

LITTLE BROWN GAL

by Don McDiarmid & Lee Wood 1935

One of the four songs commonly used by matson ships and waikiki hotels to teach the hula to tourists.

The commercialization of Hawaiian culture began most likely with American interest in the Hawaiian Islands engendered by the Spanish-American War and the imperialistic phase of the country, so evident at the turn of the century. By 1915, when a group of Hawaiian musicians, singers, and dancers — featuring George E. K. Awai's Royal Hawaiian Quartet — were headline acts at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, a musical craze was born that was to sweep the United States and, later, Western Europe as well. The early Hawaiian musicians — Awai, Frank Ferara, Pali Lua and the Bird of Paradise Trio, and Sol Hoopii, who played background music for many Paramount movies — inspired mainland music composers, the New York Tin Pan Alley people, to begin writing this sort of material for mass consumption. The results was a series of "phony" Hawaiian songs, many with nonsense lyrics like those of the Al Jolson hit, "Yaaka Hula Hickey Dula," or ones demeaning to the Hawaiian, such as Harry Owens' "Princess Poo-Poo-ly Has Plenty Papaya." Hawaiian musicians themselves, who came to the mainland to tour in vaudeville and theater, gradually incorporated these much-requested songs into their repertoires — as well as rearranging Hawaiian classics to the newly popular jazz beat that was sweeping America. As the first tourist hotels opened on Waikiki, this commercial "Hawaiian" music was the natural sound for the stage shows and dance bands that sprang up with the tourist industry. Ragtime, jazz, blues, foxtrot — all were used in creating songs with Hawaiian themes, but with English lyrics. These hapa haole songs, played live in Waikiki and across America by touring bands, were also broadcast throughout the world on the famous radio program, "Hawaii Calls," as well as being featured in films such as Bing Crosby's 1937 Waikiki Wedding, from which the hapa haole song "Sweet Lailani" won the Oscar for best song. This music, much of it commercially produced by non-Hawaiians, came to be defined as authentic Hawaiian music and was mistakenly assumed to represent and reflect the cultural identity of the people. This was true, sadly, even among Hawaiians themselves, many of whom took on the "false culture" and the impact of its negative images of Hawaiians as a part of their heritage. From 1930 and on into the 1960s this "Hawaiian sound," much of it created in Tin Pan Alley, flourished commercially both on the American mainland especially in the 1930s and 1940s) and in the lounges and supper clubs of Waikiki.

by George H. Lewis Winter
University of the Pacific 1988

Introduction

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Bb **F7** **Bb**
To the Isles across the blue Pacific,
Bb **F7** **Bb**
I've a constant longing to return
Cm **G7** **Cm**
There's a reason that is quite specific
C7 **F7**
Someone for whom I yearn

(Bb) **F7**
It's not the islands fair that are calling to me
Bb
It's not the balmy air nor the tropical sea
G7 **C7**
It's just a little brown gal in a little grass skirt
F7 **Bb**
In a little grass shack in Hawaii

(Bb) **F7**
It isn't waikiki nor Kamehameha's folly
Bb
Not the beachboys free with their ho'omalimali
G7 **C7**
It's just a little brown gal in a little grass skirt
F7 **Bb**
In a little grass shack in Hawaii

C
H
O
R
U
S
Dm **A7**
Through that island wonderland
Dm **A7**
she's broken all the kane's hearts
Dm **A7**
It's not hard to understand
Dm **G7** **Cm** **F7**
For that wahine, is a gal apart

(Bb) **F7**
I'll be leaving soon, but the thrill I'll enjoy
Bb
Is not the island moon, nor the fish and the poi
G7 **C7**
It's just a little brown gal in a little grass skirt
F7 **Bb**
In a little grass shack in Hawaii

