



Rell Sunn, photo by Jeff Divine

*"Every two years, the cancer would come back with a vengeance... and you realize that the life that was once yours, the life you lived, is no longer yours. It belongs to the pain in your back, or your chest or in your throat or in your lung or the medications that make you feel ill. It's not yours anymore, and you just go NO. But then, when you can get up in the morning and have enough energy to get in the water and catch a wave you own your life again. It's so wonderful."*

Rell Sunn, 1997

## **Heart of The Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai**

A Documentary by Lisa Denker and Charlotte Lagarde

### **Audience Award**

PBS Independent Lens, 2003

### **Audience Award for Best Documentary**

San Francisco International Film Festival, 2003

### **Special Jury Prize /Aloha Spirit Award**

Hawai'i International Film Festival, 2002

### **Best Documentary Award**

Ashland Independent Film Festival, 2003

### **Audience Award for Best Documentary**

Newport Beach Film Festival, 2003

# *Heart of The Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai*

## Synopsis

***Heart of the Sea*** is an hour-long documentary about Hawaiian legend Rell “Kapolioka'ehukai” Sunn who died in January 1998 of breast cancer at the age of 47. Known worldwide as a pioneer of women’s professional surfing, in the Islands Rell Sunn achieved the stature of an icon — not only for her physical power, grace and luminous beauty, but for her leadership in a community that loved her as much as she loved it. Named one of Hawai’i’s most influential women of the 20th century by ABC television, Sunn - whose Hawaiian name means ***Heart of the Sea***- was eulogized in the New York Times for having “captured the heart of Hawai’i during a 14-year battle with cancer.”



The story is set primarily in Makaha, a beach town on the leeward coast of Oahu that is troubled by crime, drug abuse, high teen pregnancy and school drop-out rates -- but Rell thought of it as "paradise on earth", surfing by the age of 4 and becoming a peerless spearfisher. Throughout her life, Rell led by doing. A woman who carved the way for women’s professional surfing, in a sport dominated by men, Rell also lead her community as an organizer and activist for at-risk youth and for the preservation of the natural beauty and cultural traditions of her native Hawai’i. At the age of 32 Rell was diagnosed with breast cancer. With no family history of the disease, Rell discovered that Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women have the highest incidence of breast cancer of all women in the United States and detection and prevention programs were largely under funded. She became an activist for breast cancer awareness and for the protection of the environment from the toxins she believed caused her disease.

***Heart of the Sea*** traces Rell's personal and public life, interweaving her last interview in 1997 -- two months before her death -- with archival footage and news, home videos, and interviews with her daughter, friends, fellow surfers, her doctors, and others in the community whose lives were changed by the way Rell chose to live hers. Rell, the storyteller, is never far from the dramatic center, as she recounts adventures and adversity with the openness and warmth that was her trademark.

The film’s lyrical style combines traditional Hawaiian music and ambient sounds of nature with captivating underwater scenes shot by award-winning cinematographer Don King. The mix of DVCAM, used for interviews and hospital settings, and 16-mm film, for the ocean and landscape footage, brings the audience closer to the depth and beauty of Rell's world. The result is a view of the islands at once vibrant, authentic, inspiring, and alive.

Through Rell’s feats, her tales, grace, beauty, and her canny use of the media, she left behind a larger-than-life story that was perhaps her greatest gift to the community that loved her, a story that delves deep into the heart of Hawai’i.

***Heart of the Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai***

Contact: Charlotte Lagarde, 182 Grand View Ave. San Francisco, CA 94114 -Tel: (415) 826-8820 – [www.swellcinema.com](http://www.swellcinema.com)

# *Heart of The Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai*

## Production Team

### **Charlotte Lagarde, Producer, Director**

Charlotte Lagarde's documentary *Heart of the Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai* (2002) about Hawaiian legend Rell Sunn was broadcast internationally. In the US, it won PBS Independent Lens Audience Award 2003, the Audience Award at both the San Francisco International Film Festival and the Newport Beach Film Festival and Best Documentary Award at the Ashland Independent Film Festival.

Lagarde's productions *Voting in America* (2004), *Every Child Should Have a Chance* (2001), *Tribal Sovereignty: Unplugged* (1998) and *Juvenile Justice: Unplugged* (1997), are distributed in public schools throughout the United States, and the latter was screened at the White House for public policy makers. Lagarde's documentaries *Swell* (1996), about four generations of female surfers in Santa Cruz, California (Gold Apple from the National Educational Media Network) and *Zeuf* (1994), a documentary about a woman surfer's struggle with breast cancer (Directors' Choice award at the Black Maria Film and Video Festival) were broadcast on PBS stations and the Sundance Channel and are currently in distribution on home video.

Lagarde holds an MA in documentary filmmaking from Stanford University, and a BA in Political Science. She founded Swell Cinema in 1996 and teaches media study in high school. Lagarde is the executive producer of *Reporter Zero*, directed by Carrie Lozano (*The Weather Underground*), which opened at the 2006 Berlin International Film Festival.



### **Lisa Denker, Director, Cinematographer**

Lisa Denker started working in film after attending the Art Center School of Design film program. She was the Art Director for the independent feature: *Gas, Food and Lodging* (Dir. Alison Anders); the Grammy Award Ain't It Heavy rock video for Melissa Etheridge, and was the Set Decorator for the feature film *Citizen Ruth* (Dir. Alexander Payne). She then went on to union work on films such as Warner Brothers *Batman Returns* (Dir. Tim Burton).

Close to a decade later, Lisa wanted to get back to creating her own films. Lisa applied her talents to projects: *Swell* (1996), along with others through to *Every Child...* (2001), conceptualizing, story boarding, cinematography, building dramatic moments and finding the narrative spine. Directing has always been Lisa's goal. "It was reading about Rell Sunn that drew me into imagining an intimate film about her." As Lisa went deeper into seeing Rell's many layers: her generous personality, her passion and zest for living, complicated as it was with the built-in conflict of living with cancer, made it clear to her that Rell's story could be a dramatic film. "I believed the viewer must go into Rell's world, experience it intimately, discovering significant emotional moments, thus allowing them to feel empathy for her". This film portrait, *Heart of the Sea, Kapolioka'ehukai* is a clear affirmation of Lisa Denker's talent as a director.



### **Janet Cole, Executive Producer**

Veteran producer Janet Cole's executive producing credits include the Oscar-nominated *Promises, Regret to Inform*, and the upcoming *Freedom Machines*. She received Academy Award and Emmy nominations as producer of *Regret to Inform*, as well as a George Foster Peabody Award. She also produced the Emmy-nominated *Paragraph 175* for HBO and Channel Four and *Absolutely Positive* with director, Peter Adair. Cole has specialized in the strategic distribution and production of social issue films for over 20 years and is a frequent consultant and advisor to filmmakers, media arts groups, and foundations.

### ***Heart of the Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai***

Contact: Charlotte Lagarde, 182 Grand View Ave. San Francisco, CA 94114 -Tel: (415) 826-8820 – [www.swellcinema.com](http://www.swellcinema.com)

**Vivien Hillgrove, Editor**

Vivien Hillgrove is a highly acclaimed editor whose picture editing credits include *Henry and June* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Phil Kaufman, Academy Award documentary *Broken Rainbow* by Victoria Mudd and *The Devil Never Sleeps* by Lourdes Portillo. Her sound editing credits include *Blue Velvet* by David Lynch, and *Amadeus* by Milos Forman.

**Don King, Underwater Cinematographer**

Award-winning cinematographer Don King is known internationally for his groundbreaking surf and ocean photography. His unique style provides stunning visualizations for many of Rell's stories, bringing the audience closer to her world. His credits include the IMAX films *The Living Sea* and *Extreme* and the feature films *City of Angels* and *Cast Away*.

***Heart of the Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai***

Contact: Charlotte Lagarde, 182 Grand View Ave. San Francisco, CA 94114 -Tel: (415) 826-8820 – [www.swellcinema.com](http://www.swellcinema.com)

# *Heart of The Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai*

## Music

The music is a mixture of pre-recorded songs by Hawai'i's most renowned musicians such as Israel Kamakawiwo'ole, Sonny Chillingworth, Sol Hoopii and Ozzie Kotani and a chant and song especially written for Rell by Kumu Shawna Ke'alameleku'uleialoha Ngum. Living legend slack key guitar player, Led Ka'apana performs Rell's song improvising on traditional Hawaiian music for the score. The recordings were mixed and re-arranged by composer Miriam Cutler who also wrote the score for the film.

### **Miriam Cutler, Composer**

Miriam Cutler has been writing, producing, and performing music for over 20 years. Getting her start in bands including the popular Mystic Knights of the Oingo Boingo she developed her own recording studio and moved from live performance into composing full time. Pursuing her passion for documentaries, she has combined her love of music and film with meaningful and activist projects. These include the award winning *Licensed to Kill*, *Double Life of Ernesto Gomez Gomez*, *Hidden Neighborhoods of San Francisco - The Castro*, *Death a Love Story*, *Shattered Lullabies*, *Slender Existence* and *Scouts Honor*. Her scoring credits also include many features, short films, TV shows, and a circus.

### **Led Ka'apana, composer and musician**

Led Kaapana is known as one of Hawai'i's most beloved traditional musicians. He has been a professional musician for forty years with over 25 CDs released. A master of *ki ho'alu* (slack key guitar), Led is also accomplished on 'ukulele, autoharp, bass, steel guitar and other plucked string instruments. He is a fine, emotional singer in both baritone and *leo ki'eki'e* (falsetto). Led's improvisational skills make him a favorite of singers, especially *leo ki'eki'e* singers such as Auntie Genoa Keawe, Uncle Joe Keawe, The Ho'opi'i Brothers, David Chun and others. He has teamed up with other slack key guitarists, especially Cyril Pahinui, and with steel guitarist Bob Brozman. Under the auspices of the National Council for Traditional Arts, Led has toured nationally three times with a host of top country, blues and jazz guitarists., including dobro wizard Jerry "Flux" Douglas. In the last year, Led has opened for Bob Dylan, at the request of Dylan's band, and for bluegrass sensation Alison Krauss, with whom he's recorded.

### **Kumu Shawna Ngum**

Shawna Ke'alameleku'uleialoha Ngum is the founder and Kumu Hula (director) of Hula On Productions. She has danced and taught hula for over 26 years, and studied under the tutelage of Ellen Ku'uleialoha Castillo and Leina'ala Kalama Heine. Shawna has performed throughout the world in places such as Africa, Europe, Israel, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Japan, as well as being a premier dancer for the celebrated Brothers Cazimero for many years throughout Hawai'i. During her years as a dancer, Shawna won various soloist awards in prestigious competitions such as The Merrie Monarch Hula Festival and the Las Vegas Hula Competition.

### **Sound Edit & Mixing**

Lora Hirschberg has an extensive list of credits as sound editor and re-recording mixer in feature, IMAX and documentary films. Her feature film credits include *Panic Room*, *Quills*, *Pitch Black* and *Titanic*. She has worked on IMAX projects, including *Whales*, *To be an Astronaut* and *The Journey Inside*. Her documentary film credits include *Senorita Extraviada*, *First Person Plural*, and *The Celluloid Closet*. She currently is on staff at Skywalker Sound in Northern California.

### ***Heart of the Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai***

Contact: Charlotte Lagarde, 182 Grand View Ave. San Francisco, CA 94114 -Tel: (415) 826-8820 – [www.swellcinema.com](http://www.swellcinema.com)

# *Heart of The Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai*

## Interviewees

**Rell Sunn** – Pioneer woman surfer, legendary waterwoman, hula dancer, breast cancer activist, ambassador of Aloha, Queen of Makaha

**Keith Block, MD** – Medical Director, Block Medical Center Comprehensive Health Services in Evanston, IL.

**Jeannie Chesser** – Former professional surfer, friend of Rell's since the seventies.

**Jeff Divine** – Photo Editor of Surfer's Journal, has known Rell since the seventies.

**Sonja Evensen** – Former professional windsurfer and educator, has known Rell since the seventies.

**Luana Froiseth** – Outrigger coach and childhood friend of Rell's.

**Fred Hemmings** – Hawai'i State Senator, former world champion surfer, and former surf promoter, knew Rell in the sixties as she embarked on her professional career.

**Brooke Holt-Froiseth** – Organizer of the Menehune contest, lives in Makaha.

**Malia Jones** – As a child, she idolized Rell and was one of the kids on the trip to Biarritz, France. Former professional surfer, former Menehune, and professional model.

**Vi Jones** – Surfer, mother of Malia Jones, knew Rell since the seventies.

**Dalani Kauihou** – Surfer, teaches traditional crafts and culture and lives in Makaha.

**Brian Keaulana** – World known waterman, lifeguard, lives in Makaha, knew Rell since he was a child.

**Momie Keaulana** – Rell's auntie, lives in Makaha.

**Jennifer Lee** – Surfer, former Menehune.

**Marilyn Link** – Former neighbor and friend of Rell.

**Ron Mizutani** – Television Sports Newscaster for KHON, Hawai'i.

**Mark Renneker, MD** - Patient Advocacy Specialist in San Francisco, California

**Jan Sunn-Carreira** – Rell's daughter

**Kathy Terada** – Surfer, nurse, hula dancer, lives in Makaha, friend of Rell's since the seventies

**Keoni Watson** – Former Menehune then professional surfer, grew up in Makaha under Rell's wing.

*Heart of the Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai*

Contact: Charlotte Lagarde, 182 Grand View Ave. San Francisco, CA 94114 -Tel: (415) 826-8820 – [www.swellcinema.com](http://www.swellcinema.com)

# *Heart of The Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai*

## Credits

DIRECTORS	Lisa Denker Charlotte Lagarde
PRODUCER	Charlotte Lagarde
EDITOR	Vivien Hillgrove
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	Janet Cole
PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY	Lisa Denker
UNDERWATER CINEMATOGRAPHY	Don King
SOUND RECORDISTS	Esther Figueroa Charlotte Lagarde
ORIGINAL SCORE	Miriam Cutler
ADDITIONAL MUSIC	Led Kaapana
ORIGINAL COMPOSITION	Shawna Ngum
SOUND EDIT & MIXING	Lora Hirschberg
ON LINE EDITOR	Heather Weaver

***Heart of the Sea*** is a production of Swell Cinema in association with Pacific Islanders in Communications (PIC), KHET & the Independent Television Service (ITVS), with funds provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Additional funds were provided by: the James and Abigail Campbell Foundation, the Gerbode Foundation, the Atherton Family Foundation, The Pohaku Fund, Mr. & Mrs. James W. Growney, Quiksilver, Inc., Watergirl Inc., Pacific Pioneer Fund, Kapiolani Health Foundation, Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, The Women's Fund of Hawai'i, the Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation, and many generous individuals.

***For more information, please contact:***

Charlotte Lagarde  
Swell Cinema  
182 Grand View Ave.  
San Francisco, CA 94114  
Tel: (415) 826-8820  
[swellcinema@yahoo.com](mailto:swellcinema@yahoo.com)  
[www.swellcinema.com](http://www.swellcinema.com)

***Heart of the Sea: Kapolioka'ehukai***

Contact: Charlotte Lagarde, 182 Grand View Ave. San Francisco, CA 94114 -Tel: (415) 826-8820 – [www.swellcinema.com](http://www.swellcinema.com)