



Literary Arts



Photo credit: <https://www.festpachawaii.org/>

The 13th Festival of Pacific Arts & Culture (FestPAC) showcases a collection of literary arts from across the Pacific Islands. This segment of the festival features both formal and informal events that celebrate the diverse literary traditions of the region. It provides a platform for knowledge sharing and discussions on languages and cultural themes rooted in literary works. Participants and audiences engage in conversations that highlight the significance of authorship, storytelling, and oral traditions in Oceanic literature.

Literary Arts: “The Narrow Way”



Pesetā Vaaelua Tialuga Sunia Seloti

Pesetā Vaaelua Tialuga Sunia Seloti is an accomplished poet, musician, and academic from the villages of Safune and Pu’apu’a in Savaii; Fasitoo, Samatau, Lefaga, Lepa, and Lalomalava in Upolu; and Leone in Tutuila; and Manu’a.

As the Executive Director of the Samoan Language Commission of American Samoa, she hopes to showcase the territory’s cultural and artistic contributions. Her goals included assisting the delegation’s leadership, addressing misconceptions about American Samoa, sharing her literary work, learning about diverse Pacific cultures and promoting *alofa* (love) and appreciation for others.

She believes that she’s achieved all the goals she set for this years’ FestPAC through interactions with other delegates, group meetings, and showcases. She emphasized the importance of love in cultural preservation and identity, noting American Samoa’s strong spirit of unity and belonging. She highlighted the necessity of preparing the delegation to exhibit good values.

Looking forward, she hopes her art, particularly literary arts and music, will be preserved for future reference while maintaining high standards of respect and morality. She advised future delegates to come prepared with quality work, engage in meaningful discussions and continuously read and research to build their craft.

Pesetā’s first collection of Poems was necessitated in 2004 for Palau’s 10th Festival of Pacific Arts & Culture. So, it is fitting that her next entry “The Narrow Way” was revealed during this 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture.

“

Love conquers all. Without love, there is no real power in our endeavors, be it with culture, language, or those who work to preserve our identity. I proudly say that American Samoa has a strong spirit of oneness and sense of belonging . . .

”

Literary Arts: "The Narrow Way"





Theater: “Solo o le Va”



In *Solo o le Va*, or the Polemic play About the Origin of Heaven & Earth, Tapaau Dr. Aga delves deep into the Samoan creation myth, offering one interpretation that weaves together elements from four main scholarly sources. This synthesis not only highlights the richness of Samoan lore but also showcases the diversity of interpretations that have emerged over time. Tapa’au Dr. Aga’s approach highlights the story’s complexity and depth, making it accessible and engaging for contemporary audiences.

Theater: “Solo o le Va”

“

The evolution of artistic and cultural expression by Samoans depends on their insights, experiences, study of the discipline, & their ability to realize their vision without losing the joy and the fun of creating art, music, dance, and all other arts.

”



Tapa'au Dr. Daniel Aga

Tapa'au Dr. Daniel Aga, an accomplished academic, seasoned educator and long time musician took on the role of leading American Samoa's theater category at the FestPAC. This marked his first involvement in the festival since the 2008 event held in American Samoa, potentially making this a significant and possibly final participation for him.

Motivated by a deep commitment to representing American Samoa with passion and authenticity, Tapa'au Dr. Aga aimed to showcase the richness of Samoan artistry. His primary goal was to present a theatrical performance that captured the spirit and culture of American Samoa, ensuring it resonated genuinely with audiences.

Reflecting on some lessons he learned throughout the festival, he described the opening night as a powerful moment. It reinforced his belief in the resilience and promising future of Pacific peoples. The cross-genre approach to the Samoan myth was particularly notable. By integrating text from various sources, utilizing dynamic imagery, incorporating choreography, Samoan chants, selective musical instrumentation with the *fala* and acoustic guitar, and elements of *fale aitu* (humorous Samoan theater), the performance offered an immersive experience for the audience.

When asked about his favorite memory of this year's festival, he highlighted the profound impact and inclusive approach to character representation. By intentionally creating a non-verbal character (the *Segaula*), who communicates primarily in American Sign Language, the play was able to reach a mother in the audience whose child communicates in the same way. This moment highlighted the festival's potential for connection and the importance of inclusivity in the arts.

Theater: “Solo o le Va”



Nellie Tuigamala Lisala

Nellie Tuigamala Lisala with roots in the villages of Leone and Matautu Lefaga, is an active performing arts ambassador from American Samoa. She is the daughter of Atrina Tuigamala and Philip Lisala and is one part of the dynamic duo that enacted, “Solo o le Va” at the FestPAC.

Professionally, Nellie serves as a Program Coordinator for Kupu in Hawaii and a Youth Development Professional at the Boys and Girls Club of American Samoa. Her passion for the arts and youth development led her to be referred by the Amerika Samoa Humanities Council to participate in the Theater category of FestPAC.

Nellie’s primary goal at FestPAC was to share the enduring power of performing arts in bridging cultural gaps and showcasing the rich heritage and cultural identity of Samoans. She aimed to demonstrate that “Samoans are talented and versatile, capable of excelling in dance, singing, acting, design and more!”

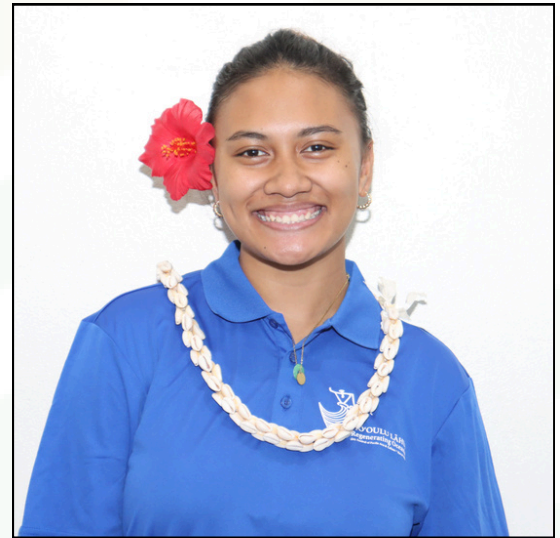
Throughout her FestPAC journey, Nellie emphasized the importance of embracing new media and aesthetic ideals while honoring the tradition of storytelling. Nellie’s favorite memory from FestPAC was the camaraderie and bonds formed with her fellow delegates and making new friends from other islands of the Pacific.

If she could offer advice to the next delegate in her category for FestPAC 2028 she would say, “Be open minded! Anything can happen so be prepared, always.”

“ There is nothing more beautiful than a woman who is unapologetically herself. ”

Theater: “Solo o le Va”

“ There’s something special about a woman who dominates in a man’s world. ”



Lolomaletaiotumua Faoliu

Lolomaletaiotumua “Loloma” Faoliu is an accomplished actress from Nu'uuli & Leone, American Samoa, known for her roles in numerous successful theater productions under the House of Flying Daggers. She is currently pursuing a degree in Criminal Justice at the American Samoa Community College. With the legacy of her parents, the late Reverend Fuaifale Faoliu and Polataia Siliva Faoliu, Loloma continues to shine as a representative of her culture and heritage at the FestPAC.

Loloma was excited to seize the opportunity to showcase her talents on a larger platform. Although it was challenging being away from her family, she and her team persevered - delivering a successful and memorable performance. This experience taught her the importance of collaboration and the need to work well with others, regardless of differing perspectives. Loloma hopes to continue improving her ability to work with diverse groups and individuals over time. Her key advice for future delegates is to practice patience and always remember the significance of the names they carry with them. Representing American Samoa is an honor, and giving a great show is a tribute to those they represent.

When asked what her favorite memory has been thus far she found it challenging to pinpoint a single favorite memory. “The entire journey has been a truly amazing experience, filled with countless memorable moments.

Theater: “Solo o le Va”



Terisa Siagatonu

“

I hope more Samoan poets and writers archive, share, and publish their work. I think it's vital that we preserve the literary work of our people so that we have something substantial that our future generations can inherit, learn from, and be inspired by.

”

Terisa Siagatonu is an award-winning poet, teaching artist, mental health educator, and community leader from the Bay Area with deep roots in American Samoa. Her father, Uiese Siagatonu is from A’asu, while her mother, Silaulau Leatutufu Siagatonu, comes from Tula. Driven by her passion for poetry and a desire to represent her ancestral home, Terisa joined the American Samoa delegation for the FestPAC. Her work, blending personal, cultural, and political themes, has taken her to prestigious venues such as the White House, the UN Conference on Climate Change, and the SF Women’s March. One of Terisa’s most cherished memories from FestPAC 2024 is walking out with the American Samoa delegation during the opening ceremony, an experience she describes as unforgettable. When asked what advice she has for the next delegate in her category at FestPAC 2028, Terisa advised staying present, soaking in the experience, and taking pride in representing American Samoa. She also encouraged openness to learning about other Pasifika cultures - who are our extended *aiga* (family).

Offstage, Terisa creates and facilitates workshops, leads artistic and professional development trainings, provides mental health clinical support, and delivers keynote speeches across the country on issues that inform her 10+ years of community work involving: youth advocacy, educational attainment, Pacific Islander/Indigenous rights, climate change, LGBTQQIA rights, gender-based violence, and others. She holds a Bachelors in Community Studies & minor in Education from the University of California Santa Cruz and a Masters in Marriage/Family Therapy from the University of Southern California, aiming to use her background as a mental health clinician and poet to bridge the gaps in our quest for collective healing and liberation.

Theater: “Solo o le Va”

“

As Pacific Islanders, we are well versed in the importance of community and the benefits of being village raised. By pulling from the community as a whole, we can ensure that diverse approaches lead to innovative solutions. Theater is one platform we can use to address challenging societal issues while fostering community engagement through a healthy & creative outlet.

”



Lindsey Laupola

Lindsey Laupola is from the villages of Fagamalo, Faga’itua, Afonotele & Pago Pago, American Samoa. She is the daughter of Loa Tuimavave T. Laupola & Lana Aga. She is currently serving as a Public Education Research & Development Specialist in the American Samoa Office of the Governor. Her focus is centered on American Samoa’s Political Status, Constitutional Review, & Federal Relations. She has a Bachelor’s in Criminal Justice Administration and is currently pursuing a Master’s in Legal Studies.

In 2023 she became a part of the inaugural cohort for the Resilient Pacific Islands Leaders Fellowship under the East West Center. Her passions include regional collaboration which recognizes that true progress is not measured in isolation but in the unity of our Pacific families standing side by side for a brighter more inclusive future.

Lindsey’s participation in the Theater category at FestPAC has allowed her to explore the intersection of the arts and public service. It reinforced her belief that the arts can be a powerful tool for communication and advocacy, complementing her work in public education and political engagement. This experience highlighted the value of interdisciplinary approaches to problem solving and community building. “As Pacific Islanders, we are well versed in the importance of community and the benefits of being village raised. By pulling from the community as a whole, we can ensure that diverse approaches lead to innovative solutions. Theater is one platform we can use to address challenging societal issues while fostering community engagement through a healthy & creative outlet.”

Her favorite memory of FestPAC was the opening ceremony. She felt extremely honored to share space with so many of our brothers and sisters from across the region. The solidarity and support shown that night will remain with her for a lifetime and she hopes that we can continue this spirit of collaboration well beyond the dates of this festival.

Theater: "Solo o le Va"





YOUNG PACIFIC LEADERS



The Young Pacific Leaders (YPL) is a youth leadership development program organized by the U.S. Department of State. YPL started in 2013 and focuses on four themes that Pacific youth identified as their top priorities: education, environment and resource management, civic leadership, and economic and social development. The program strengthens linkages between emerging leaders across the Pacific and the United States. These relationships between the younger generation of government, civic and business leaders help to harness the extraordinary potential of youth in the region to address critical challenges and expand opportunities.

Young Pacific Leaders



“

As a young Samoan woman researching health disparities in the Pacific, I wanted to attend FestPAC to learn and share cultural frameworks that can improve health outcomes for our Pasefika people, but especially our Samoan community.

”

Tulimalefo'i Mauga Vaofanua

Tulimalefo'i Mauga Vaofanua, hailing from the villages of Aasu, Aoloau, Faleniu, Sailele, Aoa, Poloa, Fagamalo, and Pavaiai, is one of the two young leaders representing American Samoa at the FestPAC. As the daughter of Setalilemalelegaolemalietao Vaina Vaofanua and Maria Claudia Mauga Vaofanua, Tulimalefoi brings a strong sense of cultural heritage and a passion for health disparities research within the Pacific region to her role at the festival. Tulimalefoi's motivation for participating in FestPAC stems from her desire to engage with the rich cultural traditions and people of the Pacific. She noted that much of the available research is Eurocentric and hoped to hold discussions on traditional practices to create better health outcomes for Pacific communities, especially the Samoan community.

Before arriving at FestPAC, Tulimalefoi set a goal to forge partnerships and gain a more holistic perspective on indigenous health in the Pacific. She sought to observe how art, dance, and music are used to convey messages on issues facing the Pacific. Through her involvement in the YPL activities, she has successfully connected with youth ambassadors, institutional leaders, and traditional practitioners from across the Pacific. These interactions have empowered her to share her experiences and perspectives as a Samoan woman in STEM.

When asked what advise she had for the next delegate to FestPAC 2028 she stated, "Use every opportunity as a learning experience! I've learned so much from conversations at the breakfast table and on the bus rides to and from the workshop and performance locations. It is a joy if you just learn to enjoy as you go!

Young Pacific Leaders

“

When addressing issues such as climate change, food sovereignty, and preservation of culture and identity, it is so critical that indigenous knowledge from all nations of the Pacific are considered and utilized.

”



Kacey N. Iloilo

Kacey N. Iloilo, proudly representing the village of Faga’alu, is one of the two young leaders from American Samoa participating in the YPL Program at the FestPAC. During her time at FestPAC, Kacey learned valuable lessons from her interactions and relationships with members of other Pacific Island cultures. She discovered that despite the unique customs, arts, and traditions of each culture, there is a profound commonality in their experiences as indigenous people. They have faced similar challenges and share a collective determination to thrive.

Kacey emphasized the importance of considering and utilizing indigenous knowledge from all Pacific nations when addressing critical issues such as climate change, food sovereignty, and the preservation of culture and identity. One of Kacey’s favorite memories from FestPAC 2024 was the incorporation of music through choir performances. She described how music connects people in a way that only love can, and witnessing the performances of different delegations’ choirs, especially American Samoa’s, filled her with an overwhelming sense of pride in her culture and heritage. Another highlight was meeting Mufi Hanneman, an instrumental political leader in Hawaii, who emphasized the value of Pacific Islander identity and empowered the young leaders to use their voices even in uncomfortable situations.

Kacey’s advice for the next delegate to FestPAC in 2028 is to seek, create, and take advantage of opportunities for growth, both professionally and personally. She encourages young Pacific leaders from American Samoa to go the extra mile, as it makes a significant difference regardless of the type of work they do. Leadership, she believes, is not about titles but about making an impact from any position. Reflecting on her experience, Kacey shared that the YPL Conference held in conjunction with FestPAC taught her the power of working together.

Young Pacific Leaders



AMERIKA SAMOA



2024 FESTIVAL OF PACIFIC ARTS & CULTURE - HAWAII



HO'OU LU LĀHUI Regenerating Oceania

13th Festival of Pacific Arts & Culture • Hawai'i 2024