UH West Oʻahu documentary about the songs of Japanese immigrant plantation workers to air on PBS Hawaii Sept. 17

_Canefield Songs: Holehole Bushi_ narrated by Jake Shimabukuro

KAPOLEI --- This September, PBS Hawaii will air _Canefield Songs: Holehole Bushi_, a compelling documentary about the songs of Japanese immigrant workers sung while laboring in Hawaiʻi’s sugar plantations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Called _holehole_ (Hawaiian for dried cane leaves) _bushi_ (Japanese for melody or tune), the songs are an intimate record of the workers’ joys, sorrows, and challenges, and provide a fascinating window into early plantation life.

_Canefield Songs: Holehole Bushi_ was co-produced by the University of Hawaiʻi – West Oʻahu Center for Labor Education and Research and PBS Hawaii. The production team included Executive Producer and Writer, Chris Conybeare; Producer/Director, Joy Chong-Stannard; and Franklin Odo, former UHWO Distinguished Visiting Scholar, Founding Director of the Smithsonian Institution’s Asian Pacific American Program, and former Acting Chief of the Asian Division at the Library of Congress. _Canefield Songs: Holehole Bushi_ brings together archival interviews and music in a stunning new 30-minute video partly based on Odo’s book _Voices from the Canefields_, published by Oxford University Press. Pioneers and former plantation workers Katsue Asakura of Wainaku (Hawaiʻi County), and Haru Ueno, Tsuyoshi Endo, Kiku Yoshida, and Yasu Sato of Waipahu tell their stories and share songs. Many of these songs, composed and sung by women, provide a direct connection to Hawaiʻi’s plantation past as experienced by female Japanese immigrant plantation workers.

“_Holehole bushi_ are the Japanese immigrant equivalent of ‘the blues,’” said Executive Producer Chris Conybeare. “The songs themselves inform us about all aspects of immigrant life. A surprising number chronicle the seamy side of existence on Hawaiʻi’s plantations, including workplace brutality, sexual tensions, drinking, and gambling.”

In the 1960s, Honolulu music teacher Harry Urata recorded over 100 _holehole bushi_, sung by the women and men who created them 60 years before. His own experiences in concentration camps during World War II taught him the value of preserving immigrant culture and much of _Canefield Songs: Holehole Bushi_ is told through Urata, who was instrumental in the preservation of this important part of plantation history.
The documentary includes interviews and performances by students who learned Hawai‘i plantation history from their grandparents, featuring music teacher Harry Urata, singer Allison Arakawa, and sisters Cara and Lacy Tsutsuse.

“Revival of the songs and stories depends on new generations learning and passing on the knowledge,” says Conybeare.

The themes and haunting sadness expressed in holehole bushi have led to their renewed popularity. The songs can be heard in tea houses and night clubs in Japan and were featured at the Tokyo Summer Festival in 2009.

Hosted and narrated by ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro, Canefield Songs: Holehole Bushi will air on PBS Hawaii on Sept. 17 at 9 p.m. The documentary also includes original music by UH West O'ahu student, Brandin Soquena, and UHWO Assistant Professor of Music, Jon Magnussen.

The UH West O'ahu Center for Labor Education and Research will host a sneak preview of Canefield Songs: Holehole Bushi on Tuesday, Sept. 15 from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the UH West O'ahu Library ‘Ulu‘ulu Archive Exhibition Space. For more information, contact the UH West O'ahu Center for Labor Education and Research at (808) 689-2760.

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Canefield Songs: Holehole Bushi is part of The Canefields Songs Project that seeks to preserve and protect the legacy of holehole bushi as part of Hawai‘i’s plantation history. The Canefield Songs Project includes Voices from the Canefields, a book about holehole bushi by Franklin Odo; a sugar plantation website designed by UH West O‘ahu Creative Media students, and the preservation and digitization of historic video interviews with original plantation workers. The Canefield Songs Project is generously supported by The Smithsonian Institution, Arthur A. Rutledge Endowment for Labor Studies, Bank of Hawaii Foundation, Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai‘i, and Farmers Insurance Hawaii. A portion of the archival footage was supported by a grant from the Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities.
The **University of Hawai‘i - West O‘ahu Center for Labor Education and Research** (CLEAR) provides labor education, research and labor-related programs to workers, their organizations and the general public through classroom instruction, seminars, workshops, publications and more. *Canefield Songs: HoleHole Bushi* is a continuation of the Rise & Roses television series pioneered by CLEAR. Located in the UH West O‘ahu Library, CLEAR maintains a research collection and archive of labor history and law. For more information, visit the [CLEAR website](http://clear.uhwest.hawaii.edu) or call (808) 689-2760.