCP ticket from 1982

Left: Wil Welsh's Hawaiian comedy/tragedy logo became a long-standing symbol for KCP. Although no longer in use, it remains a cherished part of our rich history.