

MIDWEEK O'AHU | DECEMBER 10, 2025

HAWAII'S FAVORITE NEWSPAPER | PHOTO COURTESY PEARLIE SPACER III  
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Midweek

# Eddie and Myrna

The legacy of MYRNA and EDDIE KAMAE is found in a lifetime of work dedicated to preserving and sharing Hawaii's cultural heritage through music, film and education.



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Story by **BILL MOSSMAN**Photos courtesy **MYRNA KAMAE**

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December has long been a special time for Myrna Kamae. Beyond the celebrations, the middle of the month is the anniversary of sorts for her. Next week marks the 50th anniversary since she beheld these islands for the first time.

"Dec. 17, 1964 is a day I hold close to the course of my life," she says.

Hawai'i, though I didn't know yet that it would become my home, my teacher and my heart."

Of course, it wouldn't be long before the business for the islands convinced her that this was the place to put down roots. Neither would it be long before she began carving out space in her heart for the islands.

On Christmas Day 1965, she first met Eddie Kamae, a founding member of the Hawaiian Cultural Renaissance and a man who would become a central figure in the Hawaiian cultural renaissance.

As she recalls, the scene was a private performance on Maui. Eddie was strumming along on the 'ukulele, and slack-key master Alan Lomax was accompanying him.

And all Myrna could do was revel in the notes in the air and the captivating performance.

"I just stood by the door and I didn't say a word for half hours," Myrna remembers. "The music was so beautiful and everybody else was talking and drinking and I heard this music,

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**Eddie  
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**D**ecember has long been a special time of the year for Myrna Kamae. Beyond the annual holiday celebrations, the middle-of-the-12th month marks an anniversary of sorts for her. Next week, it will be 61 years since she beheld these islands for the very first time.

"Dec. 17, 1964 is a day I hold close — a day that changed the course of my life," she says. "It was my first day in Hawai'i, though I didn't know yet that this beloved place would become my home, my teacher and the center of my heart."

Of course, it wouldn't be long before her growing fondness for the islands convinced her that she was in the right place to put down roots. Neither would it be long before she began carving out space in her heart to include another love.

On Christmas Day 1965, she first laid eyes on Eddie Kamae, a founding member of the iconic band Sons of Hawai'i and a man who would become an important figure in the Hawaiian cultural renaissance.

As she recalls, the scene was a private Christmas party on Maui. Eddie was strumming along on his Martin concert 'ukulele, and slack-key master Raymond Kane was accompanying him.

And all Myrna could do was revel in the spellbinding notes in the air and the captivating man behind many of them.

"I just stood by the door and I didn't move for two and a half hours," Myrna remembers. "They were playing music, and everybody else was talking and doing things. And when

I heard this music, I just fell in love with it. And I have to say that I fell in love with the music first, but it wasn't long afterward that I fell in love with the player."

The two eventually started dating and the following year, they tied the knot. From then on, they were inseparably connected and wholly aligned in their mission in life: to gather and share the stories and sounds of the people they loved, from the islands they cherished, for present and future generations.

In 2000, Myrna and Eddie established The Hawaiian Legacy Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to documenting and perpetuating the islands' cultural heritage through music, film and education. Of vital importance was safeguarding countless videos, audio recordings, papers and photographs of what Eddie called "the most precious legacies" of the islands' revered elders.



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As Myrna explains when recounting this labor of love, "We stepped into a journey we could never have imagined: decades of preserving Hawaiian stories, songs and the voices of kīpuna who entrusted us with their knowledge."

And though the couple enjoyed much success with their legacy efforts over the years — including producing 11 award-winning Hawaiian cultural documentaries; releasing seven LPs and five CDs, which includes Christmas and children's albums; and authoring the book *Hawaiian Son: The Life and Music of Eddie Kamae* — all good things, as the oft-used phrase goes, must come to an end.

Beginning this month, Myrna plans to wind down operations at the foundation and shutter it completely by next spring. In explaining her decision to close shop less than a decade after her husband's death (Eddie passed away in January 2017), the octogenarian says it's simply time to let go of the foundation and finally pursue other interests.

"I'm 83, and even though I work with wonderful people, it's time to look at the next phase of my life and learn to play 'ukulele, learn Hawaiian, play songs on my violin and read all the books I haven't been able to read for the last 50 years," she says.

"And, of course, eat healthy, exercise and have fun, too!"

Despite the nonprofit's impending closure, the couple's valuable work will, fortunately, continue on at University of Hawai'i-West O'ahu. There, the foundation's complete collection of film and print materials will be transferred to and digitally housed at the campus's 'Ulu'ulu: The Henry Ku'ualoha Giugni Moving Image Archive of Hawai'i and James & Abigail Campbell Library. When the move is completed in March, faculty, students and the general public will have full access to film files at 'Ulu'ulu and print materials at the library.

"(Those) who work with this collection will gain rare access to one of Hawai'i's most significant cultural archives and an opportunity to learn directly from the stories and wisdom Eddie gathered over decades," Myrna says.

"I think that we have accomplished the things that Eddie and I set out to do," she adds. "Now, we're lucky that it's going to be carried on in such a wonderful way by wonderful people."

In addition, a recently announced endowment from the Kosasa Foundation will further the nonprofit's educational vision of providing students and future cultural practitioners with scholarships, internships and fellowships, and faculty members with grants.

All of which still thrills and inspires the woman who fell head over heels in love with the Hawaiian islands and Eddie Kamae so many years ago.

"This moment is the beginning of a new era," she says, "one guided by the same message that (renowned Hawaiian scholar, author and educator) Mary Kawena Pukui would give Eddie after every work session: 'Ho'omau, Eddie. Ho'omau.'"

Beyond counseling Eddie to persevere, Pukui would also encourage him to look toward the future by focusing on the little ones.

"She'd say, 'Do it for the children. Then, it will live forever,'" recalls Myrna.

Since then, the advice has guided the foundation in every move it has made.

"And now," she adds, "as The Hawaiian Legacy Foundation completes its mission, the work continues — alive and growing — through the students, the archivists, the musicians and the community members who will carry it into the future."

There's at least one other reason why this December is extra special for Myrna. The long-awaited Hawaiian translation of the previously released *The Eddie Kamae Songbook: A Musical Journey*, is finally available to the public.

Portions of this free cultural resource — made up of 34 songs that played an instrumental part in Eddie's life — have been released in recent days, while the remaining tracks and their accompanying lyrics, music sheets, video and audio clips, and more are expected to be out before month's end.

"The digital book allows for instant switching between English and Hawaiian



(Top) After marrying in August 1966, Myrna and Eddie Kamae formed a union committed to preserving Hawaiian stories and songs. Together, they established The Hawaiian Legacy Foundation in 2000. (Above) Sons of Hawai'i members David "Feet" Rogers, Eddie Kamae and Joe Marshall gather at Hanalei Bay for a photo shoot following a recording session. The band, which went through many incarnations, effectively ended with Eddie's retirement in the early 1990s.

PHOTOS COURTESY MYRNA KAMAE

— simple and intuitive, exactly the way it needed to be," she explains. "We called it an 'Aunty Myrna version' — accessible to all generations, welcoming to learners, and easy to use for teachers and families.

"My whole idea was not only picking songs that were important to Eddie's journey, but that each song have audio and video with it because I think that makes the songs come alive."

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# Eddie Kamae Digital Songbook Now Available In Hawaiian

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Offering the digital songbook in 'olelo Hawai'i was not only vital to communicating Eddie's wisdom and native values to

listeners, she adds, but also in fulfilling part of the foundation's mission, which is to share Hawaiian music with students and their families.

Myrna credits several individuals, including project director-archivist Kapena Shim, writer-translator Lilinoe Andrews, UH-West O'ahu chancellor Maenette Benham and musician-educator Aaron Salā, with helping to bring this "major milestone" to completion. She

also believes their contributions will lead others, especially the younger generation, to appreciate the man who not only helped pioneer solo work on the 'ukulele, but who also turned his song arrangements into masterpieces.

"One of Eddie's main gifts was his ability to arrange a song so that people would love to play it," Myrna says. "So many people who play Eddie's arrangements have no idea that that is what made that song come alive."

Now, thanks to the release of the songbook and the continuation of the foundation's mission and collection — soon to be housed at UH-West O'ahu — their lifetime of work will live on.

And that's important to Myrna Kamae. "I look back with gratitude and forward with hope," she says. "The journey that began for me in 1964 continues today in a new way, grounded in the same purpose that Eddie and I shared: to preserve, to honor and, above all, to ho'omau."