

JOHN PIILANI WATKINS

Fatherless at the age of seven, he began his musical career at this early age by singing and dancing by ear. At the age of eight, he was tutored by Momi Jones in playing the piano. He attended Kaloaloa School, then Aiea Intermediate and Wallace Rider Farrington High School. Mr. Watkins appeared many times with churches, March of Dimes, clubs, etc.

In 1947, he graduated from Farrington High School and left for Hana, Maui for a short visit, acquired a job as a clerk with Hotel Hana. It was during this time he really started his career.

At the age of 17, he composed his first song, "Hana Paradise", sometimes known as "Heavenly Hana", composed for the unique beauty of Hana itself. His second song "Hana No Ka Oi" which was made for the people of Hana rocketed to top sales with the 49th State Recording Company.

Because Mr. Watkins did not have a Hawaiian name, the recording company dubbed him "Piilani". All the Hawaiian lyrics of many of his songs were composed by his Mother, Mrs. Abby Watkins, now deceased. The music was composed by John Piilani Watkins. Meka Nani Ao Kaupo, made for the people of Kaupo followed and then many others. In 1953, Mr. Watkins returned to Honolulu, his birthplace, and composed more songs like "Kaloaloa, Ipu Kukui Ao Mao Mao, Pearl Harbor, etc.

In 1953, he was inducted into the U.S. ARmy serving with the 25th Division, 14th Regiment in Korea as a rifleman, then transferred to Intelligence section as a stenographer. Mr. Watkins did not entertain at all in the service.

After completing his tour of duty in 1953, Mr. Watkins worked with the Kapalulu Tavern as a choreographer and head musician. During this time, he scored the top hit in Hawaii with the song, "Manu O-O. More compositions like "Mahalo E Hilo Hanakahi", other songs like Kukuna O Kala, and Kananaka, and Pua Carnation were translated on recordings, thus, setting a new era in Hawaiian music.

Going back to the age of 10, Mr. Watkins started teaching hula with the help of his grandmother who was a school teacher on the island of Hawaii by the name of "Lokalia Kaaumoana". Since then, Mr. Watkins has diligently continued the art of teaching and singing the songs of Hawaii. In 1957, Mr. Watkins branched out to teaching of Hula, Tahitian, Maori, and Samoan dancing. It is in this field that he mastered the art.

In the summer of 1955, Mr. Watkins took 48 dancers from Hawaii and went to New York to work with the famed June Taylor and Guy Lombardo for the produciton "Paradise Island". The group has gained nation-wide acclaim for its nightly performance to ten thousand mainlanders of almost every state. Newspapers raved about his dancers:

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE: "They dance like spirits
within..."

JUNE TAYLOR: "One of the most talented and well behaved
groups I have ever worked with."

GUY LOMBARDO: "The greatest"

The Honolulu Star-Bulletin carried pictures and stories about the group to all of Hawaii also.

The very talented Piilani choreographs, designs authentic costumes, sings, Emcees, plays ukulele, piano, base and guitar. He has trained many dancers such as "Taofi" who is one the finest fire knife dancers who is currently performing on the mainland.

His unending search into the arts of Polynesia has never ceased to be. His show has appeared many times on the local TV stations in Honolulu and Maui. Military shows has been one of his regulars as well as many hospitals and institutions. Whenever he had a call, he was always there, including church functions, luaus and the like. Piilani has toured Japan, Okinawa, Taiwan as well as doing a show in Hollywood with Dinah Shore.

At the age of 40, he has dedicated his life to the earnest teachings of Polynesia for all who are interested whether it be male or female from three year and older.

From 1971 John Piilani Watkins was the M.C and star performer for Studio Four Productions and Germaine's Enterprises. In this position, he was the the "Man who means Aloha". Piilani entertained thousands of people from all over the world -- and was genuinely loved by all who saw him.

In addition John held a full time day position and twice awarded the honor of "Employee of the Year". Further proof of this remarkable man's great heart, was the fact that with all his gifted talents, his responsibilities, his performances, etc., he still found time to help many families, and homeless children. He supported, educated, housed, fed many in need. And, whatever the need may have been, John always came through. He did this quietly, with humility and a loving heart, never asking for anything in return.

Piilani will be missed by many, but always remembered as our "Beloved Man Who Means Aloha".