

# The Wonder of Woodwinds

By Paige Takeya  
Photos by Anthony Consillio



**Hawai'i Flute Society is dedicated to sharing and celebrating the beautiful tones of the flute.**

**H**awai'i Flute Society owes its genesis to a very remarkable woman: Jean Harling.

A founding member of the National Flute Association, she was one of the very first women to ever play in a professional orchestra. She also was principal flutist at Honolulu Symphony Orchestra for 40 years, as well as an instructor at University of Hawai'i — positions that enabled her to teach generations of flute students.

When she died in 2016 at the age of 92, she left a void behind her.

"Our solution was to found this organization," says Lance Suzuki, Hawai'i Flute Society president.

The group, which boasts approximately 40-50 members, is devoted to teaching and sharing a love of the woodwind instrument. It hosts the annual Hawai'i Flute Festival, as well as a few other

concerts throughout the year, with its members performing as soloists, ensembles and even a choir.

"We also run educational programs, such as clinics and master classes, to help develop the skills of our members and our students," adds Suzuki.

**I**t may seem like a niche organization, but members believe strongly that they play an important role in Hawai'i's musical — and social — scene.

"As a homeschooler, the public schools don't allow many (of us) to join band and marching band, so Hawai'i Flute Society is another opportunity to play in an ensemble and choir," says Noelani Velasco, an eighth-grader.

In fact, half of the society's membership consists of students.

"I grew up here, and I went through the system here," elaborates Suzuki. "I was in a lot of the same

programs these kids were in — like youth symphony, band, marching band — and part of my goal is that I want to help this organization provide better access to these types of activities, things I wish I had more of when I was a kid."

On the other end of the spectrum, retirees like Caren Kusaka appreciate what the society offers them, too.

"It's been a really fun time, and such an experience to meet all these people," she says.

Fellow retiree Teresa Iwashita agrees.

"Playing music and the flute has just really given me an opportunity to keep my mind sharp, to enjoy a passion I didn't seem to have time for previously, and I feel like it's just a gift of life — it just keeps you going, it keeps you passionate about a hobby, and it's relaxing."

"We sound very studious and serious, but I think the social aspect

of the flute society is an important part," adds Ellen Powell, membership coordinator and co-vice president. "We try to pair social activities with some of our rehearsals."

The society has plans to expand its reach statewide — it currently only serves O'ahu — as well as grow its educational programs, particularly in public schools.

**B**ut what thrills members most is seeing the community respond favorably to their public performances.

"We are specialized and focus only on the flute as our mission," Suzuki notes. "We are really dedicated to supporting the level of playing here through new ideas and hearing new people."

The recent fourth annual Hawai'i Flute Festival was a testament to the fruits of that devotion.

Lynn Muramaru, member and middle school band

teacher at 'Iolani School, remembers, "Seeing people — not only flutists, but saxophonists, clarinets, parents, the elderly, the retired, students — everybody came, and I was so proud to be part of Hawai'i Flute Society and being part of the process to helping make that vision come alive."

It comes down, says Suzuki, to the simple beauty of live music.

"In 2020, there are so many ways we can be exposed to music.

"You can pull music up digitally, but there's a difference between that experience and experiencing live performances.

"I really believe there is no substitute for live music, and this is a huge part of what we do."

*Those interested in joining Hawai'i Flute Society should visit its website at [hawaiiflutesociety.com](http://hawaiiflutesociety.com).*



(Top) Hawai'i Flute Society is led by Lance Suzuki, president, and Ellen Powell, co-vice president. (Left, above) Members Noe Velasco and Cynthia Farias



The group consists of approximately 40-50 members, including Cathlyn Momohara-Ho (left) and Mae Masuda-Kop (above)