



Long before Perry met Price, Aku ruled Hawaii's airwaves

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I wrote a few weeks ago about KCCN's 50th anniversary. Jim Howard, one of my readers, remembered Aku broadcasting from the treehouse at the International Market Place.

"I have this vague memory of going into Waikiki on a Saturday morning with my mom, and standing on Kalakaua Avenue in front of the marketplace and peering up at the tree, knowing that Aku was up there," Howard says.

Was it true, he asked?

Disc jockey Harry Soria Jr. found a photo in the Territorial Airwaves archives that is labeled "Aku in the Treehouse Studio at the International Market Place."

I went digging into our newspaper archives. A clipping I found, written by Aku himself, says, as of Jan. 18, 1960, "the International Market Place will be the latest scene of Aku's crusades, campaigns, controversies, assaults on human dignity and other bric-a-brac."

Why from a tree? "Because as so many of you have said for so many years, this program is for the birds."

He closed by inviting listeners to "drop up and see me sometime."

Back in 1960, KHVH broadcast from the treehouse at the International Market Place.

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Hal Lewis, or, more formally, J. Akuhead Pupule, or simply Aku to most of us, was Hawaii's top disc jockey on KGMB/KSSK before Perry & Price.

It was said that he was the top-paid deejay in the world, earning about \$150,000 a month (in today's dollars) at the time of his death in 1983.

Lewis was born in Brooklyn and took up the violin at the age of 9. Beginning at 11, he won several Northern California violin contests, posing as a boy from each particular community.

The violin brought him to Hawaii in 1946. Lewis was hired by Matson to play violin on its sailings to Hawaii.

He left that and worked for many radio stations over 36 years — KGMB, KPOA, KHON, KGU, KHVH and KORL — before being hired by KGMB/KSSK again.

Twenty percent of morning radio listeners tuned in to him each weekday for his jokes, news and banter ... NOT, I suspect, for the big-band 1940s music he played.

Lewis was highly critical of rock 'n' roll, calling it "frenetic and negative," in Honolulu magazine. "It's all sung by people with whiny voices who really can't sing."

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What was his daily routine, listeners frequently asked? "Four o'clock in the morning, the alarm goes off," Aku replied. Up out of bed and into a brisk, cold shower; a quick glass of orange juice; and some conditioning exercises.

"These are all done by my son, Lance, who then comes and wakes me at a quarter to five."

Actually, he said, he rose early, read the paper at Cocco's (at Kalakaua and Kapio-