Hawaiian Hula Instruments

'Ili 'Ili - Stone Castanets

'Ili 'Ili are small, waterworn lava stones which are held in the hands and clicked together. They can be held between the fingers or in the palm of the hand. Selection of the stones is very important. The sound the stones create differs depending on the density of the lava, the minerals in the lava, the amount of air in the lava, and the thickness of the stone itself. Thinner stones generally create a more glassy type of sound while thicker stones will have a more clunky or thudding sound.

These stones are used to accompany hula, mele (chants) and other musical instruments. It is believed that traditionally, thin, dense stones were preferred whereas thicker, coarser stones were used in later times. The Bishop Museum also has stones that have been hand formed from other materials such as hematite. Rough stone can be either found in nature or purchased at gem and mineral shops and then formed into 'ili 'ili.
Waterworn stones, when dry, have a dull gray appearance. Some ‘ili ‘ili players enhanced the beauty of their stones by rubbing them with kukui oil to create a sheen. Over time, the stones become smoother and shiny from the oils in the players hands and the rubbing action when clicking the stones together. Keola Beamer, uses these stones in some of his performances both as accompaniment to his guitar playing and as a tool to pluck the strings of the guitar. The results are quite beautiful and unexpected.

Stones have always been powerful healing tools and the ‘ili ‘ili are no exception. Through the resonant sound, the properties of the stone, and the intent of the player, these stones can be used in a variety of methods for healing purposes. Multiple pairs of ‘ili ‘ili can be used simultaneously to create complex rhythms. ‘Ili ‘ili can be heard on a number of recordings including:

- "Maika‘i Kaua‘i" by Tom Hiona
- Wooden Boat by Keola Beamer
- "Pu‘uonioni" by Pele Puku‘i Suganuma

‘Ili ‘ili can be found on some beaches and in streambeds. The lava consistency depends on the island location and time of the lava flow. Some very nice ‘ili ‘ili can even be found in rivers, on beaches, and in streams on the mainland. If you choose to find your ‘ili ‘ili, be sure to ask for guidance in their choosing and only accept the gift if the signs are right. In pairing ‘ili ‘ili, try them out first. Hold them in your hands and see if they feel right together. ‘Ili ‘ili will let you know when you’ve found the right pairing.

**MORE COOL HAWAIIAN MUSIC MAKERS FOR CHANTING:**

- ‘Uli‘uli
- Pu‘ili
- Ipu hula

Feather gourd rattles Split bamboo rattle Gourd drum