Don Ho, who died yesterday of heart failure at age 76, was the pop-culture face of Hawai‘i. Yet those who knew him best say he wouldn’t understand what all the fuss was about.

He became a national star in the 1960s, riding the crest of Hawai‘i’s tourism boom and a catchy hapa-haole tune about cheap champagne. “Tiny” ... something. Back then, he was the dark-eyed, laid-back, slightly boozy, vaguely hedonistic — and unmistakably sexy — embodiment of the nation’s newest state. He became a Waikiki headliner, appeared on national television, had a network series, toured the world.

And he endured. Forty years in Waikiki and he was still packing them in.

But he never took himself seriously.

“He didn’t come on with airs,” said longtime entertainment columnist Eddie Sherman. “No matter what he achieved, he was always just a local boy. He would be happiest sitting in a joint somewhere eating stew with his friends.”

Said Big Island rancher Larry Mehau, who grew up with Ho and was a lifelong friend: “I don’t think he ever realized how important he was to Hawai‘i ... how big he was. I mean, he knew he had talent. But the other stuff ... he didn’t care about all the other stuff.

“With Don, it’s ‘Ain’t no big thing.’ But he was big-time.”

Haumea Hebenstreit Ho, the entertainer’s longtime associate and wife since September, said she found him collapsed in the bathroom of their Waikiki home yesterday.

She said she called an ambulance, then tried to resuscitate Ho for 10 minutes. He was taken to The Queen’s Medical Center, where he died.

“He is the love of my life,” said Haumea Ho, who also was the producer of Ho’s Waikiki show. It was the only public statement made by Haumea Ho. The family has asked for privacy.

Friends and family had flocked to the hospital as news of Ho’s death spread. Ho’s daughter, Hoku, also an entertainer, was on a flight to Hawai‘i from California last night.

“(Ho) was my father, my friend, my buddy,” said Cha Thompson, a longtime entertainer in Waikiki. Thompson was the lone non-family member at Ho’s bedside at the hospital, and was asked by Haumea Ho to help plan a farewell. Details on that event will be released soon.

For more than a year, Ho had been grappling with a life-threatening heart condition, called cardiomyopathy, which slowed him down and led him to reduce his workload to three shows a week.

1930 - 2007

Legendary crooner brought Islands to the world

BY DAVE KOGA
Advertiser Staff Writer

The Honolulu Advertiser Sunday, April 15, 2007 | A21

ON THE WEB
Listen to Don Ho singing and talking about his life, post your condolences, watch three videos about him and view dozens of more photos at HONOLULUADVERTISER.COM

Timeline
Highlights of Don Ho’s personal and professional career | A24-25

Commentary
Wayne Hīnani remembesthe
King of Waikiki | A22

Talk story
Local entertainers, friends and fans tell their fondest stories about Don Ho | A23

Trivia
His discography, TV history and 10 things you might not know about him | A28

SEE DON HO, A24

# Hawai‘i’s icon
Legendary crooner brought Islands to the world

The Honolulu Advertiser Sunday, April 15, 2007 | A21

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HAWAI'I'S ICON

With Don's death, Waikiki has lost its magic, its prime attraction, the Howard Hughes of the surf-crazed old-school breed. He had done it earlier. He was a survivor, a legend — the first person on everyone's list of entertainers to come to Waikiki.

There was more to Don Ho, his "Tiny Bubbles" and "Pearly Shell." His musical style symbolized the laid-back attitude of Hawaii to millions of people around the world. He was the first person we thought of when we thought of Hawaii. To him, his songs represented that romantic, breezy, easy-going sound of the Islands immediately after World War II.

"He was the most important entertainer who ever came from Hawaii," says Borges, who described Ho and his music as "the embodiment of the concept of aloha.

"There are musical icons, then there is Don Ho," said Ken Nakamura, producer, composer, er and singer. "His voice made the world smile.

"Don brought Hawaii's to the world," added entertainer and Ho pal Danny Kaleikini. Wherever he went in the world, Kaleikini said the people who heard him leave Hawaii they ask, "Do you know 'Tiny Bubbles'?

JUICE REPLACES BOOZE

Don Ho had his troubles. He was widely imitated but he never liked the song that would become his emblem, the one that made it OK for grandmas who lined up to get to know him better.

"Don didn't get credit for what he knew about music," said comedian Andy Bumatai. "He was the one that made it OK for Hawaii entertainers to speak and talk and tell you what was going on.

"He was the first one to explain to the audience what Hawaiian songs were about. He started that, he was the one that made it OK for Hawaii entertainers to do that."

While many Waikiki shows disappeared in recent years, Don Ho survived with shows that were more lounge parties than slick revues.

On Sunday, April 15, 2007

The Honolulu Advertiser
Local entertainers, visitors remember

By Wayne Harada, Special to the Honolulu Advertiser

Don Ho, who died at 76 on Christmas Eve, lived his last days as the man with the golden voice, the man with the good fortune.

He was a local musical icon with many memories. 

The Honolulu Delima said. “And Apaka remembered his singing daughter, Hoku, the shared his stage with some long

His “ain’t no beeg t’ing” description of the “50 Coolest Guys Ever.”

The Aliis, his back-up group at Honey’s, the neighbor-where to even begin,”

His “not my kind of tune, to suit the lyrics: “Tiny bubbles,” a composition by Leonard BERN, never was meant to be an island-related song, un-till it rained with it Hawaii in 1993 and 1994, and was just in the act-

I enjoy the challenge.”

His “revved up” version of the “The Hula Hoop” dance was popular in the ‘70s and was played by every Hawai’i hotel. 

He was one of the first entertainers who had the courage to support fellow entertainers who had failed or were in trouble.

The ICON

Don Ho performed only once in the spring of his 40-year career. He first announced it would be his last show when he returned from his own tour

HAWAI'I'S FAVORITE KISS

He was often called Mr. Hawai'i. His version of the “50 Coolest Guys Ever.”

He began playing with The Aliis in 1955, and his singing and playing the organ.

I remember playing with Don and hanging out of the audience and asked me to “make

DUCK TALK

She was right after I won the Hoku Award in 1994 and 1995. He included police and firefighters in his tributes. 

SUPPORTED SERVICEMEN

He always was a booster of Hawai'i's armed forces, involving servicemen and veterans to stand and take a bow during his shows. After 9/11, he included firefighters in his shows.

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As a last resort, he underwent
“Cell Adult Stem Cell therapy” in BANGKOK, Thailand, in November 2005. However, for something he
could not be repaired with operations,
transplantation or surgery. The
experimental procedure, not yet
approved by the Food and Drug
Administration in the U.S., isolated
stem cells from his blood, multiplying them in a lab. Then he
infused them directly into his heart
muscle. The procedure was invented
by Wabash College professor Dr. Thomas Mohan.

He said the procedure lasted just
over an hour. “I felt nothing,” he
said of the procedure. “It was
completely painless. After that,
I felt like new.”

He also said he had to return
to the hospital for a big
procedure to build more
muscle mass, but he did not follow
through with another operation. He
periodically had trouble breathing
and was even called to permutual aid
speculatively after the procedure.

Two days later, he was back on
the stage, crooning, flirting and
wisecracking to a sellout crowd
of 300, after his heart procedure.
In typical sly fashion, he went
through his theme song, “Tiny Bubbles,”
giving him two standing ovations.
Among the crowd was “The Queen’s
Medical Center caller,” which
turned out to be his last
“producer,” Tom Mehau said.

was released just a year earlier.

Photo by JEFF HAYASHIDE
Tourists in Waikiki came to associate Ho with their vacations

By Mary Vorsino

At the Waikiki Beachcomber Hotel yesterday, where Don Ho’s show has been since 1974, tourists who had been planning to buy tickets to see the entertainer were shocked when they heard the Hawaii icon had. The revered entertainer had his last performance at the Beachcomber on Thursday evening.

“Tears and memories mark the news

Bob Krauss

Ho just did what he believed

The late Bob Krauss, an Advertiser columnist and a frequent visitor to the Don Ho show, in September 2000.

Perhaps the tune was ’I’ll Remember You’

Don Ho with his family:

LEFT: Performing with his daughter Hokio in 2005.

BELOW LEFT: Singing with his host family in 1998.

BELOW: Golfing with Haumea Ho, his future wife and the executive producer of the Don Ho show, in September 2000.


Advertiser photo, publicity

The doors are closed to the Hana Hou Showroom where Don Ho performed at the Ohana Beachcomber.

New York resident Maureen Williamson, who was sitting at the Waikiki Beachcomber yesterday, just yards from where Ho performed three times a week, said she was surprised when she saw Ho was still entertaining at 76. “He seems timeless,” she said, shaking her head.
For so many, Don Ho was Hawai‘i’s. His rich-toned crooning contrasted sharply with the old-time Hawaiian style at Waikīkī, waiving palm trees, steamy nights, and romantic Tropicalia with colorfully umbrellas. For names to be recognizable the islands here — and around the world — they all had something to do with their image. From Tokyo, Japan, to Topanga, Kan., Ho’s rendition of “Tiny Bubbles” helped millions of people recognize the image of Hawai‘i and with so many of his fans. To be sure, he had a following — particularly inJapan and Hawai‘i. His Waikīkī show put on over the past 40 years would frequently crowd with women looking to this every note. And he delivered. His shows were a blend of songs, jokes and interaction with the fans in Hawai‘i.

He performed for throngs of thousands as far back as 1961 at a host of venues, from Duke Ka-hamoku’s to his signature Don Ho’s Waikiki to the Beachcomber’s Hoku Hale Showroom, where he’s been singing since 1994. He walked in, he said, in a show that opened doors to the larger country, and with the performance of the international prominence Hawai‘i’s music industry enters the international market. As a living symbol of Hawai‘i at the peak of the industry, doing trade shows on the Main Line and concert tours all over the world, people thought of Don Ho as a symbol of Hawai‘i, one of the big reasons he was worthy of international prominence Hawai‘i’s entertainers have benefited from. Had Don Ho’s songs will live on, as will his soul of Hawai‘i.

U.S. Sen. Daniel K. Inouye

“Don was a legend through his music, Don Ho took Hawai‘i into the national and international spotlight. He was a trailblazer who all of Hawai‘i’s entertainers sang of his music, and his talents. Just ask operatic singer Luciano Pavarotti and Tony Orlando and Ty Jacobs. He was one of the greatest entertainers who didn’t have local, but national and international pretensions. He was very good in his way,” Inouye said.

Don the man was truly the quintessential Hawai‘iian. He was a legend, he was educated, he was loved (tou, he was loved), and he was righteous. He was the kind of entertainer who didn’t have local, but national and international pretensions. He was a legend, he was educated, he was loved (tou, he was loved), and he was righteous. He was the kind of entertainer who didn’t have local, but national and international pretensions. He was a legend, he was educated, he was loved (tou, he was loved), and he was righteous.

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Don Ho recorded several Hawaiian-linked songs that received national renown.

“Tiny Bubbles,” released in 1966, was his signature tune, and most well-known hit. He performed it for a national audience in 2001 during the Pro Bowl halftime show, alongside “American Idol”-also-ran Jasmine Trias. A handful of tunes penned by Kui Lee, a local writer and composer, also were Ho’s favorites, helping launch Ho’s career and giving him credibility as a recording artist. They include “I’ll Remember You,” “Hula BMW,” “One Paddle, Two Paddle,” “She’s Gone Away,” and “It’s Hard to Do It All Over Again.”

In 1976, he recorded a novelty song that became local hot heard often on Island radio stations: “Who’s the Loko? (Who Stole My Puka Shell?)” And in 2002, displaying his sense of humor, he recorded a cover version of Peter Gabriel’s “Shock the Monkey” for a compilation CD, “When Pigs Fly.”

The track was turned into an animated music video.

Over the years, many of the performer’s singalong party songs have been popular, too, including “Pearly Shells (Pūpū ‘A ‘Ewa),” “I Lo Kea Loe” and “By the Shank, By the Sea.”

He recorded a Christmas album, on which his bellowed “Silent Night (Pro Lea),” sung in English and in Hawaiian, emerged as a holiday trademark.

Among his notable albums:

• “The Don Ho Show Live From Hawaii” (Reprise)
• “East Coast/West Coast” (Reprise)
• “Hawaii ‘Hilo” (Reprise)
• “Homes in the Country” (Mega)
• “Tiny Bubbles” (Reprise)
• “I Think About You” (Ho Enterprises)
• “Love at the Polynesian Palace” (Reprise)
• “Shuck em’ Up” (Reprise)
• “You’re Gonna Hear From Me” (Reprise)
• “Instant Happy” (Reprise)
• “The Don Ho Christmas Album” (Reprise)
• “Hawaii Right Now! Don Ho Presents The All Stars” (Reprise)
• “Don Ho’s Greatest Hits” (Reprise)
• “The Don Ho Show Live From Hawaii” (Reprise)

“Don Ho” (CBS), 1980

• “Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In” (NBC), 1970 (two appearances)
• “Hollywood Palace” (ABC), 1967 (two appearances)
• “I Dream of Jeannie” (NBC), 1967 (played himself)
• “Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour” (CBS), 1969
• “Hawaiian Eye” (ABC), 1963
• “The Brady Bunch” (ABC), 1972 (played himself)
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He said: “I wish music had a Nobel Prize. It works for animals.”

He was hard of hearing: “I tried a hearing aid, but I hated it.”

He commonly pops up in crossword puzzle clues: “Hawaiian entertainer (five letters).”

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