



Don Ho
1930 - 2007

Five nights a week, Don Ho sits center stage behind his Hammond Organ, sings some of his favorite songs and "talk story" with his audience. He teaches the mainlanders how to make an "Aloha" sign. Holding up his right hand with thumb and pinky finger extended, he says, "This means Family in Hawaii," and jokes, "or at least it did when I was growing up. Nowadays to the kids, it just means hang loose."

What he does is easy to describe: He lounges at the organ, caressing the keys. He sings a song in a sleepy, intimate voice. He gets the audience singing and clapping and pretty soon he gets individual members of the audience on stage to be kissed and hugged and teased. But what the magic is, is harder to figure.

Don was born in the little Honolulu neighborhood of Kakaako of Hawaiian, Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch, German parentage but soon moved to Kaneohe. Don's climb to today's heady heights began in a cocktail lounge in the windward Oahu town of Kaneohe called Honey's, named after his mother. After returning from the Air Force, Don took over Honey's in Kaneohe, Hawaii. "When I took it over, the place was empty," says Ho. It was packed everyday during the war years. My dad said 'Son, why don't you go make music.' Ho gathered a couple of friends who knew how to play musical instruments and started a band. "I was terrible," says Ho. "So, I just played very softly." Needless to say, business boomed.

Playing and learning from the talented musicians he hired for shows, Ho created his own musical image. In 1962, Ho began playing at Duke's in Waikiki. "That's when things started happening for us with records, TV shows and everything," says Ho. These were the days of Don's greatest development as an entertainer and a star. Backing him were the sensational five Aliis, playing piano, drums, two guitars, xylophone and doubling on half a dozen other instruments. Don presided at the organ, a glass of scotch in his hand, a cigarette burning in the ashtray. (Not anymore. He quit drinking and smoking fifteen years ago) The music was outstanding; the humor was fast and snappy. Tourists came, but so did locals and, after a while, visiting Hollywood stars--any of whom might take to the stage. Raising his glass in salute, Don would urge the audience to "suck'em up," and they did.

Those rowdy, rollicking years brought stardom to Don and made Duke's Hawaii's most popular nightclub. Don, the Aliis, Duke Kahanamoku, Kimo McVay, young singers like Robin Wilson, Angel Pablo, Sam Kapu and everybody else on stage had a ball every night. The audience felt it and shared it and kept coming back for more. During his years at Duke's, Don literally erupted on the national show biz scene, first and most suddenly in a two-week engagement at Hollywood's ultra-posh Cocoanut Grove in 1966. His opening night was a triumph, breaking all previous attendance records, and he went on to play to turn-away crowds nightly.

With such a "debut," other star turns naturally followed: return engagements at the Grove, feature spots at the Sands in Las Vegas, Hara's at Lake Tahoe, the Palmer House in Chicago, the Americana Hotel's Royal Box in New York, TV guest appearances with Johnny Carson, Joey Bishop and Art Linkletter, and his own hour-long color TV special--not to mention a clutch of best-selling LP record albums for Reprise. From his home based in Hawaii, Don launched out to discover old and new fans all over the country.

Tiny Bubbles

C G
Tiny bubbles, in the wine

C
Make me happy, Make me feel fine

C7 F
Tiny bubbles make me warm all over

C G
With the feeling that I'm gonna love you

C C7
'Til the end of time

F
So here's to the golden moon

C
And here's to the silver sea

D7 G
And mostly here's a toast to you and me

C G
Tiny bubbles, in the wine

C
Make me happy, Make me feel fine

F
Tiny bubbles make me warm all over

C G
With the feeling that I'm gonna love you

C
'Til the end of time

C G
With the feeling that I'm gonna love you

C
'Til the end of time