

Hawaiian music icon Alfred Apaka remembered 60 years after his death

By John Berger
jberger@staradvertiser.com

1/26/20
20

Recording artist Jeff Apaka will be thinking about his father this Friday — and with good reason. Friday marks the 60th anniversary of the day his father, Hawaiian music superstar Alfred Apaka, died unexpectedly at the age of 40 while playing a morning game of handball at the Central YMCA. Jeff had been on the mainland attending school; he was 13.

When Alfred Apaka died, he was at the height of his career in Hawaii and seemed on the verge of national stardom as well. Apaka was the headline entertainer and entertainment director of what

was then Kaiser's Hawaiian Village (now Hilton Hawaiian Village), and the biggest Hawaiian star in the business. He was also a successful national recording artist, appeared regularly on Webley Edwards' internationally syndicated radio show, "Hawaii Calls," and counted Bob Hope and Bing Crosby as two of his biggest promoters on the mainland.

His ability to impeccably sing both tenor and baritone was displayed in his recording of the Hawaiian standard "Lei Aloha Lei Makamae." Apaka was one of the greatest Hawaiian male vocalists of the 20th century.

Kaiser had founded a record label to release an al-

bum, "Broadway Wears A Lei," to show mainland audiences that Apaka could sing mainstream American pop music and show tunes with same strength and commercial appeal that drove his Hawaiian and hapa haole repertoire. At the time of his death, a pilot for a national network Alfred Apaka television show had been picked up by a sponsor.

Buried at Diamond Head Memorial Park, Apaka's memorial tomb was refurbished earlier this month. New marble and a new cement walk were installed, and the lettering and decorative bronze maile lei was refurbished.

Jeff Apaka plans to visit Thursday.



COURTESY JEFF AKA

Alfred Apaka, pictured with his wife, Edna Blake Apaka, was the headline entertainer at Kaiser's Hawaiian Village (now Hilton Hawaiian Village).