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BEING 'DUKE'

By John Berger

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In the last 15 years, Moses Goods has played heroes and antiheroes on many local stages. He's done Shakespeare, experimental modernist works and Japanese theater. He's written plays and worked as a director. Even with all that experience, Goods' latest project — starring as Duke Kahanamoku in "Duke," a oneman play that he wrote for Honolulu Theatre for Youth — is a challenge for him as an actor and as a playwright.

"A big challenge is fear. If you do a story like this, you have to do it well," Goods explained, his deep resonant voice cutting through the din of a downtown restaurant. Ethnicity is not an issue —

Goods is 50 percent Native Hawaiian, slim and muscular — but "looking the part" raised another challenge for him.

"When people found out that I was going to do this role, they were saying, 'It's the role of a lifetime,' and those kinds of things can go to your head if you let it," he continued. "For me, to do justice to Duke — who was all about humility — you have to make sure that this is about him and about his story. It's not about me, it's the story of a great man who in many ways shaped the lives of a generation."

More than a year ago, Goods began working on the play, which opens Friday at Tenney Theatre.

"It took me a while to really get going, in terms of writing a script and figuring out a direction, because it's hard with someone like Duke for several reasons — he's done so much and he's accomplished so much."

As Kahanamoku was known to say, "And how!"

Duke Paoa Kahinu Mokoe Hulikohola Kahanamoku was born a subject of the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1890. His life spanned the overthrow of the Hawaiian government, the dark times of the Republic of Hawaii, the entire 59 years of the Territory of Hawaii and the first nine years of statehood.

As an athlete he broke several American swimming records in Honolulu Harbor in 1911 and then



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Moses Goods Stars in and wrote the one-man play "Duke"

repeated those feats in mainland swimming pools to qualify for the U.S. Olympic team. Kahanamoku won his first two Olympic medals — one gold, one silver — at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm, Sweden; he won more medals at the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp, Belgium, and at the 1924 Olympics in Paris.

In the years that followed, he served 12 terms as sheriff of the City and County of Honolulu, appeared in two dozen Hollywood films, and partnered with Kimo Wilder McVay to open his namesake nightclub, Duke Kahanamoku's, in the original International Market Place.

Kahanamoku is also credited with reviving the sport of surfing and popularizing it outside Hawaii. For many years, he used a traditional Hawaiian koa surfboard that was 16 feet long and weighed more than 100 pounds. In 1917, he rode it on a single wave for more than a mile along the surf breaks of Waikiki; the construction of the Ala Wai Canal in 1928 caused so many changes in surf patterns off Waikiki that a similar nonstop ride is no longer possible.

“There were so many things that he did, things that he accomplished (and) things that he became,” Goods said.

“The other big challenge was deciding what voice (the play) would be in, because Duke — with all of his accomplishments — would never talk about himself. He just wouldn't do that. That's one of the things that makes Duke so special.”

And so Goods also plays several other characters. He included them so that HTY audiences could hear many of the accolades Kahanamoku received from sportswriters and others during his life. Goods and HTY director Eric Johnson also tell the story with a mele inoa (name chant) about Kahanamoku that was originally published in a Hawaiian-language newspaper a century ago.

“Duke was born at a very interesting time,” Goods said. “He was born right before the kingdom fell, and he died right before the Hawaiian Renaissance, so he lived through the time when Hawaiians were struggling to find our identity. Duke gave Hawaiians someone to look up to.”

A free study guide with more information on Kahanamoku and suggestions for story-related activities is available at htyweb.org.



Moses Goods portrays Duke Kahanamoku in “Duke,” the play he wrote for Honolulu Theatre for Youth