

# Ho brought Hawai'i to the world via TV

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Don Ho was the right entertainer in the right place at the right time.

He became the image of the musical sound of the Islands at a time when Americans and much of the rest of the world were thirsting for all things Hawai'i — right after Hawai'i became a state in 1959.

That was the same year that Qantas Airways introduced the first jet airplane service across the Pacific, giving eager post-World War II travelers a quick means of reaching Waikiki and the land of aloha so many had only read about in magazines and seen in films.

And there, waiting to entertain them, was Ho.

Those who couldn't make it to the 50th state still had ample opportunity to see Ho through another of America's great love affairs of the age, network television.

Beginning in the early 1960s, Ho appeared on dozens of specials and prime-time TV shows, including "Laugh-In" and "The Tonight Show." In 1969, Ho appeared a number of times on NBC's "Kraft Music Hall" and ended up hosting the show that season.

He appeared as himself on "Batman," "I Dream of Jeannie," and "Sanford and Son."

And although it wasn't around for very long, one program that seemed to stick in the collective mind of viewers was his own "The Don Ho Show" — a half-hour daytime ABC television variety show that ran from October 1976 to March 1977.

Here, Mainland folks got to see Ho — a hip, handsome and laid-back Island version of Dean Martin and Elvis — right in his own Waikiki setting. Mostly taped at the Outrigger Reef Ho-



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Don Ho with Saki in "Kraft Music Hall Presents: The Don Ho Fourth of July Special," which aired July 2, 1976.

tel's Ocean Lanai, the series presented the picture postcard, beach-boy Hawai'i to audiences everywhere, beckoning them to come.

Ho's initial leap of fame happened so quickly, the entertainer himself never seemed to fully grasp the magnitude of it. Almost without realizing it, he had become Hawai'i's ambassador to the rest of the United States and the world.

Ho's signature song and biggest hit, "Tiny Bubbles," bounced around the national Billboard charts in 1966 for more than four months. But "Tiny Bubbles" and Ho's other songs became so closely associated with the singer, they practically transcended chart listings. Visitors by the tens of thousands dutifully carted recordings home and then picked up more on their return trips.

And Ho's almost mystical audience appeal led people to continue to come to Waikiki to see the performer they felt they already knew. And that was just the way Ho wanted them to feel.

For more than four decades, people just couldn't get enough of him.