



Photo courtesy of Don Ho

Above: Don Ho is one of the most recognized Hawaiian musicians due to his well known melodies and many appearances on television and in films.

Right: "Tokyo Joe", one of several local musicians who regularly join the show, brings a little country flavor to the entertainment.

Below: Don Ho brings audience members of all ages to the stage to show off their singing ability or hula talent.



JO2 Jim Williams photo



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# Don Ho

## A Hawaiian Legend

**JO2 Jim Williams**  
 Editor

On a darkened stage at the Waikiki Beachcomber Hotel, you'll find Don Ho still sitting behind his Hammond organ after over four decades of entertaining both tourists and locals alike.

As colorful lights slowly fade upon an audience ranging from the Ho fans of yesteryear, to honeymooners stepping out for the night, to locals looking for an evening of entertainment, the band begins the show with that familiar melody "Tiny Bubbles."

"Tiny Bubbles makes me happy," croons Don in his charismatic voice. "Tiny bubbles make me feel fine."

"Tiny Bubbles," he goes on, talking this time instead of singing. "We've played that song every night for 41 years." He pauses a moment in that masterful way he's famous for before adding, "I really, really hate that song."

The Don Ho Show flows into the evening with Don singing, joking and sharing a little touch of Hawai'i with an audience who is invited to join in the singing, clapping and possibly even getting up on stage to show off some of their talent.

"I think it's really important to get the audience involved with the show," Don says. "I've done it from day one." Then he adds with a chuckle, "Maybe that's because our audience was always better than me."

His humor and ability to entertain is just one of the many things that has made the name Don Ho one of the most recognizable symbols of Hawai'i.

Donald Tai Loy Ho was born in 1930 in the Honolulu neighborhood of Kakaako, but grew up in Kaneohe where his career really began in a small cocktail bar called "Honey's", named after his mother.

He recalls all the way back to World War II when his family regularly served servicemembers drinks in the bar.

"I've always appreciated the value of the military being here," says Don. "And I try and thank them for their efforts whenever I can."

His interest in the military led him to join the Air Force as soon as he could, where he became a fighter pilot just as the Korean War was coming to an end. He flew T-6s, T-28s and T-33s before eventually moving on to the Military Airlift Command. Stationed at Hickam Air Force Base, he ended up regularly flying C-97 cargo transports from Travis Air Force Base (in California) to Tokyo.

While serving in the military, he bought his first trademark electric Hammond organ and began to play. But five years after joining, he had to leave the Air Force to take over managing the family bar.

"I loved flying, but I also love my home and had to take care of things here. If they would have let me stay in Hawai'i my entire career, I would have probably stayed in the Air Force," he recalls.

When he took over the family business, the bar stayed pretty empty, but

by the Vietnam Conflict, it was soon packed everyday. Under his father's advice, he and a couple of friends started a band to entertain the clients.

Before long, he made a name for himself as a musician and began playing at Duke's in downtown Waikiki where he perfected his show. With a mix of good music, well-timed humor and introducing the best of Hawaiian upcoming entertainers, the tourists and local residents began pouring in.

This mix, which still offers an evening of enjoyable entertainment, caught the attention of record producer Sonny Burke who heard Don's show and after only two songs, decided to sign him and record his first album.

One of the songs recorded was his own rendition of "Born Free" which he says was very popular with many of the GIs on R'n'R from the war.

But it was another song, "Tiny Bubbles", that eventually made Don Ho a household name.

After that, things moved uphill for Don as he toured the mainland performing at places like the Coconut Grove in Hollywood, the Sands in Las Vegas, Harrah's at Lake Tahoe and the Americana Hotel's Royal Box in New York. He also made guest appearances on many television shows like Johnny Carson and Art Linkletter, as well as an hour-long television special. Of course, the younger generation may remember him best for his role on the Brady Bunch.

Soon, Don was discovering new fans as he shared a little of his home in Hawai'i with the rest of the world.

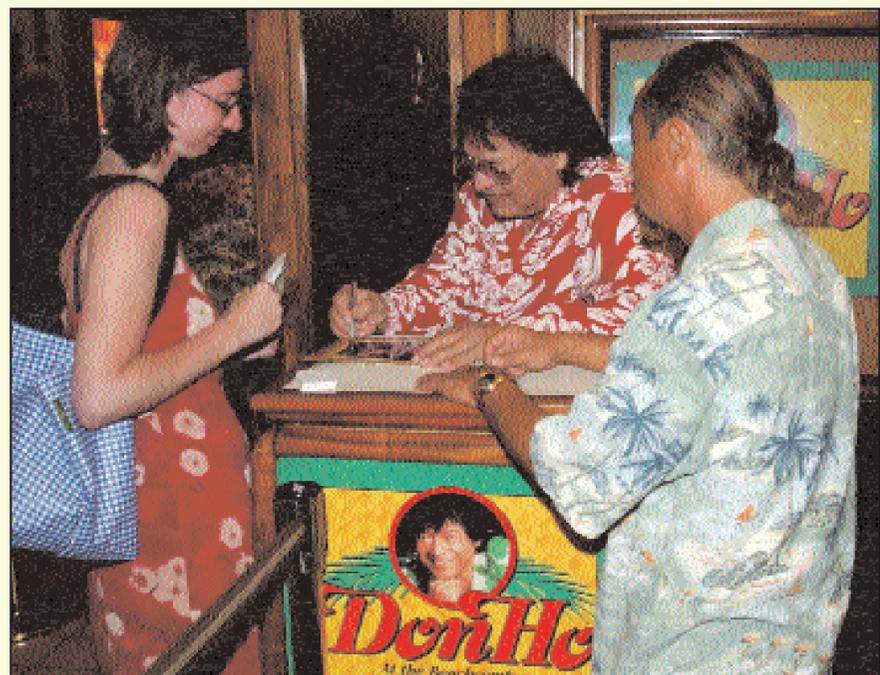
"I think it's always been important to share our culture - even if we just do it in a light-hearted way," he says. "I've always been proud of my heritage as most us are here and I take a lot of pride in conveying to the world what we are spirit-wise and culture wise."

Time has passed, but the Don Ho Show hasn't; it still offers a selection of his hits throughout the years, mixed with well-timed humor and a showcase of the island's upcoming musicians. Some nights you might even find his daughter Hoku performing by his side. Following in her father's footsteps, she has recently made a name for herself as a musician on the mainland with songs released on the "Legally Blond" and "Snow Day" movie soundtracks.

And as always, before and after the show, Don still always makes himself available to the audience for signing autographs and posing for photos.

"I do this for the people. People make me light up. Before the show I always enjoy interacting with everyone. It gives me a good feeling before I go on stage," explained Don.

Don Ho is a true Hawaiian entertainer showing the world what the islands have to offer, while providing an evening of fun entertainment. Of course, when asked what he loves best about doing the Don Ho show after all these years, he says it makes him feel healthy and alive to get out and do the show five nights a week. Then he adds with a smile, "Plus it sure beats working for a living."



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Don Ho always takes time to interact with his audience, sign autographs and pose for photos before and after the show.

### Free Don Ho Show Offer

To thank the military members serving in Hawai'i, Don Ho is offering an evening of free entertainment. The cover charge (about \$25) will be waived for anyone who brings a copy of this article from the Hawai'i Navy News to the show. You will still have to purchase beverages (and food).

Reservations are required and it is on a space available basis. The free admission offer is good for up to 10 persons in a party. This offer only lasts for one month (now until Feb. 18).

Regular package information:

**Cocktail Show Package** - Adult rate includes choice of one standard cocktail or mai tai or one non-alcoholic beverage for anyone under age. (6:30 p.m. seating)

**Dinner Show Package** - Complete dinner service includes fresh taro rolls, Hoku Hale green salad, New England cut prime rib and chicken filet, Don's favorite dessert choice. Coffee and tea Service, one standard cocktail or mai tai. (5:30 p.m. preferred seating)

**Show only** - (6:45 p.m. seating)

Shows run every Thursday through Thursday at the Waikiki Beachcomber Hotel, 2300 Kalakaua Avenue, Honolulu, HI 96815.

The local reservation number is 923-3981 or toll free at 1 (877) MYDONHO(693-6646). Reservations are taken daily from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.

When making your reservations, please let them know that it's in conjunction with this offer.