



Giants in Their Realms:
Close Encounters of the Celebrity Kind – Vol. 4

by

Kerry J. Byrnes



Okemos High School (Class of '63)



Giants in Their Realms: Close Encounters of the Celebrity Kind

VOLUME FOUR (CHAPTER 15)

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Chapter 15 - Tiki Encounters in the Realm of Exotica Musicians

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Chapter 15

Tiki Encounters in the Realm of Exotica Musicians

For more than four decades, it's been known by finger-snapping hi-fi hipsters as "exotica," an evocative musical hybrid born out of jazz, Latin rhythms and aboriginal instrumentation. It is a genre that predates Motown, electric jazz and the British invasion. Its songs recall a bygone era, when the Hawaiian Islands were considered America's Shangri-La and the Holy Trinity of Artie (the late Arthur Lyman), Marty (Martin Denny) and Les (famed arranger-conductor Les Baxter) shook up the music charts like a cool vodka martini. Hi-fi was the rage then, and exotica, replete with colorful vibes, bongos and birdcalls, was the music of choice ([Source](#)).

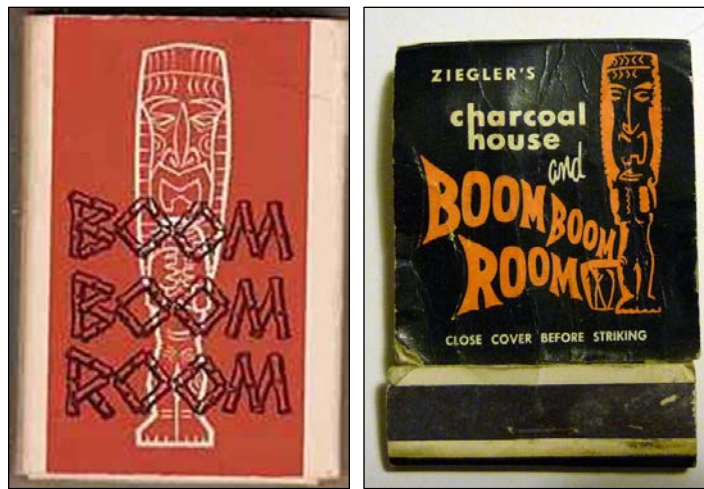
Back in the 1950s, when my father (**Francis Byrnes** – see vignette) bought a hi-fi system—a receiver (radio tuner / amplifier), turntable, and mono speaker, I couldn't have foreseen that his collection of LP records and occasional visits to a local restaurant – Ziegler's Charcoal House and Boom Boom Room – would introduce me to Exotica – a genre mixing tunes evocative of places in the South Pacific, arranged with alluring exotic musical instruments and the tropical embellishment of birdcalls and even croaking frogs. Two of the pioneer recordings in this genre – *Exotica* and *Exotica 3*, two LPs my father had in his collection – were by Martin Denny, the artist that many years later would be endearingly christened as the King of Exotica.



Ziegler's Charcoal House, located in East Lansing's Frandor Shopping Center, included a tiki bar called the Boom Boom Room. Occasionally my parents would take the kids (Kerry, Kevin, and Kathryn) for a steak dinner at Ziegler's, though I clearly recall the menu having exotically enticing names for a variety of tropical alcoholic drinks that at the time I was too young to be drinking (or sipping)!



The Boom Boom Room of Ziegler's Charcoal House,
Frandor Shopping Center, East Lansing, Michigan



Other Memorabilia from The Charcoal House and The Boom Boom Room ([Source](#))

What I didn't know at the time was that, in addition to Martin Denny, the Exotica genre would have at least two other major contributors – Les Baxter and Arthur Lyman. And I couldn't have imagined, as I listened to my father's two Martin Denny albums and occasionally took in the Boom Boom Room's tiki ambience and perused The Charcoal House's menu options of exotic cocktails (which I was too young to order), that I would someday have close encounters with each of these musicians whose large output of Exotica LPs would dwarf the one-off LPs of many wannabe Exotica musical group copy cats that, while Exotica was in vogue, recorded and released one or two Exotica-flavored LPs.

In March of 1963, as our family was landing in Honolulu for a week's visit before proceeding on to my father's new job in the Philippines (see Francis Byrnes vignette), Martin Denny's bossa nova take on "Quiet Village" ("Quiet Village Bossa Nova") was getting air play on local radio stations. Yet, while the **Exotica** and **Exotica, Vol. 3** were two of my favorite albums, it never occurred to me during that week as we traveled around Waikiki that there might have been a chance of catching Martin Denny and his group performing at some local nightclub. Of course, just out of high school, I was probably a bit young to be thinking about nightclubs, especially with the family focused on getting checked into our rental apartment (see two photos below), hitting the beach (after many cold and snowy Michigan winters), and taking in the tourist sites (e.g., Pearl Harbor and the USS Arizona Memorial) around Honolulu and the island of Oahu (e.g., the Ulu Mau Village).



Byrnes rental apartment in Waikiki / Kathryn views Ala Wai Canal beyond the palm trees



Kathryn on Waikiki Beach & Kerry and Kevin at the Ulu Mau Village

I wasn't even asking myself how Dad had discovered or learned about these *Exotica* or why he hadn't purchased *Exotica, Vol. 2*. In short, at the time, I wasn't yet really into *Exotica* music, though the late 1950s to early 1960s rage (as it were) with "everything tiki" in the United States inspired me to carve a tiki-like slide (shown below) for my Boy Scout neckerchief.



Eventually I would take a more direct interest in *Exotica* music and, over the years, had close encounters with three of *Exotica*'s pioneers – Les Baxter, Martin Denny, and Arthur Lyman; a "postal exchange" encounter with Robert Drasnin' and two additional encounters with contributors to the *Exotica* genre – Lloyd Kandell and Paul Conrad. But the back story on those encounters began in 1982, nearly 20 years after first visiting Hawaii in 1963, with a real world flight stopover in Los Angeles en route from Jakarta, Indonesia to Florence, Alabama, a stopover that paid off with a close encounter with Les Baxter that is now recounted.

Leslie Thompson Baxter (3/14/22 – 1/15/96)



Any good music must be an innovation.

Born in Mexia, Texas, **Les Baxter** was a popular musician, bandleader, recording artist, and film composer who scored more than 150 films. He began learning to play the piano at five years of age and studied at the Detroit Conservatory and Pepperdine College in Los Angeles, California. While beginning his career as a concert pianist, Baxter joined Mel Tormé's Meltones in 1945 and later started conducting orchestra for a number of radio shows including *The Bob Hope Show*. He arranged and orchestrated for Nat King Cole, Margaret Whiting, and Frank DeVol, and recorded with his own orchestra many albums for Capitol Records. In March of 1956 Baxter's recording of "The Poor People of Paris" was a #1 hit, selling more 45rpm singles than any other recording that decade. Another big hit was "April in Portugal." Baxter's first record album,

Music Out Of The Moon established his inherent talent for the unusual. By the use of completely unorthodox instrumentation (flute, cello, French horn, four percussion, a choir that sang no words, and a previously unheard-of electronic instrument called the Theremin) he produced the most original and wonderfully strange sounds yet recorded. This album became one of Capitol Records' biggest selling items. His second album, *Perfume Set to Music*, featured the combined use of strings, choir, concerto style piano, Theremin, and Latin rhythm instruments – for the first time on recordings. This album had a tremendous influence on the entire recording field, and many of the color and effects created by Les were subsequently adopted by other composer/arrangers, and have become the "sound" or "style" associated with many of today's artists. His third album, *The Voice Of The Xtabay* (with Peruvian soprano Yma Sumac), contained some of the most unusual voice and orchestra effects ever recorded, and was the largest selling album in the world at the time ([Source](#)).

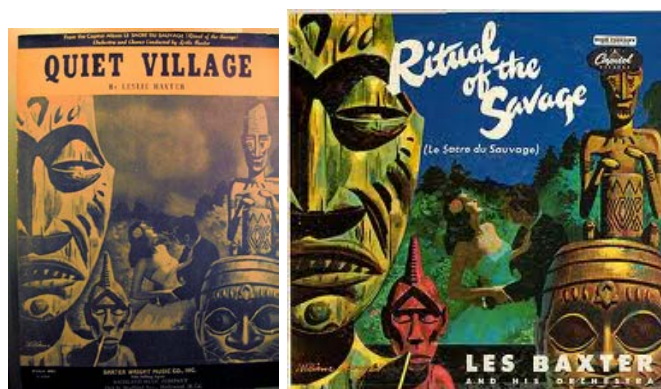
In all, Baxter recorded some 40 albums, four of which achieved the number one position. All of Baxter's twelve hit singles, including "Blue Tango," "Poor People Of Paris," "April In Portugal," "I Love Paris," "Ruby," "Wake The Town And Tell The People," and "Unchained Melody," reached number one!

In the wake of his recording successes, in 1962 Baxter began to take an increased interest in composing scores for films in diverse genres – horror, comedy, romance, suspense, science fiction, western, and contemporary rock – all challenging him to deliver a variety of scores. His feature film scores included *Beach Blanket Bingo*; *Beach Party*; *Black Sabbath*; *Black Sunday*; *Bora Bora*; *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine*; *Fall of the House of Usher*; *Frogs*; *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini*; *Operation Bikini*; *The Dunwich Horror*; *The Man With the X-Ray Eyes*; *The Pit and the Pendulum*; and *The Raven*.

For the aficionado of Exotica, however, Baxter is most remembered for his original composition, lush arrangement, and release in 1952 of “Quiet Village” on the *Ritual of the Savage* LP. Baxter described in this LP’s liner notes described the feeling that his music was attempting to convey: “[t]he jungle grows more [dense] as the river boat slowly makes its way into the deep interior. A snake slithers into the water, flushing a brilliantly plumaged bird [that] soars into the clearing above a quiet village. Here is a musical portrait of a tropical village deserted in the mid-day heat.”



Click on album cover above to list to Baxter’s “Quiet Village”



However, “Quiet Village” would not gain national notoriety until another musician, Martin Denny (see vignette), recorded it several years later. The popularity of Martin Denny’s exotic arrangement of “Quiet Village” and the many Exotica albums Denny, Baxter, and Arthur Lyman (see vignette) would record, led to their names becoming “synonymous with the Exotica music genre, with other musicians and musical groups over the years recording “Quiet Village” and other exotica-flavored songs, and releasing their own Exotica-themed albums. But it was Denny’s “Quiet Village” that would score high on *Billboard* and the charts three separate times, originally with the Denny version in the 1950s, again in the 1960s, and yet again in the 1970s.

Even Darla Hood of *Little Rascals* fame recorded “Quiet Village” on her recording of “My Quiet Village” (click on 45 rpm image below to hear Darla sing “My Quiet Village”).



Alone in my quiet village I pray
You will be returning one day
To me
Return to me
Alone living with the mem'ry of you
Promising you'd always be true
To me
Be true to me.
Above me there's a moon on fire
Telling you to love me as I desire
And ever the flame in my quiet village will burn
Darling till the day you return to me,
Return to me, return to me.

In the wake of the popularity of Martin Denny's Exotica-themed albums, Capitol Records and later other labels (e.g., Reprise) released many Exotic-flavored albums that featured Baxter as conductor-arranger-composer, including *Tamboo*, *Ports of Pleasure*, *Les Baxter's Original Quiet Village*, *The Sacred Idol*, *Jewels of the Sea*, *The Sacred Idol*, *The Soul of the Drums*, *The Primitive and the Passionate*, and *Bora Bora*, this latter a rescoring by Baxter of the film of the same name released in Europe and originally scored by Piero Piccioni. But Baxter's version of "Quiet Village," even re-recorded in stereo for his *Original Quiet Village* album, or adding bird calls for a version Baxter performed on a 1961 TV show (*The Lost Episode*, Dionysus/Bacchus Archives), never became as popular as Denny's version.





Baxter's interest in more serious music also led him into the concert and ballet field, with his works performed by the Symphony Orchestras of Hollywood, Knoxville, and Delaware. The Atlanta Civic Ballet performed a suite of Baxter's music, and several important dance companies include his works in their repertoire. Sadly, at the relatively young age of 73, Baxter died of heart and kidney problems on January 15, 1996.

Flight Log Memories: As earlier recounted in the Magic Johnson vignette, in 1982 I had flown into Los Angeles from Tokyo in route home from Jakarta, Indonesia, where I had been on an assignment for the International Fertilizer Development Center. I had previously arranged to meet with David Kraft, a fellow soundtrack LP collector (with whom I had been exchanging soundtrack LPs) and a film music authority whose film music articles appeared in *Movieline*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and *Daily Variety*. Knowing the date of my return flight's arrival in Los Angeles, I had arranged for an overnight stop in LA to meet with David and talk shop on collecting soundtrack LPs.

On the morning of November 21, 1982, as I came out of customs, there was David waiting to meet me, after which he sprung on me our agenda for the day packed with the following three surprises:

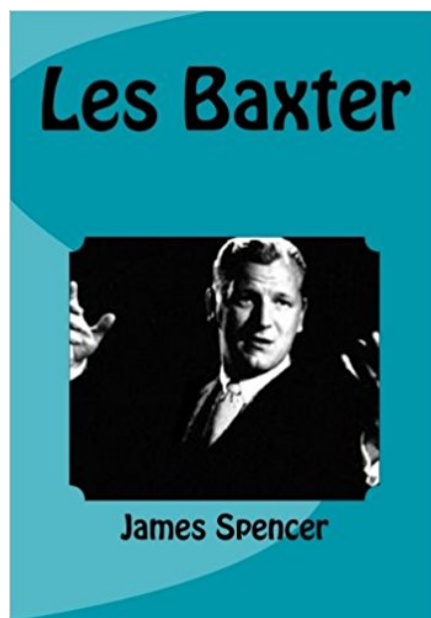
- The first surprise was a visit to KTLA TV where David was director of *News at 10*. Looking around the station, owned by Gene Autry (see vignette), brought back memories of my youth and the day (January 25, 1954) in the 1950s when my mother took me to the Michigan State College Auditorium to see Autry's "wild west show."
- The second surprise was a pair of tickets for David and me to go that evening to the Fabulous Forum for a NBA game between the Denver Nuggets and Los Angeles "Showtime" Lakers, which afforded opportunity for a close-up view of Earvin "Magic" Johnson (see vignette) as he and his teammates ran off the court at half-time for the locker room.
- The third surprise was a lunch meeting that David had arranged with **Les Baxter** at a local hamburger joint. Between wolfing down a cheeseburger and listening to David and another friend chat with Les, I never got a question for Les into the discussion, in part because I was so star struck or dumb struck by this close encounter with Baxter, composer of *Quiet Village* and Hollywood film score composer, that I just sat there in awe – though perhaps as much because I was tired from the two flights I had been on during the previous day, the first from Jakarta to Tokyo, then overnight from Tokyo to Los Angeles.

After lunch Baxter invited us over to his apartment, affording opportunity to view many of the music-related awards he had received over the years. Fortunately, earlier in the day, I had asked David to take me to one of Los Angeles' specialty soundtrack LP retailers, where I picked up an LP with some Baxter-scored film themes. Les kindly autographed the album.

Years later, now living in northern Virginia, I was driving home on a Saturday morning when the news on the car radio reported Baxter's passing earlier that morning. To this day, I wish I had been better prepared to interview Baxter when David handed me that opportunity on a golden platter.

Sadly, a little over ten years after having met David in Los Angeles, he died at the age of 35 on 6/24/93, the victim of Crohn's disease since the age of ten.

On a brighter note, James Spencer's recently published *Les Baxter* (2016) provides a 703-page comprehensive review of the biography and works of Les Baxter.

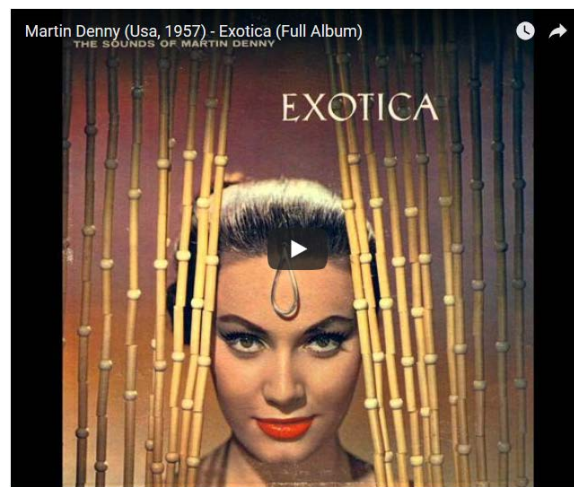


Our next vignette introduces Martin Denny, the man who came to be known as the King of Exotica music, a career launched with his Exotica version of Baxter's "Quiet Village."

Martin Weissner (Martin Denny) (4/10/11 – 3/2/05)



Oh, I loved Honolulu, playing at a place right on the beach at Waikiki!



Martin Denny's Original Cover of Les Baxter-composed "Quiet Village"

Overview

Martin Denny was an American composer and pianist who came to be recognized as the "High Priest of Tiki" and "King of Exotica," "a branch of lounge or easy-listening music popularized in the 1950's that took standard pop tunes and...Tiki-inspired originals and gave them a languid, tropical feel with the introduction of non-western instruments and various sound effects" ([Scott Feemster](#)). Denny's "Exotica" sound fused American jazz and pop songs with musical influences from Latin America, Asia, and the South Pacific, accentuated not only by gongs, chimes, and other unconventional instruments but also by birdcalls, chirping crickets, and croaking frogs. "Denny once said his music was inspired by the romantic setting of James Michener's novel, *South Pacific*. In turn, Michener once said Denny's sound: "reminds me of places I've been, and sounds I've loved" ([Source](#)). In a March 1996 interview that Martin Denny gave with Boyd Rice, Denny spoke of the evolution of his "sound":

I have a sound that's become identified with my name. It's evolved over a period of years; it just didn't happen overnight. I have an identity I'm very proud of. When you hear **George Shearing**, you know it's George Shearing. You hear other artists and recognize the sound immediately. When you hear one of my things, you think of Martin Denny (Boyd Rice, "Martin Denny", *Seconds*, Issue 37, pp. 56-62; hereafter "MD1").

During a long career Denny toured the world popularizing his “Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny” which included exotic percussion, imaginative rearrangements of popular songs, and original songs by Denny and others celebrating so-called Tiki culture. After having played his signature song “Quiet Village” in 2003 with the Don Tiki group (see Lloyd Kandell vignette) during his last major performance, Denny took two standing ovations, with “cheers of ‘hana hou’ filling the Hawai’i Theatre. ... Although weakened by age and failing health, he had lived to enjoy the international resurgence of exotica and was thrilled with the endorsement of his music by baby boomers” ([Source](#)).



The Early Years

Denny took a circuitous route to reaching the heights of musical Exotica. Martin was born in New York City on April 10, 1911. However, his last name at birth was not “Denny” but rather “Weissner,” the son of Aroon and Vera Weissner who had immigrated to the United States from Russia (1940 U.S. Federal Population Census). That Martin’s last name was Weissner was a revelation published by Ricardo Riseti in his *Memorias del jazz argentino (Memories of Argentine Jazz)* (1994) and later reported by Jorge H. Andrés in his tribute to Martin Denny titled “Rescatando al exótico Martin Denny” (“Rescuing the Exotic Martin Denny”) published in the Buenos Aires newspaper, *La Nación*, on March 14, 2005, just twelve days after Denny’s passing in Hawaii on March 2.

Writing about various musicians in the Argentine jazz community of the 1940s-1950s, Risetti touched on “Don Dean,” an American whose real name was Arthur Dean McCluskey (born: 1/16/1905 in Billings, Oklahoma; died: May 1980 in Buenos Aires, Argentina). Dean had arrived in Argentina in 1932 with five American musicians billed as Los Estudiantes de Hollywood (The Hollywood Students) or the Don Dean Orchestra (Orquesta Don Dean). Risetti, apparently in doing research on Dean and possibly interviewing him, learned that the pianist in Dean’s musical group, Martin Weissner, was later recognized by Dean as having gone on to fame in the United States under the name of Martin Denny.



At an early age Martin’s parents encouraged him to learn to play the piano. When V. Vale interviewed Denny for an article published in *Incredibly Strange Music, Volume 1* (1993, Re/Search Publications) (hereafter “**MD2**”), Denny recalled his background in classical background” “At age ten in New York City I studied piano under Lester Spitz and Isadore Gorn—I was kind of a child prodigy” (MD2).

Four years later when interviewed by Dana Countryman, Denny modified his comment about being a “kind of child prodigy”: “I don’t know about prodigy! I guess I was a pretty talented youngster, though. I started with classical music, and it gradually evolved into popular music” (Dana Countryman’s July 4, 1997 interview of Martin Denny as published in “The Ultimate Martin Denny Interview,” *Cool and Strange Music*; hereafter “**MD3**”).

Later, in a 2003 interview with *The Honolulu Advertiser*, Denny shared:

“My first job paid \$5, when I was about 15 [about 1926], playing at an Irish wake,” he said, remembering his New York origins. “I made rounds of booking agents, and one asked me if I could play piano, and I did, and I was expecting \$5 for a stag party gig for Borden Milk Co. employees. Well the cops raided the hootchie-kootchie joint, and I never got my five bucks” (Source).

During the late 1920s, Denny’s parents moved the family to Los Angeles where Martin continued studying music and completed high school.

The South America Tour

In 1931, Arthur Dean McCluskey invited Martin, then just 20, to join the Don Dean Orchestra, a sextet comprised of Dean (who sang and played alto sax and clarinet) and five young Americans, to perform at the Granada Hotel in Bogotá, Colombia for, as Martin recalled, “what was supposed to be just a six-month engagement” (Martin Denny).

Our ages ranged from 22, down to 18, and we had a six-month contract to go to Bogotá, Colombia. And of course, it was during the depression, we were still with our parents, and things were...pretty tough on them back in the United States. They told us that if we could keep working down there (South America), well, we should. So we free-lanced our way down the West Coast, going down to Lima, Peru and Santiago, Chile and eventually to Buenos Aires, Argentina. We spent 3 1/2 years there (MD3).

On August 5, 1931, Martin, Dean, and the other four members of the Don Dean Orchestra departed Los Angeles, traveling by ship to Colombia. Risetti's *Memorias del jazz argentino* recounts the origins of this trip (translated from the original Spanish text by Kerry Byrnes):

Dean attended college at the University of Southern California-Pasadena where he earned a degree in agronomy. To pay for his studies he had formed an orchestra named Oregon that also had recorded some songs in Los Angeles on the RCA label during the years 1926-1931. ... The great crisis of 1930 resulted in many places of work being closed to McCluskey, this obligating him to accept playing in some hotels in Los Angeles. On one occasion where McCluskey was performing, a Metro Goldwyn Mayer director was present and offered McCluskey the opportunity to make a world tour to open that chain's movie theaters. At the time McCluskey was playing with the Dorsey brothers who had been fellow students, but for the tour that MGM was offering McCluskey had to find other musicians. McCluskey left Los Angeles with five new band members by ship and arrived in Colombia, where they began an itinerary that was to have included all of Latin America and later Europe. His pianist was Martin Weissner, who until today [1994] has his own orchestra in Honolulu that continues ... with a repertoire that incorporates some of the tunes that he played with McCluskey's orchestra. Weissner often would recall as an anecdote that at the outset of this tour there also was a circus, complete with animals, and when a winch was loading an elephant onto the boat, the ropes gave way and the elephant fell in the water (pp. 139-140, *Memorias del jazz argentino*).

In Colombia the band played in the Granada Hotel in Bogotá, then later in Cali and Medellín. They then moved on to Guayaquil [Ecuador] and later Lima [Peru], where they inaugurated another movie theater and played at the Country Club frequented by high society patrons, who were those who would be interested in the kind of music that this orchestra was playing during this period of global expansion of jazz. Later they traveled by ship from Lima to Valparaíso [Chile] where they also inaugurated a movie theater and then one in Santiago. But in those days in Chile there was a revolution against President Montero, and with a curfew and other restrictions McCluskey decided to travel to Buenos Aires [Argentina]. The band was to have inaugurated the Cine Broadway, but this was not possible due to some circumstances and as a result the band had to stay a week longer than had been planned. Their plane had suffered a mechanical problem and while they waited for the plane to be repaired the band continued performing. There another circumstance arose: McCluskey met Lila Raquel Suárez Howard, whom he married a short time later and with whom he would have four musicians in the family: Buddy, Alex, Patricia and Donald, their children (p. 140, *Memorias del jazz argentino*).



Granada Hotel, Bogotá, Colombia

After Dean's band had completed its contract at the Granada Hotel, they traveled to Cali where they performed for a period of time at the rooftop restaurant (La Terraza) of the Hotel Alférez Real (Martin Denny, personal communication). Indeed, the social page (p. 6's "el Día Social) of the February 6, 1932 issue of Cali's *El Correo del Cauca* newspaper listed recent arrivals to Cali from outside the country ("DEL EXTERIOR"). One of the arrivals listed by the Hotel Alférez Real, where the young Americans would stay and perform, was "el Señor don Mac Chusky" (misprint of Don Dean's real last name "McCluskey") "whom we greet with attention" ("a quien saludamos con atención").

DEL EXTERIOR
—Hállase entre nosotros, procedente del exterior, el señor don Mac Chusky, a quien saludamos con atención. Hotel Alférez Real.



Cali's Alférez Real Hotel (1927-1972 – circa 1934)



Rooftop Restaurant (La Terraza) of Cali's Alférez Real Hotel (1927-1972)

While Martin played piano professionally during his years in school, his travel to and playing piano in various South American cities was his first professional tour. Years later Weissner, now Denny, recalled the years he traveled with the Don Dean Orchestra and The Students of Hollywood – and the influence that exposure to Latin American music had on the evolution of his Exotica music.

"We were called *Los Estudiantes de Hollywood*, The Students of Hollywood. ... Don Dean... fronted the band, and he was a good-looking jock. It was a natural for him, because he'd had much more experience than we'd had. But we were a typical bunch of young kids from the States. I think we were the first band to free-lance our way down the coast. It took a lot of guts on our part, you know. ... We started out playing nothing but American music, but along the way we started playing some other native music. Of course, as far as rhumbas and things, they came from Cuba. My first recording was done in 1933 on Victor" (MD3).

The group played the popular songs of the day such as Bing Crosby's "When The Blue Of The Night Meets The Gold of The Day," "Midnight Sweetheart," and "Hold That Tiger." Martin recalled: "We were jazz, we played Dixie

at that time. We also picked up on the local things, you know, the music that was played in those countries” (MD3). In short, as summarized by Scott Feemster, Dean’s group

played Dixieland-style jazz, pop standards, and whatever else would get audiences up on their feet to dance. The group...played American-style jazz at hotels and clubs in the various cities. It was during this tour that the band started soaking in some of the Latin influences of some of the areas they were performing in, and [Martin] in particular took a great deal of inspiration, (and some ethnic instruments he collected along the way), incorporating Latin instruments and rhythms into his later exotica work (Scott Feemster).

After the group’s Colombia bookings, they traveled by land from Colombia to Lima, Peru (where Martin spent his 21st birthday on April 10, 1932). After some time in Lima, the group went by ship to Chile’s port city (Valparaíso), and onward by land to Chile’s capitol city, Santiago. But the group’s stay in Santiago proved relatively short as Riseti recounts:

The group included a musician named Monty Montero, the trumpet player, whose last name was the same as that of the Chilean president who was facing a revolution. This coincidence resulted in Chilean revolutionaries being suspicious and was another reason why the group decided to leave Chile. They arrived in Argentina at the Morón airport [about 22 miles from Buenos Aires] on a Panagra plane that landed at 3:25 p.m. on Tuesday the 7th of June of 1932, according to newspaper reports of the era. This arrival was announced publicly and, while the plane was flying over the city of Buenos Aires, McCluskey’s musicians were playing music on the plane which was heard over loudspeakers on the plane’s fuselage so that their music could be heard on the ground. The group was composed of six musicians, including Red Radom, known as “El Pecoso” [“Freckles”], who in addition held the job of being the group’s Administrator. The pianist was Martin Denny [then known as Martin Weissner] (p. 140, *Memorias del jazz argentino*).

Martin recalled how the group’s stay in Santiago, Chile came to be cut short:

A revolution broke out on June 7th, 1932.... So, here we are in Santiago, Chile and the President had absconded. There were mob scenes and people were all up in arms. It was pretty grim. We had to leave the country because there was complete chaos. So we were able to book passage on the first plane trip I ever made. It was a Ford Tri-Motor and we had to go over the Andes at a height of over 16,500 feet. We had to breathe through oxygen tubes in those days. This particular plane [assigned to PANAGRA] was called a ‘San Jose’ [it crashed in the mountains a little over a month later on July 16, 1932] and ... wasn’t recovered until a year later (MD3).



Ford Tri-Motor (Exterior & Interior)

when we got to Buenos Aires, we didn't have any bookings. When we arrived, we checked into this hotel. We were one of the first ones to bring news of the revolution, because all the wires had been cut off. We were interviewed by newspaper reporters who came up to our room. One of the boys in the band, his name was Noble Dunn Montero. Now "Montero" also happened to be the name of the absconding Chilean president. And so we read the headlines in the paper that an American orchestra was traveling incognito with the deposed president's son! ...the press had to retract the statement. I still have the paper, although it's yellowed with age. It's dated June 7, 1932 (MD3).

A Don Dean biography reports that the Don Dean Orchestra debuted in Buenos Aires at the Broadway Theater, a debut given a boost by the press having reported that one of the group's members (Montero) was the Chilean president's son. This garnered for the Don Dean Orchestra lots of newspaper coverage and free publicity. Indeed, Martin recalled:

When we first got down there, we got a lot of bookings on the strength of the publicity that we got from the papers. We played at the Broadway Theater, and oddly enough, our opening theme song was "Song of The Islands" and we closed with "Aloha 'Oe" ["Farewell to Thee"] So, it was sort of prophetic that I would eventually come here to Hawaii (MD3).

If escaping the Chilean revolution wasn't enough to disrupt the South America tour of the Don Dean Orchestra, the orchestra's manager then skipped out while the group was in Argentina. Denny recalled: "We had a manager who arranged the tour, and then he ran out on us while we were down in some little town in Argentina and left us stranded. Eventually, we got back to Buenos Aires and opened up this nightclub" (MD3). This nightclub was the Roof Garden of the Alvear Palace Hotel where the orchestra debuted on September 5, 1932.



Roof Garden (Jardín de Invierno) of Alvear Palace Hotel, Buenos Aires

Risetti's *Memorias del jazz argentino* notes that the "orchestra played all hours in the Alvear: at tea hour in the gallery; at the dinner hour in the lower level grille, and the most danceable location later in the Roof Garden, the same location from which was broadcast at midnight the most listened to radio program of the era." (p. 140). The Don Dean Orchestra also played the luxurious ballrooms of other venues such as Les Ambassadeurs. Local radio stations (Radio Excelsior and Radio Belgrano) broadcast the orchestra's performances.

Occasionally the orchestra traveled to nearby Uruguay (Montevideo) and Brazil (Rio de Janeiro) for performances. During a tour near Mendoza, Dean saw the property that his wife had in the south of the province in which Mendoza is located. According to Risetti, "as a result of Dean's degree as an Agronomist and knowledge of agriculture, he very much liked this area which he would make a home on leaving music in 1938" (p. 141, *Memorias del jazz argentino*).

Dean's orchestra, as Martin recalled, "made two trips to Rio de Janeiro [Brazil] and we played at the Copacabana Hotel" (MD3). Dean apparently planned to tour Brazil more extensively but a revolution in that country resulted in a decision to focus on performing in Argentina (Source). During this period, Dean started

the Dixie Pals Orchestra in the Alvear Palace Hotel.... They traveled to Bahía Blanca and worked in the south of the province of Buenos Aires. They returned to alternate between the Alvear and the City Hotel and later the Plaza Hotel. Don Dean's radio programs at midnight were broadcast by radio Stentor, later by radio Splendid and also by LR 10 Radio Cultura. The Don Dean Club was inaugurated in the Diagonal Roque Saenz Peña 943. Argentine musicians were hired to augment the original grouping which continued to include Red Radom, the Colombian Will Rodríguez who had joined the group in Argentina, Nobel Don "Monty" Montero, Junior Lawson and Martín Weissner, the latter as pianist (pp. 140-141, *Memorias del jazz argentino*).

Looking back on his years playing with the Don Dean Orchestra and Los Estudiantes de Hollywood in Buenos Aires, Martin recalled that the group played the songs of:

Louis Armstrong and of course, Ray Noble. ...we played modern ballads of the day, "I'm Through with Love," "I Never Had A Chance," "I Surrender, Dear," a lot of Bing Crosby songs. Bing Crosby was very popular at that time. ...and there was another singer [whose] songs we did, who was almost Crosby's rival...Russ Columbo. ...we had a powerful influence on the local music scene when we came to Buenos Aires (MD3).

We also played for the American ambassador, there was a lot of society that we were exposed to then. We opened up another nightclub called "The Whoopie," it was down in the basement of a building, and we were able to draw a lot of people from society. And we packed the place nightly, and then from there we did a tour through the south of the Argentines. ...we played a lot of places that had never heard an American jazz group (MD3).

In 1933, while Martin was in Buenos Aires with the Don Dean Orchestra, the orchestra, with Martin on piano, made several recordings on the Victor label, the first of which was its first recording on Victor (Vi 37414), a jazz fox trot arrangement of the Irving Berlin song titled "Me" under the Spanish title "Yo" ("I") [*The Jazz Discography Database* (Tom Lord)]. This recording was later included on the album titled *Jazz and Hot Dance in Argentina, Vol. 1 (1915-1950)* (UK Harlequin HQ2010), and on *Jazz in Argentina 1915-1950*. In early 1935 Martin composed a fox trot titled "En La Playa Grande" (copyright 2/26/35 – p. 8024 of 1935 *Catalog of Copyright Entries, part 3 – Musical Composition*), with lyrics by Don Dean, that was released on the album *Hola Amigos...es Don Dean*" (RCA Camden CAL-3159).



Near the end of 1935, the remaining original members of the Don Dean Orchestra (i.e., Los Estudiantes de Hollywood) broke up, with the American members returning to the United States, except Dean who decided to stay in Argentina where he had married Lila Raquel Suárez Howard. All four of their children, three sons and a daughter, would become musicians and do well in the entertainment business. Dean also continued in the music business, including appearing in or contributing music for several films: *Crónica de una señora* (1971 – music); *Native Son* (1951 – acting); and his earliest film *Idolos de la Radio* (1934) in which he acted and sang his most famous composition “Bailando en El Alviar.”



Movie Poster for *Idolos de la Radio*

Idols of the Radio, the film’s title in English, was a compilation of various musical groups and other acts that Argentinians listened to on the radio in the early 1930s. Much of the film’s action takes place in a nightclub, with the film’s conclusion featuring musical performances by the Don Dean Orchestra including Los Estudiantes de Hollywood. Video from this film can be viewed in the following YouTube clip:



In this video clip from *Idolos de la Radio*, you’ll see at 0:22 the nightclub emcee, wearing a white jacket and speaking in Spanish, introduce “Don Dean y sus Estudiantes de Hollywood con el fox trot ‘Bailando en el Alvear’” (“Don Dean and his Hollywood Students with the fox trot ‘Dancing in the Alvear’”).

At 1:14 the camera is back on Dean (speaking in Spanish): “Hello amigos, Don Dean speaking to you. I have the pleasure of presenting the Hollywood Students. Two years ago I came here with five American boys.” The orchestra, a larger group than just the five Estudiantes de Hollywood, begins to play. However, from 1:42 to 1:50, the camera pans the orchestra and focuses on the blond female. Just behind her to the right is the piano player. At 1:50 the camera pans to the middle of the band with the drummer in the background, at which point, from 1:51 to 2:13, the drummer and trumpet player stand up, put on hats, and play some Dixieland, followed just ten seconds later, from 2:24 to 2:43, with the blond (on the left) watching another band member (on the right) playing two clarinets, while the piano player in the background between the blond and the clarinet player watches.

Then, from 2:40 to 2:45, the piano player is seen at the right rear. The three orchestra members – the drummer, trumpet player, and clarinet player – playing Dixieland arrangements most likely were three of the “five American boys” that Dean mentioned that came with him to Argentina two years before as members of Los Estudiantes de Hollywood. Now the question is: Was the piano player seen in this video a young (approximately 23-year old) Martin Weissner?

You also can check out a clearer version of this sequence on a YouTube video of the [complete film](#) beginning at 1:03:14.



In 1997, when Martin looked back on his fellow members of the Don Dean Orchestra that had departed for South America in 1931, he remarked: “Now, I’m the only living member of that group. There was the six of us originally and they’re now all gone” (MD3). But, on a more upbeat note, Martin shared: “I spent 3 & 1/2 years down there and it was one of the great experiences of my life” – “touring in South America had a very powerful influence in my life” (MD3).

Denny’s Return to the States

When the Don Dean Orchestra broke up at the end of 1935, Dean stayed in Argentina to pursue his career there. Martin returned to Los Angeles where he played with several big bands. “I played with a fellow named Giggy Royce. It was a 14-piece band, and it took me a while to get in the swing of things. It was quite a transition for me. Our first engagement was at the Multnomah Hotel in Portland” (MD3). At one point Giggy had lined up an engagement for his band to play in Honolulu. Martin recalled:

Giggy asked me if I wanted to stay with him, because he was going to reform the group in Honolulu. But being that I had just come back from South America, I didn’t want to get lost again for another 3 1/2 years. As far as I was concerned, Hawaii was just a place on a map, you know. Just a place that had hula girls and palm trees (MD3).

So Martin stayed in Los Angeles, playing with different bands until May 27, 1942, the date on which he [enlisted](#) as a private ([military serial #19098920](#)) in the U.S. Army Air Corps, where he “continued his musical career.” Denny recalled:

I was in World War Two. I entered in May of 1942 and was discharged in December of 1945. ... I was stationed just about all over. I started out in Santa Ana, California and then went up to Merced. I was in Special Services in Victorville, California, and I was shipped to Hobbs, New Mexico – very ungodly places, you know. Then I went back and was discharged at Santa Ana and that was it (MD1).

At war’s end, after nearly three-and-a-years (43 months) of service including a tour in Germany and France (MD2), Martin was discharged on December 13, 1945. He returned to Los Angeles and [attended college on the GI Bill](#), studying classical piano and composition under Wesley La Violette at the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music, while continuing to earn some money playing the piano. Later he took music classes at the University of California.

When I got my discharge, I decided I was going to continue my studies and I went at it very seriously. I then enrolled at the **Los Angeles Conservatory**. One of my teachers was **Dr. Wesley La Violette**. He was a distinguished composer, writer and philosopher. He gave me a sense of direction. Then I studied orchestration later with **Arthur Lange**, who taught me the economy of writing for small orchestras (MD1).

During those post-war years, as Martin recalled, he made a bit of a name for himself, playing solo piano at private parties in Hollywood and Las Vegas. "I played with Jimmy Grier who was well-known on most of the West Coast. And in later years, I did a lot of tours, including one with Betty Hutton" (MD3). Indeed, on November 14, 1948, *The Salt Lake Tribune* (p. 37) reported that Betty Hutton would appear at the Salt Lake City Veterans Hospital accompanied by "pianist Martin Weissner and guitarist Hal Belfer."

We did a tour of veteran hospitals. And I also did one with Ruth Warrick. She at one time played the lead in *Citizen Kane*. And then I played a lot of private parties for people like Cary Grant, Kay Francis, Frank Sinatra, people like that. ... And somewhere in between I did several gigs in Las Vegas. I opened the Sands Hotel, just playing piano. That was '53 (MD3).

"When I was in Las Vegas, I played with various bands in showrooms. The band would play on the night off for the local hotel bands and we'd back all the different acts (MD3).

On November 26, 1949, *The Billboard* reported that composer and pianist Martin Weissner had married Maxine Hamilton (press agent) on November 13, 1949, in Victorville, California. But, as Martin shares further below, the marriage would last for only a few years. Based on published records, it is not clear exactly when Martin changed his last name from "Weissner" to "Denny" or why. Perhaps, and this is just speculation, his wife (a press agent) suggested a different last name would spare Martin from anti-Semitism, or be more easily remembered and marketable.

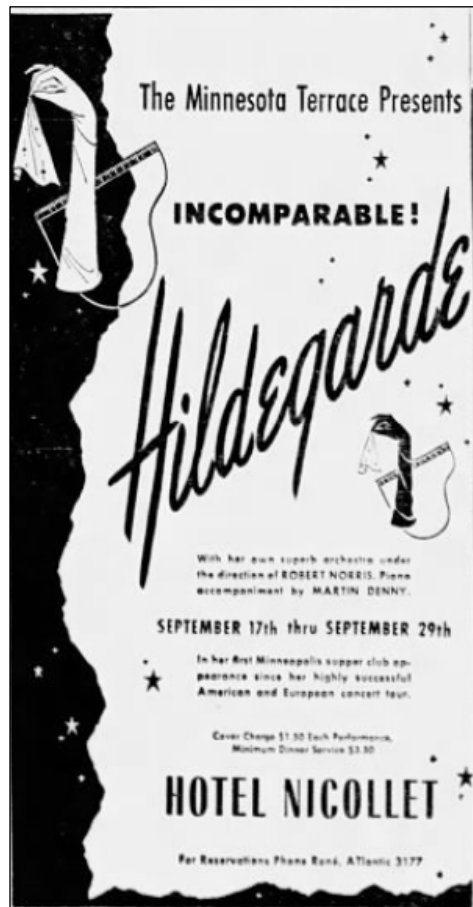
The change of Martin's last name from "Weissner" to "Denny" may have occurred in 1950 (if not earlier). Indeed, as the 1950 Christmas holiday season drew near, the U.S. Government (Department of the Air Force) was making plans for a group of Hollywood entertainers to travel to Europe as "The Hollywood Christmas Caravan" to entertain the American troops in various cities. On December 8, 1950, the *Los Angeles Evening Herald & Express* reported on p. B-8 that the Caravan "is ready to leave for Europe" a week from Monday – 25 swell entertainers to bring holiday cheer to military personnel." The article noted that: "The list is impressive...and includes Martin Denny...."

Interestingly, the Department of the Air Force "Invitational Travel" memo, issued on December 18, 1950, noted the verbal order of the Secretary of the Air Force on 15 December "inviting the following listed personnel, members of the Hollywood Christmas Caravan, to proceed on or about 17 December 1950 from Hollywood to Washington, C.C; Wiesbaden, Germany; Paris, France; and the Azores, on temporary duty for a period not to exceed thirty (30) days for the purpose of entertaining military personnel during the Christmas holidays."

The memo then listed the Caravan's invited members as including "Martin Weissner" who by now was a civilian, having been discharged from the military five years before on December 13, 1945. Yet, on the same day (December 18, 1950) that the "Invitational Travel" memo had been issued, the *Los Angeles Evening Herald & Express*, in reporting on the Caravan, noted that the Caravan's group of "Outstanding Hollywood entertainers" included "Martin Denny." So, during the interim years between when he was discharged from the military in 1945 and his participation in the Caravan in late 1950, Martin at some point began to work as "Martin Denny."

Not long after the Caravan's return to Hollywood on or around January 19, 1951, Martin started a new gig, working as piano accompanist for Hildegard Neff who was a singer and famously known as Hildegard. Over a ten-month period, Martin toured with Hildegard across the U.S. as she performed in Tucson, Phoenix, San Bernardino, Pasadena, San Diego, Fresno, Stockton, Sacramento, The Dalles (Oregon), Portland, Vancouver (Canada), Tacoma,

Spokane, Walla Walla, Boise, Twin Falls, Pueblo, Denver, and Amarillo. In July, Hildegarde and Martin were in Las Vegas, in September in Minneapolis and Iowa, and in October in Chicago at the Edgewater Beach Hotel. The following page provides some clippings announcing upcoming appearances of Hildegarde and Martin Denny.



Star Tribune, Minneapolis, Minnesota, September, 16, 1951, p. F-5



The Courier, Waterloo, Iowa, October 5, 1951, p. 23

Martin Denny Discovers Hawaii

Following the tour with Hildegard, Martin returned to working various gigs in Los Angeles and other locations in California. At the end of 1953, Martin “received a telegram from his friend Bill Howell who was near the end of his contract playing Don The Beachcomber in Waikiki, Hawaii. At the time, Martin was playing with a trio up and down the California coast — and also “was in the midst of a divorce” ([Scott Feemster](#)).

I had a friend, Bill Howell who was playing Don The Beachcomber’s in Waikiki. ... Bill was leaving to play another hotel, and so he recommended me to Don Beach [whose real name was Ernest Raymond Beaumont Gantt (1907-1989)]. I got a wire over Christmas in 1953 from Don, offering me a six-month contract, asking me if I’d be interested in playing the Dagger Bar at his place in Waikiki. ... Well, I was playing at this little place in Eureka with a trio and I wasn’t too happy about it. And so this was very exciting to me. So I was destined to go to Hawaii. So I started at Don The Beachcombers in the first part of January [1954] ([MD3](#)).



Original Don the Beachcomber's (1947-1955)

Denny recalled this period in another interview: “I first came to the Islands in January of 1954 under contract to **Don The Beachcomber** just playing piano. ... I wasn’t identified with the sound I have now because we played straight Jazz. A lot of the arrangements I sounded just like George Shearing” ([MD1](#)). Martin played solo at the Don the Beachcomber for about six or seven months in 1954, during which time he was going through a divorce.

I’d gone to Las Vegas and got the divorce. We’d been married not just 5 years. We parted amicably, but it was kind of rough on her being married to someone who was constantly on the road, and wasn’t making too much progress career-wise. So I got more serious about what I was going to do with my life. ... So I’d been advised by good friends of mine to come back to Hawaii. Oh, I loved Honolulu, playing at a place right on the beach at Waikiki! ([MD3](#)).

After appearing as a solo act at Don The Beachcomber during the first half of 1954, Martin returned to Las Vegas for a while, playing a six-week engagement at the Rancho Vegas. But he reportedly missed Hawaii and returned there to play 5-8 pm in the Surf Room of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. As Denny recalled:

I came back and promoted a job for myself playing at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, in the Surf Room. And after I'd been there several months, Don The Beachcomber asked me if I'd like to come back again. And I said, "Well, under one condition – I'd like to form a group." [as] I was getting bored just playing piano alone. So they agreed, and I decided to come back. So I alternated playing the cocktail hour at the Royal, then I'd run across the street with the group and play (MD3).



Surf Room at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel (Source)

On a personal note, in 1954, Denny met his future wife, Barbara June Ruppert (b: 6/30/1929 – d: 8/13/2001), at Don The Beachcomber, where he was playing solo piano and she was working as a cocktail waitress. They were married in 1956 and their daughter, Christina, was born a year later. In the meantime, by late 1954 or early 1955, Denny had set about organizing his group.

At the time I organized the group, I got two musicians, Arthur Lyman [to play marimba, vibraphone and multiple percussion instruments]...[and]...John Kramer, who worked for the Territory in the accounting department, and he played bass. ... I didn't have any set formula, so I bought a bunch of folio books of George Shearing. We played arrangements like "September In The Rain," "Roses Of Picardy," all of his tunes. We sounded more George Shearing than George!" [but] eventually I left the Royal and concentrated on the gig that I had at Don The Beachcombers (MD3).



Duke Kahanamoku and Martin Denny outside Don the Beachcomber (1955)

“Quiet Village” and the Birth of Exotica

By early 1955 the sound of what later would come to be known as the Martin Denny Group was starting to coalesce, “with Denny using his arranging and orchestration skills to make the small combo sound bigger. At the time, his group, known as the CoCo Combo, began playing at 8 pm in the Dagger Bar Lounge of Don the Beachcomber’s. Denny and his band mates began to make use of the various ethnic instruments Denny had collected over the years, plus native Hawaiian instruments ([Scott Feemster](#)). While Alfred Apaka had been the featured star in the main room at Don the Beachcomber during 1955, Henry J Kaiser was able to lure Apaka away to perform at the new Hawaiian Village Hotel that Kaiser was about to open. Near the end of 1955, as Martin recalled, his Don The Beachcomber contract was about to end. He recalled:

I had asked for a raise for my boys and they turned me down. So I was offered a job by Alfred, who at this time was performing at Henry J. Kaiser’s Hawaiian Village. So Kaiser’s people came down and listened to the group, and liked it very much. We were playing more or less straight jazz. So I agreed to go with him, but just before we left, a fellow came up to us from the audience and asked if he could sit in with us and play bongos. His name was Augie Colón...and Augie must have been about 22 or 23 years old ([MD3](#)).

He was a good-looking Puerto Rican boy, and he played up a storm with me. We played some Latin things, and he got a tremendous hand. I would invite him to come up anytime he wanted to sit in with the group, so he would show up every evening! It really enhanced the group, because we didn’t have a regular drummer. Lyman would play stand-up drums occasionally. So, through my influence I was able to get Augie a job to stay on and play with the group that followed me, [which] I had recommended to Don. We parted good friends, and I told him that I would help him replace my group, when I left. ... So I recommended a jazz player named Bob Laine, who was a very fine pianist. He brought a jazz trio with him, but he didn’t know what to do with Augie when he inherited him. The poor guy was out on a limb, Augie was very unhappy [because] he loved my group. So after we opened at the Hawaiian Village, I was able to prevail upon Alfred Apaka to get him to join the group. That was in 1956 when I added him into the group. At that time, I would break him in gradually just playing Latin tunes. But he wouldn’t sit in with the jazz numbers that we played. He was very flamboyant, he wore these Cuban outfits, but he was very macho and the women really went for him in a big way. Anyway, I started developing this sound” ([MD3](#)).

According to [Enter the Tiki](#),

It was Colón who ignited Denny’s full immersion into the richness of Exotica by introducing him to Les Baxter’s landmark album, *Ritual of the Savage*. Denny was so enthralled that he would go on to adapt and record over two dozens of Baxter’s compositions. The most famous cover was Denny’s adaptation of “Quiet Village,” appearing on his 1957 debut album *Exotica* ([Source](#)).



Denny confirmed the influence of Baxter’s “Quiet Village” in a 1993 interview:

Long before my ["Quiet Village"] record came out, [Baxter had] released an album with that tune on it, a suite called *Le Sacre du Sauvage*. I took at least five or six selections from it; they're imaginative and they fit in with what I did. But he [Baxter] had a big orchestra at his command, whereas I only had five guys, so I had to give "Quiet Village" a different interpretation entirely. As a result, *my* version turned out to be the big record Lex Baxter gets composer's rights, so he's made a fortune off my recordings (MD2).

If you just hear ["Quiet Village"] on record, it sounds like a whole jungle—you don't know how or where any of those sounds originated. But if you hear it "live," then you can see how it's all done, with the percussion instruments. "Quiet Village" has a compulsive jungle rhythm to it; the bass has a hypnotic effect almost like Ravel's *Bolero*. On top of that are layers of exotic percussion, plus the sounds of the vibes, the piano, and (of course) the bird calls. It all adds up to a modern sound that evokes some very *primitive* feelings (MD2).

Denny recalled that his knack for converting American standards into more tropical-sounding tunes came as a result of training in

how to make a small group sound larger than it really was. So I would use a lot of different percussive effects, and then I started collecting instruments from the South Seas and from the Orient, also from Latin America. The music became a quasi-mix of music from the South Pacific, the Orient and South America. We were always experimenting, and trying out new ideas. Of course, that's when we added the birdcalls on "Quiet Village." There was such a tremendous call for it. I kept getting repeat requests for it, I mean, during the course of an evening I had to play that damn thing maybe a dozen times! (MD3).

In another interview, Denny described how he approached arranging and performing Hawaiian songs:

if you read a dull book, you don't get anything out of it. Or if you get something that's too esoteric, you get lost. Hawaiian music per se, some it can be very placid. I added a new dimension by using a Latin beat and instead of using the steel guitar, I substitute the vibes. That was an entirely different sound because the things you always associate with Hawaiian music [are] the steel guitar and the ukulele. Of course, some of the well-known things weren't written by Hawaiians, they were what we call "Hopa Haole" tunes. Like "Sweet Leilani" – **Harry Owens** wrote it and it was a tremendous hit because **Bing Crosby** was crazy about it. ... When I did record Hawaiian music, I tried to do an updated version (MD1).

Denny considered this period of the evolution of his group's sound as a major turning point in his career:

I realized that by using different instruments from the Far East, I could build little arrangements around them. Like for instance, I did a thing called Cobra. It was imaginative. Somebody brought me a flute, like the snake charmers used. And then I got a wicker basket and put a phony snake in it. Then I had a nylon cord attached to it, which went through an eyelet in the ceiling, and I could operate it from the piano. When I pulled the string, it opened up the basket and the snake would come out and start dancing around! Augie had a turban on his head and he was stripped to the waist. He would go through all these motions, playing the cymbals and bongos. My bass player learned how to play the flute. It was that kind of showmanship that started getting us noticed (MD3).

Martin recalled the impact that his University of California orchestration teacher Arthur Lange had on the development of Denny's sound.

Lange...used to write stock arrangements that were played by every band in the country at one time or another. He also wrote serious music and countless movie scores. On an economy basis, he used a twenty-two piece band and made it sound like forty-two. He used color as an analogy to writing moods. He devised a

color chart relating to the notation of different instruments. Starting with a dark blue and light blue, it went up the scale to greens to orange, red to yellow. When you went below the spectrum, you went into indigo, purple, magenta, and colors of that sort. ... The sound of the alto flute, for instance, would fit into a blue spectrum. If you wanted to get a brilliant sound, you'd use maybe trumpet, xylophone, or bells. That influenced me because working with a very small group, I had to be very flexible. My people would double on different instruments. We tried something and if it sounded good, we'd keep it. If it didn't, we'd discard it. It was hit-and-miss until I arrived at the sound that I wanted. People were fascinated watching us move around. If you watch a xylophone player, what attracts you the most is watching his hands flash, whereas other instruments don't attract that much attention. People would say, "Why don't you play more piano?" My reply was I made my success with the sound of a *group*, not as a piano soloist. But there are times, if you listen closely, in which I shine. I think everything we did was an extension of my playing, my thoughts, my musical experience; it's an extension of everything I've done (MD1).

Denny also credited that his knack for showmanship had, in part, been picked up in the course of touring with Hildegarde, an American cabaret singer known for the song "Darling, Je Vous Aime Beaucoup."

I had done a tour with Hildegarde. I was with her for a year and we traveled all over the country, playing the top hotels. I learned a great deal of showmanship from her. I played piano and she had a big traveling orchestra with her. So I played second piano and she paid me \$50 a week extra for coaching her. She was a tremendous star in her own right. I learned a lot about lighting and presentation from her. A lot of it rubbed off on me (MD3).

Denny moved from Don the Beachcomber to the Hilton Hawaiian Village in late 1955, having contracted with Kaiser to open and play The Shell Bar from January 1 to December 31 of 1956. That this gig quickly became a success was recorded in an entry in Denny's diary, "We made a very good impression. We had the best crowd yet and packed the place. Everyone was very pleased with the group" (Christina Denny, personal communication). Indeed, performing in the Shell Bar, Denny's group became a sensation in Hawaii, and word-of-mouth among vacationers, especially among military personnel stationed on Oahu, got them attention back on the mainland, including Liberty Records signing Denny's group to their label in 1956.

It was during Denny's engagement at The Shell Bar that he discovered his trademark sound and the birth of "Exotica" although different sources report slightly different versions of the exact sequence of events leading to this discovery. As reported by Wikipedia, The Shell Bar featured a very exotic setting:

a little pool of water right outside the bandstand, rocks and palm trees growing around, very quiet and relaxed. As the group played at night, Denny became aware of bullfrogs croaking. The croaking blended with the music and when the band stopped, so did the frogs. He thought it was a coincidence at first, but when he tried the tune [reportedly the song "Quiet Village"] again later, the same thing happened. This time, his band mates began doing all sorts of tropical birdcalls as a gag. The band thought it nothing more than a joke. The next day, someone approached Denny and asked if he would do the arrangement with the birds and frogs. He agreed. At rehearsal, he had the band do "Quiet Village" with each doing a birdcall spaced apart. Denny did the frog part on a grooved cylinder and the whole thing became incorporated into the arrangement of "Quiet Village." It sold more than one million copies, and was awarded a gold disc (Source).



The Pond with the Croaking Frogs outside The Shell Bar of the Hawaiian Village Hotel



Feemster reports the following similar but slightly different version:

While playing at the Shell Bar, outside near a pool of water, rocks, palm trees and plants, Denny noticed that the bullfrogs that lived in the planters and ponds around the bar would start croaking whenever the band played. If the band stopped, so too did the frogs stop. When Denny was orchestrating what would become the group's first big hit song, "Quiet Village" (a Les Baxter [see vignette] composition), he kept in mind the frogs and also had each of the members of the band recreate bird calls throughout the song, giving the aural impression of walking through a verdant tropical jungle and stumbling upon a band playing a quietly enchanting tune. When it came time to record their debut album, *Exotica* (Liberty) in late 1956, Denny recreated the sound of the frogs on a grooved cylinder ([Scott Feemster](#)).

Denny recounts the following version of how he hit upon the "sounds of Exotica":

“The song was purely accidental,” [Denny] said. “I was opening at the Shell Bar at the old Hawaiian Village (now the Hilton Hawaiian Village), and we played [“Quiet Village”] and inserted bird calls. “There was a pond of water near the band, and whenever we played the selection, bufos were croaking, ‘Ribbet, ribbet, ribbet.’ When I stopped playing, they stopped croaking. It was a coincidence. When we started up again, adding the birdcalls, the croaking would resume. Cracked me up.” When [Denny] recorded “Quiet Village,” he incorporated birdcalls by Colón and imitated the frog sound by rubbing a coin on a guiro, a grooved cylinder. The track first appeared on the *Exotica* album on Liberty Records, and when it caught on, [a later Denny album recorded in stereo] was [titled] *Quiet Village*. Both albums made the Billboard charts in 1959; a single, “Quiet Village,” peaked at No. 4 ([Source](#)).

Over a dozen years earlier, in 1993, Denny provided the following summary of how his “sound” evolved:

When I was quite young I went to South America with a six-piece band... As a result [of traveling there] you can detect a lot of Latin rhythmic signatures in my music. If you take Hawaiian music alone, it lulls you to sleep—whereas Latin has exciting rhythms; it has a *beat*!

When I started my group I didn’t limit myself to Hawaiian songs; I used popular tunes as well as ones I’d composed. My group included piano (I’m the pianist), vibes, bass, drums, and Latin percussion. Everybody doubled on their instruments; the vibe person played marimba and bells (or whatever), and I leaned heavily on this interplay of percussion. Together we achieved the “Martin Denny sound,” which was a blend of all these instruments. And the *hook* was these exotic bird calls. ...

[Vale: Who thought of that?]

Well, I did—I put ‘em in there! But it began quite accidentally. I opened at the Shell Bar in Henry J. Kaiser’s Hawaiian Village in 1956. By this time we had four people including Arthur Lyman on vibes (later replaced by Julius Wechter, who went on to form the Baja Marimba Band) and Augie Colón (who did the bird calls) on bongos and congas. The Hawaiian Village was a beautiful open-air tropical setting. There was a pond with some very large bullfrogs right next to the bandstand. One night we were playing a certain song and I could hear the frogs going [deep voice], “*Rivet! Rivet! Rivet!*” When we stopped playing, the frogs stopped croaking, I thought, “Hmm—is that a coincidence?” So a little while later I said, “Let’s repeat that tune,” and sure enough the frogs started croaking again. And as a gag, some of the guys spontaneously starting doing these bird calls. Afterwards we all had a good laugh: “Hey, that was fun!” But the following day one of the guests came up and said, “Mr. Denny, you know that song you did with the birds and the frogs? Can you do that again?” I said, “What are you talking about?”—then it dawned on me he’d thought that was part of the arrangement.

At the next rehearsal I said, “Okay, fellas, how about if each of you does a different bird call? I’ll do the frog...” (I had this grooved cylindrical gourd called a guiro, and by holding it up to the microphone and rubbing a pencil in the grooves, it sounded like a frog). We played it the next night, and all evening people kept coming up and saying, “We want to hear the one with the frogs and the birds again!” We must have played that tune *thirty* times. It turned out to be “Quiet Village.”

As a result of playing in that tropical setting, I began to incorporate instruments from the South Pacific and the Orient into our act. We’d build a different arrangement around each instrument, experimenting to give each tune a different feel. Gradually the sound evolved. After a year I was ready to do *Exotica*, and I got a silver record for that—it sold about 400,000 LPs. ...

Part of the reason my records caught on was that *stereo* had just appeared on the market, with its amazing separation into right and left channels. People were interested in sound *per se*—and that included my so-called “exotic” sound. I guess I just happened to be there at the right time. ...

Plus, the people I worked with represented different ethnic groups. My bass player, Harvey Ragsdale [who replaced John Kramer], was Chinese-English-Hawaiian. My bongo player, Augie Colón, was Puerto-Rican. My first vibes man was Arthur Lyman who was part Hawaiian. My drummer was Chinese; sometimes I had people who were Korean. Visually this was a distinctive-looking group and they were all talented musicians (MD2).

Denny described the music his combo played as a perfect complement to the exotic setting of Hawaii.

Actually a lot of what I’m doing is just window-dressing familiar tunes. I can take a tune like “Flamingo” and give it a tropical feel, in my style. In my arrangement of a Japanese farewell song, “Sayonara,” I included a Japanese three-stringed instrument, the *shamisen*. We distinguished each song by a different ethnic instrument, usually on top of a semi-jazz or Latin beat. Even though it remained familiar, each song would take on a strange, exotic character (MD2).

Essentially I was lucky to have a big *laboratory* where I could experiment: I was playing in a very exotic setting with a captive audience! People would come in off the street to have a *mai-tai*, and what we played seemed to blend in with the tropical drinks. I tried a lot of sound experiments; if it was good I kept it; if it wasn’t, I dropped it. And the musicians I had would go along with whatever I suggested. After a while it all started to sound perfectly logical. I thought, “Let’s keep it this way!” Whereas most musicians just want to play straight jazz.... I didn’t accomplish this all by myself; everyone I worked with contributed their own personality and know-how. I never took credit for their talent, but I do take credit for *directing* their talent . . . for working within their limitations, organizing and putting the sounds in the right place (MD2).

Further, airline colleagues returning to Hawaii from overseas trip gifted Denny strange and exotic instruments that facilitated Denny amassing a diverse collection of musical instruments that he used to build song arrangements with musical rhythms and sounds from the South Pacific, the Orient, and Latin America, adding spice to his group’s performances on stage and in his recordings. “The airlines also played Dad’s music and aired various interviews” (Christina Denny, personal communication). Even Denny would keep an eye out to collect a new exotic instrument. For example, as he recalled in one interview:

I was browsing at one of those decorator’s galleries in Los Angeles—interior decorators are always looking for something a little novel—and there it [a 200-pound New Guinea talking drum] was. Immediately I thought of fitting it into the next album, which we were going to title *Primitiva*—primitive, in other words. When I told the fellow who owned the shop what I wanted to do, he got very enthusiastic—he didn’t even charge me for using it. All he wanted was a credit, which I gave him on the album. [The album credit reads: “We acknowledge the assistance of Franklin Galleries, Los Angeles, Calif; loan of garamut, primitive New Guinean log drum.”]

They had to lug that thing up to the studio. It had once been used for primitive rituals; the way you struck it had a sexual connotation. That was the one and only time I ever used that particular drum. For better or worse, I used all these really weird instruments just for effect—to make an impact (MD2).

In the same interview, Denny shared the back story on John Sturges, the well-known film director (*The Old Man and the Sea*, *Bad Day at Black Rock*, and *Last Train from Gun Hill*), who wrote the liner notes for Denny's *Quiet Village* (1959) album:

Knowing that I was interested in strange musical instruments, [Sturges] told me he was going to Burma to shoot the background for a film with Frank Sinatra titled *Never So Few*. I told him, "John, if you come across anything interesting, would you get it for me? Whatever it costs, I'll reimburse you." And he said, "Don't worry about *that*; I'll just keep my eyes open."

At the time—I think this was 1958—I had just finished a tour and flown back from New York City to Los Angeles. In New York I had received a cable from him that said, "I have sent you some *goodies*—I hope you like them." When I checked in at the recording studio, there were two very large packing cases addressed to me. Well, the cases were so big that I couldn't open them there, so I had them shipped back to my home in Honolulu. They turned out to be *crammed* with different types of Burmese gongs, drums, little brass instruments—everything under the sun.

It turned out that Sturges had climbed this sacred mountain to shoot background scenes at the top, and there was a Buddhist temple surrounded by little shops selling all kinds of musical instruments. He couldn't speak Burmese and they couldn't speak English, but he was able to buy up these instruments like he was in a candy store: "Gimme six of these; I'll take a dozen of those . . ." In order to get them down the mountainside, he hired a procession of monks in saffron robes—can you visualize that? When they arrived at the bottom, there was a VIP being shown around; it was marshal Tito of Yugoslavia.

Sturges got permission to take the instruments out of the county—they're classified as primitive art—and that's how I ended up with a matching collection of eight beautiful gongs that vary in diameter from 10-14 inches. I sued to have them strung together in order of ascending size, and I would play them like a scale. They gave out these wonderful sounds. There was another set of seven solid brass gongs—the largest weighed 70 pounds—and yet another set of even smaller ones. There was also a marvelous collection of Burmese drums.

Unfortunately, somebody burglarized our house and stole part of that collection. I don't think they knew what they were doing—they were probably some *delinquents*. I still have most of the collection; eventually I'll give it to the University of Hawaii. It's too valuable—in fact it's irreplaceable; it's an extraordinary collection. And Sturges charged me only for the freight, which came to about \$300. Today, each one of those instruments is worth more than \$300!

I used all sorts of percussive instruments—that became the signature of the group. And there's no musical notation system for these exotic drums and gongs. We used what is called a "head arrangement," just trial and error. So if a musician came up with a certain effect I liked, I'd say, "Okay, let's use that; remember how you did it." And you'd hope that the musician could duplicate it next time. So . . . there's no orchestra in the world that can sit down and duplicate that sound, because they don't have the instruments—they don't even know how the sound was made. That's what makes my recordings unique. I never thought about it at the time, but now I look back and realize, "hey, that *is* one-of-a-kind. Where are you going to find somebody who has a collection of those same Burmese gongs?" (MD2)

Wherever I played, I consciously tried to enhance the setting. For instance, to hide the metal tubes of the vibraphone, I built a bamboo frame around it and stretched tapa cloth across, so that if a photo is taken, you

don't see a modern-looking vibraphone. That's showmanship—in *any* presentation, the costuming and the background are very important (MD2).

Another of Denny's flairs for showmanship was the special shirts that the group members wore during their performances. Denny recalled that the shirts were especially designed for the group.

We wanted Polynesian designs that looked natural on us. They were very sharp looking. One thing that I believed was that we should look well-groomed and that was our uniform. So then we cultivated relationships with a lot of the air traffic personnel, like pilots and stewardesses. They would bring me back instruments, and I would work up little arrangements around them. I realized that the crowd we were playing for was a real melting pot. So I would cater to the tastes of the people who came in who were Filipino, Portuguese, Puerto Rican, you name it. We had a great following in the military, and we cultivated many friends (MD3).



The Martin Denny Group in Their Polynesian Design Shirts



Denny's Shift from Henry J. Kaiser to Liberty Records

It was during 1956 that the editor of the *Honolulu Advertiser* recommended the Martin Denny group to a talent manager. As Denny recalled, while appearing at the Shell Bar during October 1956:

I was introduced to Arnie Mills, of the management firm of Gabbe, Lutz and Heller, one of the giants in show business. Some of their accounts were Liberace, Lawrence Welk, Margaret Whiting, and Mel Tormé. Mills had heard my group and was impressed—he wanted to sign us up, and painted a glowing future for me. I felt this was the opportunity I had been waiting for: to finally get a crack at “the big time.”

I talked to Alfred Apaka, who was the featured attraction at the Tapa Room next to the Shell Bar. Alfred was enormously popular and the darling of the Kaisers. He was also the entertainment director who had originally signed me up to play at the Village. He wished me luck, and said he would break the news to Henry J. Kaiser: that I planned on leaving the Village when my contract expired on December 31, 1956. Shortly thereafter Alfred told me that I had the blessing of Henry J. and that he hoped we could work out return engagements.

Of course I was elated. I had a contract made up offering Arthur Lyman (vibes) and John Kramer (bass) each 25% interest in any profits we made over basic union wages. I later included Augie Colón (percussion, bird calls) who was the newest member of the group, and gave him a 10% interest. The agreement was to hold good as long as they remained in the group.

However, all this changed when Henry J. wanted to record the group without my permission (my management firm had planned to sign me to Liberty Records). I refused, and the following day was read the “riot act” in his office in the presence of my group. Henry J. accused me of disloyalty, and showered me with a barrage of intimidation. He demanded I cancel the contract with my new management, telling my boys that he had great plans for the group and that I was ruining their future—that I was an *ingrate*. He carried on this tirade for a half-hour, browbeating and humiliating me. I could not get a word in edgewise.

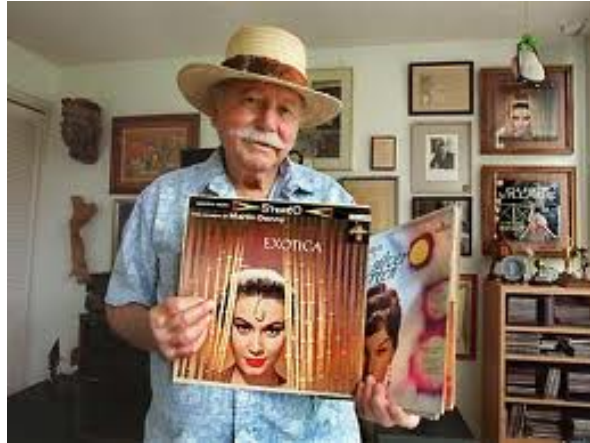
I was stunned at his outburst. The truth of the matter was that he didn't want us to leave, as he had a good thing going for him: the Shell Bar was sold out every evening. I finally asked if I could have a word with my boys privately. They told me they were with me all the way, and whatever I decided, they would go along with my decision.

I told Henry J. my decision was still the same. At this point he told me he was going to follow my career *very closely*, which I interpreted as a threat. Henry J. was a billionaire tycoon used to having his way, and later I was told that I'd received the fully Henry J. *treatment* (when he wanted something). He could be ruthless when he wanted things his way.

That same month I was married to my present wife, June. For over two months until the end of my contract I was cold-shouldered by all the employees (including Alfred Apaka) by orders of Kaiser. No one spoke to me, and any requests I made were ignored or treated with rudeness. It was hard on us, and I did have misgivings and self-doubt about my future, as well as my boys. This was one of the most important decisions I ever made—but I never regretted it, even though the next few years were tough and it was all I could do to keep the group together (MD2).

Wirth Arnold Mills, the associate manager at Gabbe, Lutz and Heller, becoming Denny's manager, the contract that Denny signed with Mills included:

an arrangement with Liberty Records [who] went along with it because they were sold on the idea of us. Si Waronker had heard some of the tapes, and he thought that they had a very exotic quality. He was the one who came up with the idea of calling it *Exotica*! And so in late 1956 I recorded at ...Webley Edwards' studios. He was the only one at that time that had Hi-Fi studio equipment. So [on November 4, 1956] we did the entire album in one session. All I had was an allowance of \$850 to do it. I was 20 minutes short and I had to beg the engineer, Bob Lang to go overtime for us. When the album was released it sold 400,000 LPs at the suggested price of \$4.95 ([MD3](#)).



Denny's first LP album on Liberty Records, *Exotica*, was released in 1957, and would rise to No. 1 on the charts for 13 consecutive weeks, with sales of over 400,000 and earning a Silver Platter (Christina Denny, personal communication). One week, Martin Denny's *Exotica* outsold many of the other top American artists of the day, including the soundtrack LP for the TV show *77 Sunset Strip* (#9), Mitch Miller (*Folk Songs with Mitch*) and Ray Conniff (*Hollywood in Rhythm*) tied at #7, Henry Mancini (*More Peter Gunn*) and Frank Sinatra (*Look to Your Heart*) tied at #5, *Gigi* (Soundtrack) at #4, the Kingston Trio's third album (*At Large*) at #3, and Henry Mancini's *Peter Gunn* at #2.

As Denny neared completing his contract with Kaiser close to the end of 1956, he signed a new contract to perform at Don the Beachcomber (which later became Duke Kahanamoku's) in the International Market Place, the venue for Denny's later (1962) album that would be titled *Martin Denny in Person – Recorded Live from Duke Kahanamoku's in Honolulu*.



Former International Market Place in Waikiki ([Source](#))

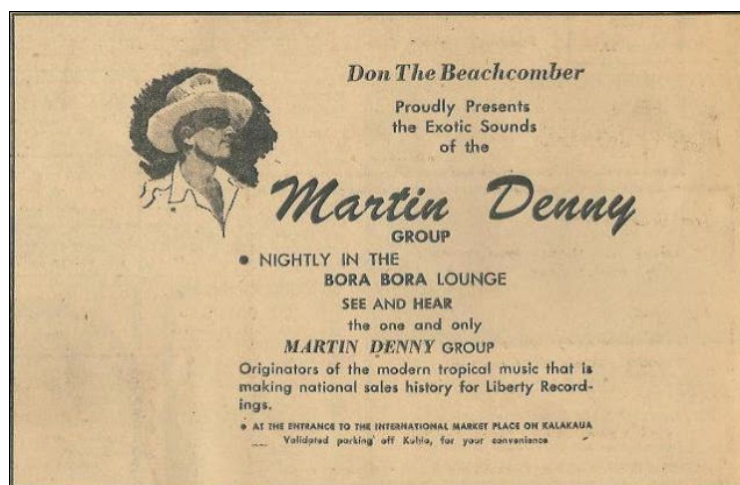
Denny recalled his years working at Don the Beachcomber's:

I appeared at [Don's] place for about seven years; it later became known as Duke Kahanamoku's in Honolulu. They had a fantastic stage setting with a huge overhead fan that moved sideways. People would ask, "What makes that thing move?" and the waiters would kid, "A little man up there turns the handle." There was a huge piece of tapa cloth that moved from side to side, creating an almost hypnotic effect (MD2).

[Don the Beachcomber] created the illusion [of tiki culture]; he was a great showman. He had brought back literally thousands of artifacts from his travels, and when you walked into his restaurant it was like entering a different world—Polynesia, with all these tiki figures, palm fronds, sea shells and everything you associate with Polynesian thatched huts. And people loved it. The food he served added to the illusion: more or less Cantonese dinners plus a few Polynesian dishes, which to most Americans then were quite exotic. Many of the drinks were unique, rum-based concoctions he'd invented himself. Don himself was very colorful—he always wore a bush jacket, khaki shorts and long stockings like he'd just come off a safari. He wore a hat, always had a cheroot in his mouth, and had a little moustache—he looked like a British Colonel. During his lifetime he entertained kings, astronauts, con artists and stars—he's mentioned in a book called *Rascals in Paradise*. I was inspired just by being surrounded by all his artifacts, which my music *adapted* to! (MD2)



Don Beach



Don the Beachcomber

Denny Reconfigures His Group

After departing the Shell Bar at the end of 1956 to perform at Don the Beachcomber, Denny's "boys" stayed with him up to a point.

Henry J. Kaiser was very upset about my leaving, because I had been doing so well at the Shell Bar. We had been cramming the place every night. So he really put the pressure on me, he didn't want me to leave. But it was one of the most important decisions I ever had to make in my life. I was giving up so-called security. He tried everything he could do to break up my group. Eventually, he did get two members. He got Arthur Lyman, who was my vibe man [and John Kramer who played bass] (MD3).

As Denny recalled, after playing at Don the Beachcomber for several months,

I was made aware that Henry J. Kaiser had been surreptitiously sending his staff to court Arthur Lyman, my vibes man. Arthur gave notice, and informed me he was leaving in November. He took my bass man (John Kramer) and formed his own group. Later, I found out that he had been rehearsing with his group even *before* giving me notice. So Henry J. finally got his way—he wanted Arthur to play the Shell Bar with a presentation identical to mine. That way he thought he could get back at me, and break up my group (MD2).

However, Kaiser "didn't break my spirit" and "Augie Colón remained loyal to me and stayed with me for over eight years" (MD2). But the departure of Denny's vibe player (Lyman) and bassist (Kramer) started Denny searching for their replacements.

So I went to the mainland on a couple of quick trips, and I heard several vibe men and I got wind of Julius Wechter through his former teacher who I contacted. This teacher told me that he had a student who was very promising. When I spoke to Julius first on the phone I asked him what instruments he had. He didn't have a Deagan, a good enough instrument. That made me kind of leery, because a musician should have a good instrument. So I auditioned some other people, but I still hadn't committed myself. Then I got a letter from Julius, who was only 2 years out of high school and was working for Lockheed or someplace as a timekeeper. He sent me a nice letter that said if I hired him, he promised that he'd be a great asset to me. It was a very nice letter. So I said 'okay,' and so I hired him. He came to Hawaii with his wife and little boy. I thought he was a great asset, he had tremendous ability (MD3).

Julius Wechter...turned out to be the best choice I could ever have made. He was only 22 at the time, and brought his wife Cissie and their infant David to Hawaii with him. Julius was extremely talented, both as performer and arranger, and played a large part in the group's development. I also added (on bass) Harvey Ragsdale, who came from Hilo on the big island. (MD2)

When Lyman announced that he was going to leave, Denny recalled, "I said okay, I would have to replace him. But I was a little upset about the manner in which he left, because he was going back to the Shell Bar, which I had opened. Henry J. Kaiser wanted the same kind of sound. So actually, when Arthur went back there, he was a carbon copy of me" (MD3).

Denny added that there had been "certain disagreements between us. But we still have 'Aloha' for one another, and [as of the time of this interview with Denny in 1997] I see him quite frequently. Although at the time, I was a little resentful of the things that were happening" (MD3). One thing that bothered Denny, as he recalled, was Lyman becoming Denny's competition:

Arthur Lyman made a reputation and career and followed my style, thanks to Henry J. This created a rivalry between us as to “who came first: the chicken or the hen?” Arthur’s wife, Marie, who acted as his manager, caused a great deal of unpleasantness. Eventually they divorced and Arthur was discouraged enough to drop out of performing (MD2).

It was like they were going down the same path as I was. But there is no animosity now, as far as I’m concerned. So after he told me he was leaving, I had to go through a major change and find someone to replace him. (MD3).

The Martin Denny Group on Tour & Television



Martin Denny Group Plays "Quiet Village" on *Hawaii Calls*

During 1957, with the success of “Quiet Village” and *Exotica* on the music charts, Martin Denny and his group made appearances at venues from Honolulu to Las Vegas to Chicago and other locales in addition to many of the popular television shows of the day such as *The Bing Crosby TV Show* (3/20/57) and *The Tennessee Ernie Ford Show* (3/27/57). Denny recalled his first tour:

My first tour was on the West Coast of California. We played for the Pebble Beach Crosby Open Golf party, and this marked our first appearance on the mainland. We were sponsored by the legendary Francis II Brown and Winona Love who kept residence there, as well as in Honolulu. His family had once owned what is now Pearl Harbor, and he was a great sportsman and golfer; we were introduced to the elite of the golfing world.

We were a big hit and from there we opened at the new Royal Nevada Hotel in Las Vegas. Word had gotten around of our “exotic sound” and many of the entertainers on the strip came to hear us, including Xavier Cugat. The Sands Hotel used “Quiet Village” as the theme for a stage presentation. While there we were rear-ended by a hit-and-run driver, and June, who was pregnant, almost aborted our baby—this was very traumatic for both of us. Our group played several resorts and finally returned to Las Vegas to play at the Flamingo Hotel. We played behind the bar on a slowly revolving stage, and by the time we’d made a complete cycle the audience would be all new faces. What was funny was the gambling bosses sending us messages to “Knock off the bird calls!” as they distracted the gamblers (MD2).

When these appearances ended, Denny’s group had not lined up any further bookings. Denny recalled:

In desperation, I cabled Don the Beachcomber and told him we were free and could he use us? To my relief, he wired back that he wanted us to open as soon as possible. I had to leave June behind as she couldn't travel and was expecting the baby any moment. When I got back to Honolulu I was fortunate in finding an older house on 1/8 of an acre that had just about every kind of plant indigenous to Hawaii: a mango tree loaded with fruit, papaya, avocados, figs, bananas, limes, and coconuts. It also had tropical flowers, ginger, red and yellow plumeria trees, Vanda orchids, wood roses and a large breadfruit tree, plus a lawn. The property took up the corner of the block it was located on, and was surrounded by shrubs that were 12 feet high.

Our baby was born in Los Angeles on August 6, 1957. I wasn't able to see her until three weeks later, when June was well enough to travel. We named her Christina Gwen and called her Tina. (MD2)

In 1958 Denny's group also appeared on Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* (1958), the hottest TV show in the United States for teenagers, and on Webley Edwards' *Hawaii Calls*. As Denny recalled, "I rode the charts of *Billboard*, *Cashbox*, and *Variety*; 'Quiet Village' was number One for 13 consecutive weeks. I had as many as three or four albums on the charts simultaneously" (MD2). Denny went back to the studio in 1958 to re-record "Quiet Village" in stereo as well as the other songs on his first album (*Exotica*), with Julius Wechter on vibes, the birdcalls vocalized by Augie Colón, and Denny mimicking a croaking frog by rubbing a stick across a grooved cylinder.

By 1959 the two-year old *Exotica*, now re-recorded in stereo, was getting a lot of airplay and by mid-1959 was a full-fledged craze, eventually reaching the top of the album charts (selling 400,000 copies), with "Quiet Village" becoming a Top-5 hit. "Hawaiian statehood that summer and America's love of the islands were tied to the music of the era; *Exotica*, spearheaded by...Martin Denny" (Source).

Augie Colón was the acknowledged master of the bird sounds—he was terrific. ... [He did] them with his mouth. When he was a youngster he used to go hunting in the jungle; he'd hear all these birds and was able to imitate them. You know, a lot of people say, 'How come Martin Denny doesn't do any bird calls?' I personally don't do any—I can give a poor imitation of a *parrot*, but that wasn't my 'thing' But to this day, wherever I go people ask me to play "Quiet Village." I can play the damn thing on piano, but I can't do the bird calls ... so I say, 'C'mon everybody; *join in!* Be my guest—you be the bird!' Sometimes the record company would pressure me to include even more sounds—overkill, you know. I began to resent it; my feeling was: 'I'm not selling bird calls—I'm selling music!'" (MD2)



“I had a running gag I would use; when people asked if we used live birds on our records, my reply would be, ‘No—we come up with sounds for which there are no birds.’ Augie Colón was the acknowledged master of the bird sounds—he was terrific” (MD2).

In 1958, a UK TV documentary, *The Air Conditioned Eden* (see first video below), examined the 1950s Tiki pop phenomena, including an interview with Martin Denny and excerpts from Denny’s appearance on *The Dinah Shore Show* (see second video below).



Martin Denny Appearance on *The Air Conditioned Eden*



Martin Denny Appearance on *The Dinah Shore Show*

At his career height, Denny had three or four albums simultaneously on the *Billboard*, *Cashbox*, and *Variety* best-seller charts, while actively touring the United States, performing in every major city. In addition to “Quiet Village,” Denny had national hits with “Martinique” (#88 in 1959), “The Enchanted Sea” (#28 in 1959), and “A Taste of Honey” (#50 in 1962). “It was Dad’s version of ‘A Taste of Honey,’” notes Christina, “that made it popular – just like ‘Quiet Village.’” Also, when Disneyland opened, Denny’s music was used for The Tiki Room and the Jungle River Boat.

When Denny and his group returning to Don the Beachcomber in early 1957, the group’s popularity continued to flourish, with the venue being frequented by celebrities and military servicemen, as Denny recalled:

Don The Beachcomber was the central place of entertainment. It was across the street from the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in the heart of Waikiki. **William Holden**, for instance, was a fan of mine. **Henry Fonda** would come in **Walter Winchell**, **Ethel Merman** – there were all sorts of celebrities that came constantly. When my recordings first came out, a lot of [servicemen] from all branches of the services bought my records. The submarine forces of the Navy played them quite a bit and when they shipped out, they took their records with them and spread the word. I had a big following in the armed forces, which contributed to

my early success. . . . when I was playing at the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas...I came into contact with all the stars at the Sands like **Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Sammy Davis, Jr.** They all came to listen to me and I got to know them personally (MD1).

Over the next few years, the Martin Denny group also continued to travel and release new albums. After Wechter worked with Denny for four years, he decided to go out on his own but, stated Denny, “he had my blessing and he felt that he wanted to go to the mainland. The rest is history” (MD3) as Wechter went on to join Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass and later formed his own group, the Baja Marimba Band.

So, along the way, with musicians in his group moving on, Denny had to make “a number of personnel changes” – at one point Harvey Ragsdale replaced Kramer, with a second percussionist (Harold Chang) added soon after. Denny recalled: “We traveled a lot on the Mainland, but we came back every 12 weeks because the guys had their families here [in Hawaii].” Despite these changes, noted Denny, “my style of music remained the same. But it started advancing and eventually started getting into other styles of music” (MD3).

“The Exotica Girl” – Those Sandy Warner Album Covers

“Quiet Village” and the *Exotica* LP launched “The Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny,” though the first LP (*Exotica*) named the artist as “The Sounds of Martin Denny” while the next LP (*Exotica Volume II*) identified the artist as “The Exciting Sounds of Martin Denny.” It was the third LP (*Forbidden Island*) that first identified the artist as “The Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny” and paved the way for the many Exotica-flavored LPs that followed. Fortuitously, each of Denny’s first twelve or so Liberty album jackets featured Sandy Warner in an alluring pose on the album cover as “The Exotica Girl” (see gallery below). The jacket covers illustrated the ability of makeup artists and cover designers to come up with an album cover that caught the record buyer’s eye and motivated the purchase of Denny’s albums.

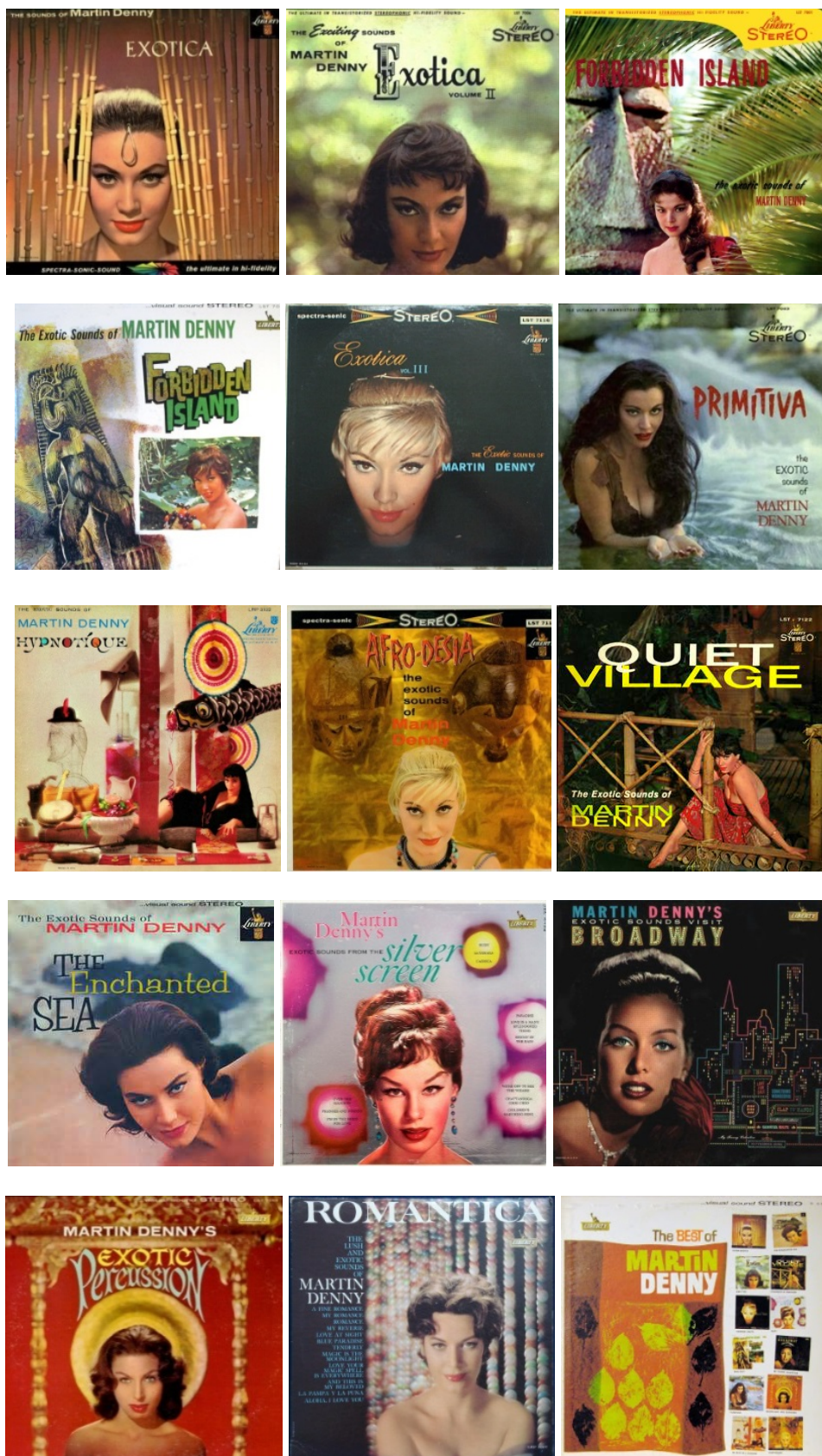
But listening to the music on these albums proved even better than what any jacket design could promise. Interestingly, Christina recalls, “Dad had no say so on the covers or the art work” but, as Denny recalled, Sandy Warner

was a stunning model, extremely photogenic. She posed for at least the first dozen albums I did. They always changed her looks to fit the mood of the package. For instance, we called one album with an African sound *Afro-desia*, and for some reason Sandy dyed her hair blonde for the photo session; she’s seen against a background of colorful African masks. When we did *Hypnotique*, which is surrealistic, she had dark hair. For *Primitiva* she was photographed standing waist-deep in water. The story I heard was that she was very uncomfortable because there were fish darting between her legs and tickling her feet. Also it was really cold—the photo was taken up at Lake Arrowhead. . . . None of the photos for the albums were ever shot in Hawaii; they were all done in Hollywood (MD2).

Denny often shared an interesting story that he never had any contact with Warner or any of his albums’ art work, noting that

I guess a lot of people bought the album[s] on the strength of her pictures. . . . Later on, she did an album and I did the liner notes for her. Steve Allen produced it, and nothing came of it. . . . I finally did get to see her. She came to Hawaii and sat in the audience right in front of the stage. After my performance, she sort of waved at me to come over. I walked over to her table, and it turned out that she was on her honeymoon. But I didn’t know who she was. Then she said, “You and I have a lot in common.” And I said “Oh, really? What’s that?” She said, “Well, I’m the girl on your album covers!” I looked at her, and said, “My God, you’re right!” . . . But that’s the one and only time I ever met her (MD3).

A gallery of the Sandy Warner covers for Martin Denny's albums is presented below.



A Gallery of Martin Denny's Exotica-Themed Album Covers Featuring Sandy Warner

Denny's early Exotica-themed albums also featured liner notes written by a number of famous people at the time. As Denny recalled, "I had some very prominent people doing the liner notes for me...the one that I treasure most is James A. Michener. He was pretty sincere. There was also [composer] Ferde Grofé, [film director John] Sturges, [and Hollywood columnist] Louella Parsons" (MD3). Even, as Denny noted, Les Baxter "did the liner notes on one of my albums" (MD3).

In 1958, Denny's group (with Wechter replacing Lyman) re-recorded in stereo "Quiet Village" and the other songs on the original mono *Exotica* album, with this stereo version issued in 1959. "Quiet Village" (now in stereo) became a #2 hit on the pop singles charts and *Exotica* #1 on the album charts. Though his music was innovative for the time,

Denny was also riding the crest of America's fascination with the South Pacific and Hawaii in particular, as 1959 was the year Hawaii was admitted to the United States as the 50th state. The late 50's was also the time when stereo was being introduced to replace mono, and Denny's lush-sounding records were the perfect demonstration of the new sound separation stereo offered (Scott Feemster).



The Martin Denny Group, c. 1961

L to R: Martin Denny, Harvey Ragsdale, Augie Colón, Julius Wechter, and Frank Kim





**The Martini Denny Group
with tiki in Maui, from
bottom: Martin Denny,
Harvey Ragsdale, Julius
Wechter, Augie Colon.**



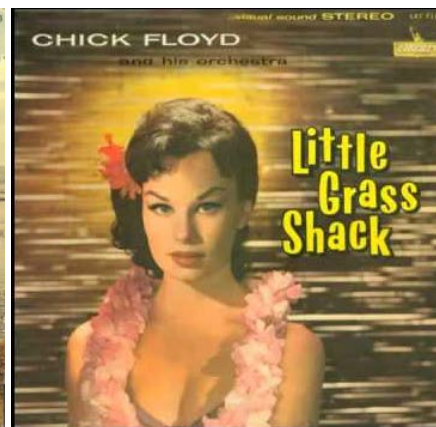
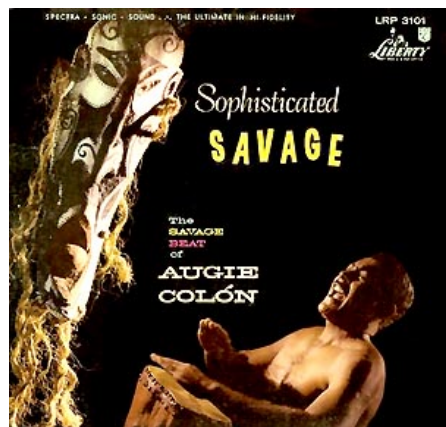
Julius Wechter, Harvey Ragsdale, Martin Denny, Augie Colón, and Frank Kim



The Martin Denny Group in Waikiki (1964)

Denny's Mentoring of Younger Musicians

With Denny's albums selling well, he persuaded Liberty to record albums by Denny-endorsed younger musicians, including Augie Colón, Chick Floyd, and Ethel Azama (see Paul Conrad vignette).





Denny's Relationship with Les Baxter

Denny first met Les Baxter in May 1958 at the Interlude in Hollywood. As Denny shared, “he gave me some other compositions he wanted me to record. Later, somebody claimed that he had put me down because I’d used bird calls on my recordings.... Ironically, years later I got a letter from him asking if I would send him a tape of my bird calls!”—he was recording something and wanted to use them!” (MD2)

Denny’s “exotica” twist on Les Baxter’s “Quiet Village” definitely boosted Denny’s career. Denny recalled how his success with Baxter’s “Quiet Village” affected his relationship with Baxter:

In 1976 I gave a concert in the Waikiki Shell for the Bicentennial. I used approximately a hundred people---two of my original groups, a symphony orchestra, a jazz group and a choral group—and presented a whole program of my selections. I invited Les Baxter, and he was guest conductor on “Quiet Village” and other numbers he had composed. ...his material was just perfect for *me*, and I in turn helped *him*, because a lot of people discovered Les Baxter as a result of my recordings (MD2).

However, in a later interview, Denny shared that he thought:

there was a little resentment on [Baxter’s] part that he wasn’t too happy that I was getting all this credit for a performance of “Quiet Village.” People always associated it with me, as being the writer, which I denied vehemently. I always gave him credit for everything he ever did. At first, he denigrated the birdcalls, but later on I got a request from him, asking if I would send him a tape of birdcalls! But he was a friend; he was a guest in my home. I had an amiable relationship with him (MD3).

In another interview, Denny spoke further about how his cover of Baxter’s “Quiet Village” affected his relationship with Baxter:

The minute you hear those particular notes, it identifies “Quiet Village” ... G, C, G, B-flat – that’s it. **Les Baxter** wrote that and I duly gave him credit. I’ve heard from different sources he was miffed because many people identify me as having written “Quiet Village,” which I deny; I give full credit to Les Baxter. He’s miffed that I’ve gained popularity due to performing his works. If anything, I think he would be flattered. Every composer would like artists to record their music ... [Baxter has] written for pictures and he’s a very gifted writer. I give him credit where credit is due and I was very fortunate to be able to use his music (MD1).

Despite Baxter’s possible jealousy over Denny’s success with “Quiet Village” and other Denny recordings of Baxter compositions, Denny noted that Baxter once did “the liner notes to one of my albums. As a matter of fact, he’s very

grateful that I recorded “Quiet Village”—why not? It was a great piece of material for me. But I’ve also recorded about 35 of my own tunes which are along the lines of exotic sounds” (MD2).



"Quiet Village" 45s: Original Mono & Rerecorded Stereo

Liberty Records' Drift from Exotica

Despite the tremendous success Denny had with “Quiet Village,” his Exotica-albums, and sold-out tour dates, Liberty Records began in the early 1960s to pressure Denny to move away from his “Exotica” sound, to record what Denny’s daughter, Christina, refers to as “a more popular sound” as heard in such Denny albums as *A Taste of Honey* (1962) and *Another Taste of Honey* (1963), a sound sometimes referred to as Denny’s “honey sound.” Over time Denny’s albums moved away from his Exotica sounds as Liberty Records sought for album sales to keep up with the popular musical trends of the day, for example, the craze over the bossa nova sound which Denny incorporated into his arrangement of “Quiet Village” as heard on *The Versatile Martin Denny* (1963), re-titling the tune as “Quiet Village Bossa Nova.”

Other themes around which later Denny albums were marketed included covers of popular songs as heard on *A Taste of Hits* (1964); two albums building on Denny’s exposure to Latin American rhythms – *Latin Village* (1964) and *Spanish Village* (1965); an album capitalizing on the mid-60s’ “go-go” mod-sound – *Hawaii Goes à Go-Go!* (1966); an album featuring the sitar – *A Taste of India* (1968) - and another featuring the Moog synthesizer- *Exotic Moog* (1969); and several Hawaii-themed album – *Hawaii Tattoo* (1964), *20 Golden Hawaiian Hits* (1965), and *Hawaii* (1966). Two of Denny’s later albums played on the Exotica theme with the titles *Exotica Today* (1966) and *Exotica Classica* (1967) but were missing Denny’s classic Exotica sound. The following link provides a listing of [Denny’s 38 studio albums](#).

However, none of Liberty Records’ drift away from Exotica was Denny’s doing, including the themes selected for many of the later so-called “Martin Denny” albums. Nor was it Denny’s decision that an unknown number of the later so-called Martin Denny albums were “ghosted” by other pianists and musicians while the real Martin Denny group continued to tour on the road. This had remained somewhat of a secret for years until Julius Wechter commented about this to Dana Countryman in an earlier interview.

But this was NOT something about which Denny was pleased in his dealings with Liberty Records. Martin recalled:

to be truthful, I had a lot of “ghosting” done [that started in the ‘60s]. ... I was traveling quite a great deal at that time and the product had to keep coming out. Of course, Liberty Records was using my name and I really didn’t have too much choice about that. The management made those decisions and they always dangled that reward at the end of the road. They said “you gotta do it,” so I had to go along with it (MD3).

I was pretty much tied-up on the road. So I participated in some of them, but not all of them. I never divulged that, nor did the company. But that wasn’t uncommon among many artists. You’ve got to remember, it wasn’t vocal - it was purely instrumental. What they did was use my name, and try and come up with an approach that approximated my playing (MD3).

An analysis of the liner notes of all of Denny’s albums on the Liberty label reveals the trend of Liberty’s drift away from Denny’s early Exotica sound. From 1957 to 1961, Martin Denny’s first thirteen albums on Liberty have his signature Exotica sound and feature a Sandy Warner cover, with ten of these albums – except *Afro-Desia*, *Quiet Village*, and *Exotic Sounds Visit Broadway* – listing the musicians, as also the fourteenth album – *Martin Denny in Person*. This latter album, however, does not have a Sandy Warner cover, rather photos from the location (Duke Kahanamoku’s) where the album was recorded live. Then Denny’s next ten albums, from *A Taste of Honey* to *20 Golden Hawaiian Hits* do not list the musicians.

Further, starting with the nineteenth album (*Latin Village*), the liner notes began listing a producer and one or more arrangers, with *Latin Village* through *20 Golden Hawaiian Hits* listing Dave Pell (a jazz musician working at the time with Liberty Records) as the producer and Bob Florence, an accomplished jazz pianist, as the arranger. That other musicians might be ghosting Denny’s albums while he was on tour was also noted in a short biography of Pell as follows: “Pell and Florence are rumored to have become so familiar with Martin Denny’s style that they ghosted several of Denny’s albums while the performer was out on tour. Certainly Pell and Moog player Paul Beaver had more to do with the great *Exotic Moog* than Denny himself did, which Denny himself readily admits” (Source). As Denny recalled:

Liberty Records [was] constantly trying to steer me into something else, those masterminds ... It wasn’t one of my choosing, but I did it. [referring to *Exotic Moog* Denny commented that it] has the Moog sound but as far as I’m concerned, it’s not the Martin Denny sound. It’s a commercial thing that I did that I’m personally not happy with (MD1).

This pattern continued into 1966 with Denny’s next two albums – *Martin Denny!* and *Hawaii Goes A-Go-Go!* – produced by Joe Saraceno and arranged by Bob Florence. While Denny’s next to last 1966 album (*Exotica Today*) was produced by Pell and arranged by Julius Wechter, the album liner notes show a photo (see below) of the album’s performers as follows – Frank Kim (percussion), Martin Denny (piano), Henry Allen (guitar), Benito Bautista (vibes, flute, & trumpet), Ted Blake (bass). While not pictured, the notes list the following artists as also being heard on the album–Bernie Fleischer (flute), Bud Coleman (guitar), Frank De Vito (percussion), and Frank De Caro (guitar).



Thereafter, starting in 1967, the liner notes of Denny's remaining six albums on Liberty, from *Golden Greats* through *Exotic Moog*, do not list the performers but do list various combinations of producers and arrangers. While Augie Colón toured with Denny from 1957 through at least 1961, the last album on which he is listed as a performer (bongos) was *Exotic Percussion* in 1961. Beginning with that same album, Frank Kim is listed as the percussionist as well as on three later albums: *Romantica* (1961), *Martin Denny in Person* (1962), and *Exotica Today* (1966).

In short, between 1962's *A Taste of Honey* and 1969's *Exotic Moog* (Denny's last studio album), none of Denny's last 17 albums except *Exotica Today* (1966) list who were the actual musicians performing on the album, leaving up in the air which albums were performed by Denny and his group versus being ghosted by other musicians.



Denny did volunteer that *Spanish Village* was ghosted, noting: “I personally never would have approved of a thing like that. They used saxophones and the like. Some of the albums were done very well. They were formulated with the idea that this was ‘Martin Denny.’ I’m not really happy about that part of my career” (MD3).

On the other hand, Denny had some involvement in the *Exotic Moog* album in 1969:

The Moog synthesizer had just come out; by recording this, the record company [Liberty] thought I’d be “keeping up with the times.” We took hits like “Quiet Village” and “Taste of Honey,” and reinterpreted them on these synthesizers. The entire group was electrified—even the drums. The introduction to “Quiet Village” was played on a synthesizer that gave it a real fat bass sound—a whole other dimension. The company aimed this at what was then called the “underground” market; this was when the hippie thing had started in San Francisco. ...

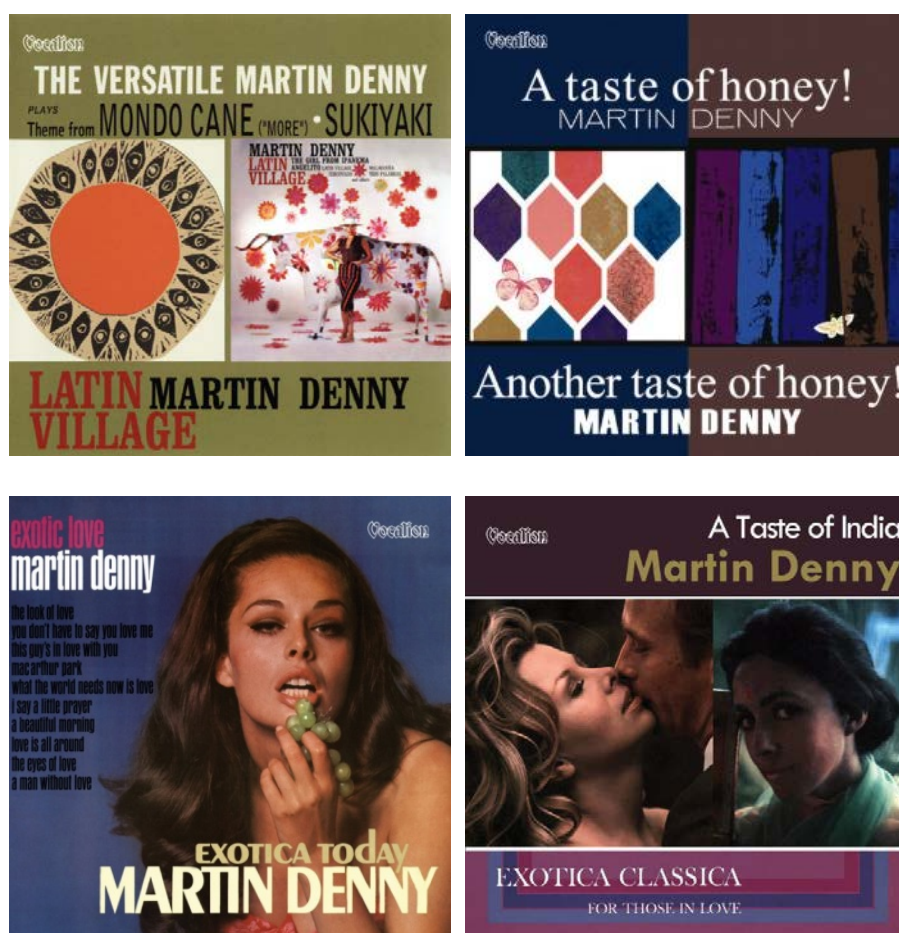
We used two keyboards, because originally you could not play any harmonies on the Moog. If you wanted to record a chord, you had to record each interval separately. ... The process involved recording one note at a time, then overdubbing and adding another until it was finished—hundreds of hours later. ...

Anyway, for *Exotic Moog* we did things like have a drummer hit gongs that were partially submerged under water. We used a new kind of electronic organ, plus other electronic effects that had just come out. The engineer played a bigger role than previously, putting all these sounds together. The album has a black cover; it’s our only record with a sleeve like that. But the record never sold, so that was the end of *that*. ... I think a lot of people just weren’t interested in it. Maybe they thought, “Hey—*this* doesn’t sound like Martin Denny!” (MD2).

I attended some of the sessions. You know some of those were done in New York City with a studio band. I haven't discussed this phase of my career with anyone. ... it was my idea, but I was never too enthusiastic about that particular medium. It was like working for a big corporation, which Liberty became. They were determined to keep me in the groove (MD3).

While Denny still received his normal royalties on the “ghosted” records, the “ghosted” albums, as Countryman mentioned to Denny, just didn't hold the same interest for the listener expecting to hear “melodic, tropical tunes” and not “the freeform jazz stuff that the ghosted albums became” (as stated by Dana Countryman in MD3).

Martin responded that “those early albums were the ones that I actually participated on, they were part of me. Ironically, those albums are becoming so popular now. Capitol just released a double CD of 40 selections” (MD3). Indeed, since this interview with Denny in 1997, it has largely been Denny's early Exotica-theme albums, with few exceptions such as a series of double albums issued on CD by Dutton Vocalion in the UK (see photos below), that have been reissued several times and sold well.

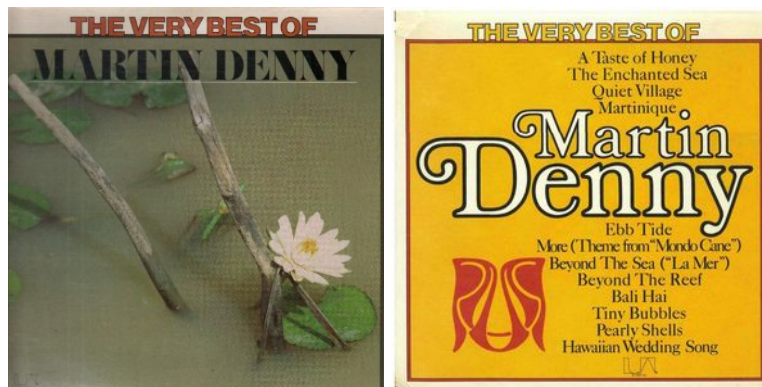


Martin Denny in the 1970s & 1980s

From the 1970s into the 1980s, Denny (with his group or solo) performed at many local hotels and other venues around the Hawaiian Islands, including Raffles at the Wailea Hotel on Maui, the Mauna Lani Bay Hotel on the Big Island, the Kahala Hilton on Oahu, the Hawaiian Regent, and others as well as many nightspots such as Canlis' Restaurant and the Blue Dolphin, the latter two no longer in existence.



In 1976 United Artists Records released *The Very Best of Martin Denny* (UA-LA 383-E & UA-LA234-G).



The Very Best of Martin Denny (UA-LA 383-E & UA-LA234-G)

When in Hawaii
Spend an evening with
"Mr. Exotica"
MARTIN DENNY



Listen to the original and Exotic
sounds of his hit recordings

"Quiet Village"
"Exotica"
"A Taste Of Honey"

Appearing at the Blue Dolphin room
with his group (featuring Augie Colon)
at the Outrigger Hotel on the beach at
Waikiki.

Current release "The Very Best Of Mar-
tin Denny" United Artists Records UA-
LA 383-E.

During the early 1980s, Denny recorded two new albums – a solo piano album titled *From Maui with Love* (1980) and *The Enchanted Isle* (1982).



Martin Denny Pounding the Keys

“Tiny Bubbles,” the first track on Denny’s *From Maui with Love* solo piano album provides a flavor of Denny’s earlier training in classical piano. Denny recalled the origin of this classical arrangement of this popular tune:

Jack DeMello, a well-known composer and artist here [in Hawaii] was to perform with a symphony orchestra for the Japanese Junior Chamber of Commerce. He had heard me play at my home where I played a few Classical selections for him. He said, “Most people aren’t aware you play these things. Would you work up an arrangement using a Hawaiian theme and treat [it like] like a Classical thing?” So I whipped up an arrangement on this trite song called “Tiny Bubbles,” the song **Don Ho** was so successful with. I did a takeoff on that, improvising, starting out with **Bach** and **Beethoven** and **Chopin**, **Liszt**, and so forth. I played it and the orchestra didn’t anticipate what I was going to do and they were flabbergasted when I did this Classical arrangement of “Tiny Bubbles” and all they had to do was a play a chord at the end. Every once in a while, I do that. It’s a *tour de force* type of thing, a blockbuster (MD1).

Denny continued touring up until 1985, when he announced that he was retiring to his home in Hawaii to spend more time with his wife June. Retirement proved short, as Denny reunited three years later with Chang, Colón, Lyman and new bassist Archie Grant to play a series of sold-out club dates. In March of 1996, when Denny was interviewed by Boyd Rice, he was asked if he would ever consider continuing to tour and doing concerts on the mainland again. Denny replied:

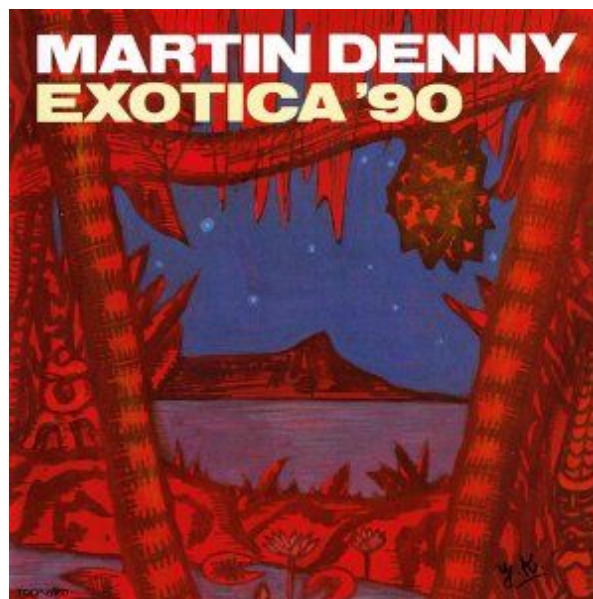
I've got news for you: next month I'm going to be eighty-five years of age. There's no way I can go back on the road again. I don't think I'd last very long. In my imagination I say, "Wouldn't it be great?" If I was in better physical shape, perhaps, but as you know, I was in an accident last September and shattered my right shoulder I can still play the piano but I don't feel qualified to go on tour (MD1).

Rediscovering Exotica and Martin Denny

While the popularity of Denny's albums on the charts declined in the 1960s, the 1990s witnessed a resurgence of interest in Denny's music. Christina recalls that the Yellow Magic Orchestra's cover of "Firecrackers" (a Denny composition) sparked renewed interest in Denny's music. YMO's version of "Firecrackers" hit the top of the charts in Japan for four months.



Then Denny's classic Exotica music became so much the rage in Japan that he was invited to pull his old group together for a concert tour in Japan, prior to which he recorded in Hawaii for Japan Toshiba an album titled *Exotica '90* that per his contact was only for release in Japan.



Lily Nakao and Norene Nakao Peyton arranged this tour for which Denny "re-assembled the band, including Arthur, Augie, Harold Chang, Gabe Baltazar, etc." (Christina Denny, personal communication). Denny recalled that "Exotica '90" was recorded

just before we went on a Japanese tour in June of 1990. I recorded for **Toshiba EMI** and we did a tour – five performances in Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya ... amazingly, most of the people that came were all teenagers or in their early twenties. ... The recording...included **Julius Wechter** on vibes and marimba, **Arthur Lyman** on percussion and **Augie Colón** on Latin percussion and bird calls. Also I had **Harold Chang** on drums, **Archie Grant** on bass and on woodwinds[.] I had one of the top Jazz performers here in the Island – he used to play with **Stan Kenton** – **Gabe Baltezar**. I had him on sax and flute and all of the wind instruments. I featured a vocalist to do some of my new compositions who was a smash and his name was **Manny De Los Santos**. For the recording, I used additional people, a total of ten. On tour we just used seven. It was well received (MD1).



In the meantime, by the late 1980s

some elements of the underground rock scene in the U.S., becoming bored with loudly distorted guitars and booming drums, began to rediscover the quirky elegance of exotica and space-age pop that their grandparents had listened to, and soon albums by Esquivel, Les Baxter and Denny were being bought up again. Sensing a market ripe for Denny's sound again, the Scamp label began reissuing most of Denny's catalog in the mid-90s, once again making Denny hip ([Scott Feemster](#)).

Recalling this resurgence of interest in Denny's music, Cristina wrote that it was

Brad Benedict, an outside contractor working at Capitol [Records], who noticed all the old records accumulating dust in the archives and decided to re-release them. That included all sorts of artists – including Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, etc. For Dad's [music] they issued a two-CD album, followed by several CDs and compilation CDs (Christina Denny, personal communication).

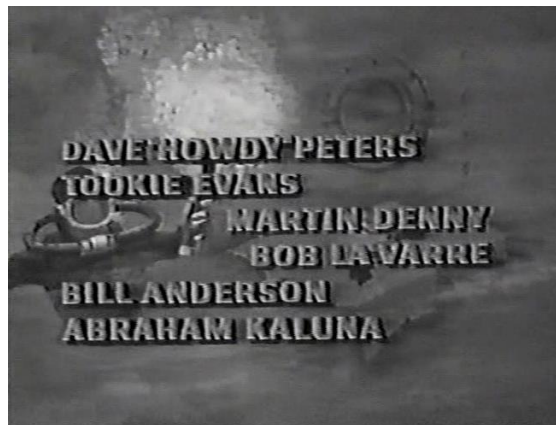


Soon followed many re-releases of Denny's early Exotica albums, with Scamp Records re-releasing most of Denny's early Exotica-themed LPs on CD as part of the ultra-lounge/space age pop/bachelor pad music craze that today, at least for its Exotica-flavored music, is now referred to as "Tiki Music."

Denny's Music & Martin in Hollywood Films

Denny's music – and even Martin himself – have appeared in Hollywood films. Denny recalled becoming involved in the film *Forbidden Island* (1959) and how he came to have a song and LP titled "Forbidden Island."

"Forbidden Island," in Denny's words, has "a twelve-tone introduction and ending which adds to its mysterious and foreboding sound." He related, "I was appearing at Don the Beachcomber's in Waikiki, when my friend Charles Griffith, who had written lyrics to some of the songs I had composed, was getting ready to produce and direct the film *Forbidden Island* at Trader Vic's. Charles asked me to play a cameo part of a piano player in a bar, like Sam the piano player in *Casablanca*. He also let me use the title..."Forbidden Island" for what became my third album for Liberty Records." (p. 35, FSM, Vol. 2, No. 4, June 1997)



In the film's opening scene, Denny's character, "Marty," delivers the line "Night, honey" to the film's blond female lead (Nan Adams). Denny again appears, still playing the piano, in the film's last scene. Denny indicated in an interview with this author that his piano playing in the film was improvisation, that "there never had been any discussion of Denny composing the [film's] score" (p. 35, FSM, Vol. 2, No. 4, June 1997).



"Going someplace, Jo? ... Night, honey." [Martin Denny (right) at beginning of film]

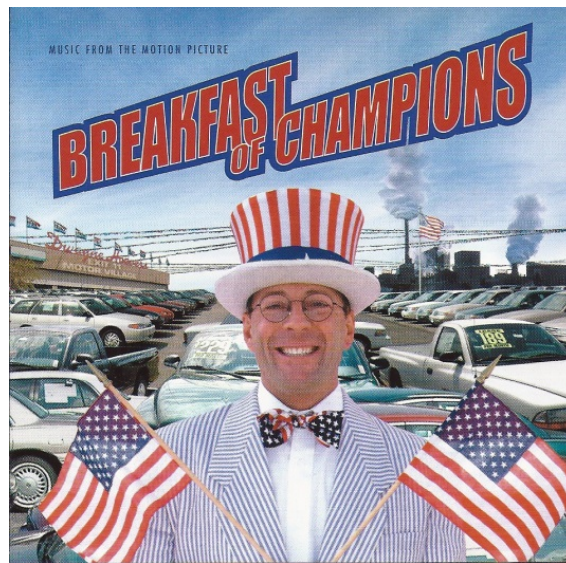


"This drink's on me. ... What for?" [Martin Denny at end of film]

While Martin referred to his "piano playing" as "purely improvisation," the song that he is playing in the film is "Forbidden Island" that he composed and which was included on his *Forbidden Island* album as well as credited to him in the film's opening titles (see title card below).



With the resurgence of interest in Martin Denny's music in the 1990s, several film producers began to use Denny's music in several films, notably the soundtrack for 1999's *Breakfast of Champions*. Christina recalls that David Blocker, son of actor Dan Blocker of *Bonanza* fame, grew up in Hawaii and "always wanted to make a movie using Dad's music [and did so]...for the soundtrack of *Breakfast of Champions* with Bruce Willis, Nick Nolte, Albert Finney, [and] Barbara Hershey."



Denny's music also is heard in *Joe's Apartment* (1996), *The Woman Chaser* (1999), *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (2002), and *The Nanny Diaries* (2007). "Jennifer Lopez and Mariah Carey vied for Dad's music," recalled Christina, "with JLo winning out." As reported at [Tiki Central](#): Denny's song "Firecracker" was sampled on Jennifer Lopez's "I'm Real" release, resulting in the JLo/Mariah Carey feud, since Mariah had planned to use the sample on her *Loverboy* release. Denny's music ("Love Dance" from *Exotica*) even played in a Charles Schwab commercial shown during the 2000 Super Bowl. In a 2000 interview, Martin commented:

I've probably attained more popularity in this part of my life than I ever have had in the past, and all I can say is that I'm very fortunate that this is happening to me. I got a royalty statement (recently) for six months, and it was over an inch thick.... It just amazes me that (my music) is being played in such diverse places as Poland, Israel and South Africa -- not to mention Norway, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and France ([Source](#)).

As reported by Dave Donnelly in his "Hawaii" column of the March 14, 2000 issue of *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*:

God bless residuals -- CAPITOL Records in L.A. contacted **Martin Denny** the other day and asked him for the names of his musicians on the original version of *Exotica* that came out in 1957. Seems one of the cuts from the album, "Love Dance," was used in the **Charles Schwab** TV commercial at the Super Bowl, and Marty and his boys have some residual money coming. This will be the first time the other members of the group find out about it, but congrats to his original lineup, **Arthur Lyman, John Kramer, Augie Colón** and **Harold Chang**. Denny's not sure how much will be coming their way, but considering it only cost them \$850 total to cut the album, and it sold in excess of 400,000 copies, it'll be a nice stack of found money ([Source](#)).

Indeed, as Denny said in an interview with Tim Ryan for the "Weekend" section of the April 25, 2003 issue of the *Honolulu Starbulletin.com*: "I started making more money after I retired than when I was working."



Source: Honolulu.Starbulletin.com



Source: Honolulu.Starbulletin.com



Denny's Legacy & Passing

“You’ve heard of the CHIPMUNKS, haven’t you? ... David Seville came up with the idea of the Chipmunks, whose records were based on speeded-up vocal sounds. The characters were named Simon (after Si Waronker [Liberty president]), Alvin (after Al Bennett [who later became Liberty president]), and Theodore (after Ted Keep [an engineer at Liberty]). When the ‘Chipmunk Song’ came out, Liberty was on the verge of bankruptcy—that record made over a million dollars and saved the company. The company’s next big hit was ‘Quiet Village,’ followed by Julie London’s recording of ‘Cry Me a River.’ Those three records saved Liberty Records” (MD2).

“I’ve had a good long career, and I’ve enjoyed what I do. My records got made because I happen to have imagination—that’s all. Along the way, a lot of people helped me pick up on ideas. Imagination plus *organization* . . . how to take something and put it in its proper perspective. It’s like making a cake; you put in the ingredients together and sometimes you come up with a new little flavor that makes it unique. So I just added a lot of musical flavors, mixed them through trial and error, and came up with the sounds” (MD2).

During Martin’s latter years he relied on a wheelchair to get to infrequent gigs. Recalling the years when her father was actively touring, Christina noted that Denny opened

most of the hotels in Hawaii and all of the major hotels on the outer islands. Molokai’s Pau Hana Inn[s] owner and developer was his best friend. Brownie Clewett. The Westin Wailea Beach Hotel – three years on Maui and...at Raffles [a restaurant on the Big Island of Hawaii] for three years in the 80s (all different names now). He played many years at the Kahala Hilton (now Mandarin), Royal Hawaiian, Canlis’ [Charcoal Broiler] Restaurant (now gone) in Waikiki, the Outrigger hotels, the Chart House Waikiki restaurant, the Charcoal House Grill, the Boom Boom Room, and many more. His name drew a crowd (Christina Denny, personal communication).

Dad often had dancers in his shows – traveling with them and all the instruments except the piano. Very expensive and lots of weight. Manu Bentley was my favorite and Shirley Recca was Mom’s – both beautiful. Dad gave many musicians their start – producing their albums, having them in his band, promoting them (Christina Denny, personal communication).



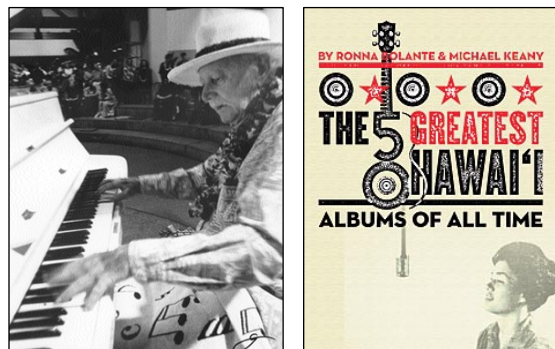
Christina Denny (center) w/ Shirley Recca (right) &

Sherri Kandell (left - wife of Lloyd Kandell - see vignette)

Denny was a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), the Hawaiian Professional Song Writers Society, and the Musicians Association of Hawaii, Local 677. Over the years he received many awards. In 1959, *Billboard* named Denny’s band “most promising group of the year,” and he was nominated for “pianist of the year” along with such greats as George Shearing and Ahmad Jamal. In 1990 the Hawai’i Academy of Recording Arts honored Martin Denny with the Na Hoku Hanohano Lifetime Achievement Award.

On July 21, 2000, Honolulu’s City Council and Mayor honored Denny by declaring that day as “Martin Denny Day.” Denny also was honored at the premiere of the film *Pearl Harbor* (2001).

Over the years Denny contributed back to the community by playing many benefits, in prisons, for disaster fundraisers, for the military, and other significant causes. In January of 2005, he appeared at Ward Centre in Honolulu (see below), playing “Quiet Village” at the launch of *The 50 Greatest Hawai’i Albums of All Time* book that listed Denny’s first album, *Exotica*, as #6 on that list. In 2004, not too long before his passing, Martin appeared with Don Tiki playing his signature tune “Quiet Village” accompanied by two of his former “boys” (Augie Colón and Harold Chang – see vignette) and other Don Tiki musicians. Portions of Martin’s performance at this show can be viewed on the Don Tiki website.



On March 2, 2005, a month short of his 94th birthday, the last original member of the Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny, Denny himself, died at his Hawai'i Kai home of a weak heart, arthritis and diabetes.

Three weeks before his “fingers flew across the keyboard playing ‘Firecrackers’ at a benefit for the Asian Tsunami victims” (Christina Denny, personal communication). Recalling his passing, Christina, Denny’s caregiver during his last years, said he “went very peacefully, graciously.” “Dad had multiple organ failure, and he rallied up and down in recent weeks. But he was lucid till the end, happy and comfortable. I kissed his masterful hands — and said goodbye” ([Source](#)).

Denny, in a 2003 interview, had said that his “greatest professional satisfaction” was having created “a sound that has an identity that’s stuck around for nearly 50 years” ([Martin Denny](#)). Denny’s memorial service was attended by hundreds, the famous and not so famous, celebrating his life with music, singing, and dancing. Following this service, his ashes were scattered at sea off Diamond Head at Waikiki, joining those of his wife June that similarly had been scattered at sea after her passing in 2001.



Martin & June Denny (1995 Christmas Letter)

Following his passing, a number of celebrities in the Hawaiian music industry shared their memories of knowing and working with Martin:

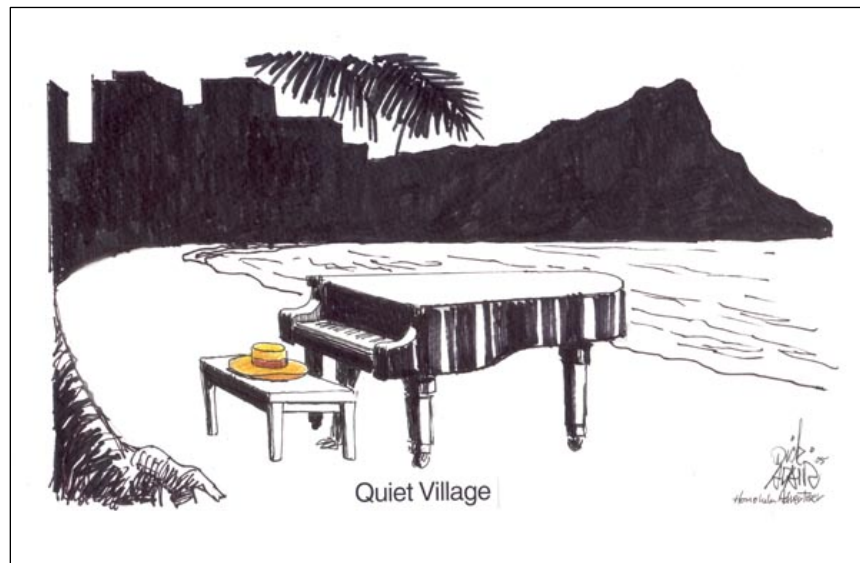
“Marty was one of the classiest guys in the business,” said Don Ho, who shared a Waikiki stage with Denny in the early 1960s. “He would play, then I would play, and he was encouraging me, so happy to see a new kid on the block being successful,” said Ho. “There was not a bone of envy in his body, not an ounce of jealousy. He has been gracious all these years; he had million-sellers and he was still supportive. We lost a good guy.”

“Marty created such beautiful exotic music for the world to enjoy,” said [Lloyd] Kandell [of Don Tiki]. “But he also was an inspirational example of how to live life. He was giving; he last performed at a fund-raiser (for victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami) at La Pietra just two weeks ago.”

“He was my buddy; we were the best of friends,” said Del Courtney, a veteran musician and bandleader who’d get together with Denny for lunch on Wednesdays, health willing. “I met him 60 years ago in San Francisco; he was a name then and still is. He’ll be missed by everybody.” ([Source](#))

Martin always said “his music was a fusion of classical (his training background), jazz (which he was playing prior [to his Exotica sound]), Latin America (which highly influenced him during his four years there), Asian (including all his foreign instruments), and South Pacific/Hawaiian (his Hawaiian home)” (Christina Denny, personal communication).

That fusion of multicultural influences left a rich legacy for all who are passionate about Denny’s “sounds of exotica.” On a very personal note, Christina wrote to me: “How can his almost 94 years of life be summed up?” Perhaps the answer to this question lies in what Christina shared about the below drawing, the artist of which had dubbed her father, Martin Denny, as Kumu Lokahi, a Hawaiian expression meaning teacher / exalted / respected / honored / forefather.



Martin Denny (4/10/1911 – 3/2/2005) ([Source](#))

“‘Return to Paradise’ was the theme song of the movie of the same title; Dimitri Tiomkin wrote it. Once I was playing it on the piano at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and Tiomkin came up to me and said, ‘That’s my song.’ He introduced himself and thanked me for playing it. Later on I recorded it with my group; it seemed to fit right in. Three years ago [about 1990] when I went to Western Samoa and played for the King of Samoa, his officials gave me a tour of the island and showed me a white sand beach dotted with coconut palms, where the movie had been filmed. I sat in the shade of a little thatched-roof bar sipping a drink and thought, ‘What a perfect setting,’ while the theme from ‘Return to Paradise’ drifted through my mind” (MD2).

“Most people live their lives content with a banana split: strawberry, chocolate and vanilla ice cream topped by some nuts and a banana. And they think that’s just fine. I don’t know if you’ve ever done this, but try putting a scoop of passion fruit sherbet on half a papaya. Nobody even *thinks* of doing that, but it’s been there all along. You’ll end up with an unusual, exotic taste that will take you to another world!” (MD2)

Martin Denny Discography

Over a 30+ year period, from 1957 through 1990, nearly 40 Denny albums were issued, most being original albums although a few were either “greatest hits” or “best of” album or those, such as on Liberty’s Sunset label (* = see list below), that were compilations of songs from earlier albums. In addition, though not listed below, dozens of Martin Denny records were released as singles (commercially or as promos) in the 45 rpm or EP format ([see listing](#)).

The following is a listing of Denny's albums on LP and/or CD. Clicking on the title of each album will take you to the Discogs.com page showing the album's cover and the titles of the songs included on that album.

LPs:

- [Exotica](#), Liberty LRP-3034 (mono) (1957)
- [Exotica](#), Liberty LST-7034 (stereo) (1959) - re-recorded for stereo with [Julius Wechter](#) replacing [Arthur Lyman](#)
- [Exotica Vol.2](#), Liberty LRP-3077/LST-7006 (1958)
- [Forbidden Island](#), Liberty LRP-3081/LST-7001 (1958)
- [Primitiva](#), Liberty LRP-3087/LST-7023 (1958)
- [Hypnotique](#), Liberty LRP-3102/LST-7102 (1959)
- [Afro-Desia](#), Liberty LRP-3111/LST-7111 (1959)
- [Exotica Volume III](#), Liberty LRP-3116/LST-7116 (1959)
- [Quiet Village](#), Liberty LRP-3122/LST-7122 (1959)
- [The Enchanted Sea](#), Liberty LRP-3141/LST-7141 (1959)
- [Exotic Sounds from the Silver Screen](#), Liberty LRP-3158/LST-7158 (1960)
- [Exotic Sounds Visit Broadway](#), Liberty LRP-3163/LST-7163 (1960)
- [Exotic Percussion](#), Liberty LRP-3168/LST-7168 (1961)
- [Romantica](#), Liberty LRP-3207/LST-7207 (1961)
- [The Best of Martin Denny](#), Liberty LX-5502 (1961) (compilation)
- [Martin Denny in Person](#), Liberty LRP-3224/LST-7224 (1962)
- [A Taste of Honey](#), Liberty LRP-3237/LST-7237 (1962)
- [Another Taste of Honey](#), Liberty LRP-3277/LST-7277 (1963)
- [The Versatile Martin Denny](#), Liberty LRP-3307/LST-7307 (1963)
- [A Taste of Hits](#), Liberty LRP-3328/LST-7328 (1964)
- [Latin Village](#), Liberty LRP-3378/LST-7378 (1964)
- [Hawaii Tattoo](#), Liberty LRP-3394/LST-7394 (1964)
- [Spanish Village](#), Liberty LRP-3409/LST-7409 (1965)
- [20 Golden Hawaiian Hits](#), Liberty LRP-3415/LST-7415 (1965)
- [Martin Denny!](#), Liberty LRP-3438/LST-7438 (1966)
- [Hawaii Goes A Go-Go](#), Liberty LRP-3445/LST-7445 (1966)
- [Exotica Today](#), Liberty LRP-3465/LST-7465 (1966)
- [Golden Greats](#), Liberty LRP-3467/LST-7467 (1966)

- Hawaii, Liberty LRP-3488/LST-7488 (1966)
- Paradise Moods, Liberty/Sunset SUM-1102/SUS-5102 (1966) (compilation)
- Exotica Classica, Liberty LRP-3513/LST-7513 (1967)
- A Taste of India, Liberty LRP-3550/LST-7550 (1968)
- Exotic Love, Liberty LRP-3585/LST-7585 (1968)
- Exotic Moog, Liberty LRP-3621/LST-7621 (1969)
- Sayonara, Liberty/Sunset SUM-5169/SUS-5169 (1970) (compilation)
- Exotic Night, Liberty/Sunset SUM-5199/SUS-5199 (1970) (compilation)
- The Very Best of Martin Denny, United Artists UA-LA383-E (1975) (compilation)
- From Maui with Love, First American FA-7743 (1980)
- The Enchanted Isle, Liberty LN-10195 (1982)
- Exotica '90, Toshiba EMI/Insideout TOCP-6160 (1990) (last album issued on CD)

CDs: Beginning in 1989 and the resurgence of interest in Exotica music and, more broadly, so-called Lounge and Space-Age Bachelor Pad music, record labels began to reissue on CD many of Denny's earlier albums in full or as compilations of songs from those original albums.

- The Exotic Sounds: The Very Best of Martin Denny, EMI Manhattan (Japan) CP32-5657 (1988) (compilation)
- Paradise (2 CD), Pair PCD-2-1267 (1990) (compilation)
- Exotica!: The Best of Martin Denny, Rhino R2-70774 (1990) (compilation)
- The Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny, Capitol (1990) (compilation)
- Enchanted Islands, CEMA Special Products S21-56638 (1993) (compilation)
- Music from Paradise, The Beautiful Music Company S21-17612 (1993)
- Quiet Village: The Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny, Curb D2-77685 (1994) (compilation)
- Exotic Moog (Martin Denny) / Moog Rock (Les Baxter), Electronic Vanguard EV-906-2 (1995) (bootleg reissue)
- Afro-Desia, Scamp 9702 (1995) (reissue)
- Bachelor in Paradise: The Best of Martin Denny, Pair (1996) (compilation)
- The Coconut Cream of Martin Denny, Elite 30364 00152 (1996)
- The Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny (2 CDs), Capitol CDP 7243 8 38374 2 7 (1996)
- Exotica/Exotica Vol. II, Scamp 9712 (1996) (reissue)
- Forbidden Island/Primitiva, Scamp 9713 (1996) (reissue)
- Hypnotique/Exotica III, Scamp 9714 (1997) (reissue)
- Quiet Village/Enchanted Sea, Scamp 9715 (1997) (reissue)
- The Best of Martin Denny, EMI-Capitol Ten Best Series 72438-19887-2-5 (1998)

- Breakfast of Champions (soundtrack from film of same title with Martin Denny's music as the film's score), Capitol 72435-22280-2-7 (1999)
- Baked Alaska, Collector's Choice Music CCM-393-2 (2003) (a live 1964 performance)
- The Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny, Rev-Ola CREV039CD (2004) (compilation)

Note: The following eight Rev-Ola CDs were released in both the UK and Japan. The Japanese version was issued in the mini-LP format. Both the UK and Japan versions contain each album's mono and stereo versions:

- Exotica, Rev-Ola CR REV 101 (2005) / Japan Rev-Ola MSIG 0172
- Exotica Vol. II, Rev-Ola CR REV 102 (2005) / Japan Rev-Ola MSIG 0173
- Primitiva, Rev-Ola CR REV 103 (2005) / Japan Rev-Ola MSIG 0175
- Forbidden Island, Rev-Ola CR REV 104 (2006) / Japan Rev-Ola MSIG 0174
- Exotica Vol. III, Rev-Ola CR REV 105 (2006) / Japan Rev-Ola MSIG 0186
- Hypnotique, Rev-Ola CR REV 106 (2005) / Japan Rev-Ola MSIG 0184
- Quiet Village, Rev-Ola CR REV 107 (2006) / Japan Rev-Ola MSIG 0187
- Afro-Desia, Rev-Ola CR REV 108 (2006) / Japan Rev-Ola MSIG 0185
- Latin Village, Toshiba EMI TOCJ-66315 (Japan) (2006)
- The Best of Martin Denny's Exotica, Capitol (2006) (compilation)
- Martin Denny's Exotica and More!, Motif MOTIF004 (2009)
- Martin Denny: Three Classic Albums (2 CDs), Real Gone Jazz RGJCD216 (2010)
- Martin Denny: Eight Classic Albums (4 CDs), Real Gone Jazz RGJCD270 (2011)
- Latin Village & The Versatile Martin Denny, Vocalion CDLK 4454 (2012)
- A Taste of Honey! & Another Taste of Honey, Vocalion CDLK 4472 (2012)
- A Taste of India & Exotica Classica, Vocalion CDLK 4477 (2012)
- Exotic Love & Exotica Today, Vocalion CDLK 4483 (2012)
- Exotica Suite (Si Zentner and His Orchestra), Vocalion CDLK 4494 (2013)
- Hypnotique (reissue, non-Sandy Warner cover), Hallmark Music & Entertainment 715892 (2015)
- The Very Best of Martin Denny (2 CDs), Jackpot 48754 (2016)

Martin Denny Compositions

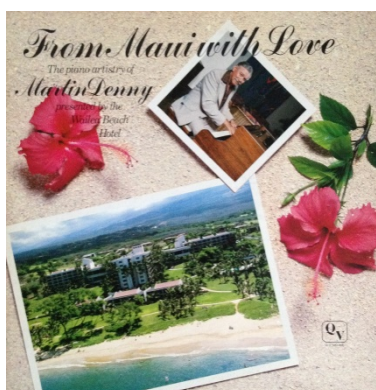
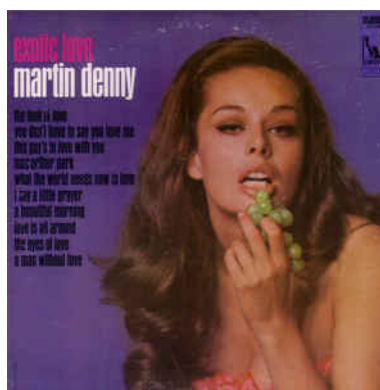
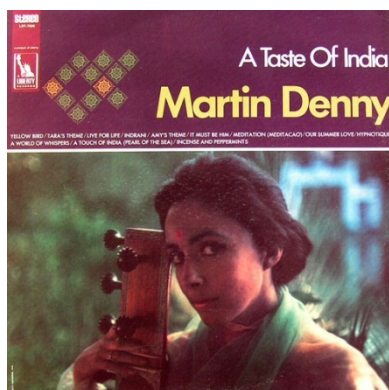
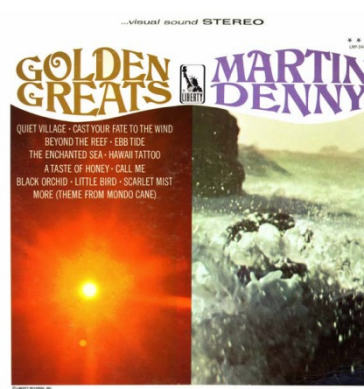
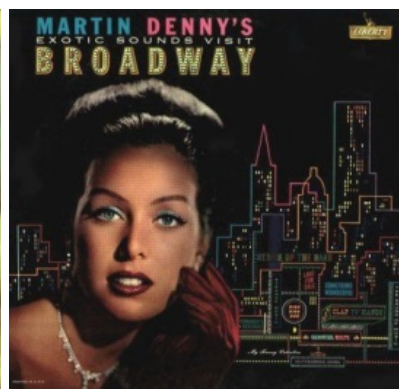
While several of Denny's earlier albums included his exotica interpretations of songs (for example, “Quiet Village”) composed by Les Baxter and released on earlier Baxter albums (e.g., *Ritual of the Savage*), many of Denny’s albums included songs that were his own original compositions. The following provides a listing of the Denny compositions included in each of his albums.

- **Exotica – Volume 2** - Island of Dreams (2:53) / When First I Love (2:22) / August Bells (2:14) (w/ Baumgart)

- **Forbidden Island** - Cobra (2:01) / Exotica (3:04) / Primitiva (2:49) / Forbidden Island (2:59)
- **Primitiva** - Burma Train (2:55) / Buddhist Bells (2:56) / M'Bira (2:45)
- **Hypnotique** - Jungle Madness (w/ Hal Johnson) (3:32) / Hypnotique (3:09)
- **Afro-Desia** - Tsetse Fly (w/ Hal Johnson) / Ma'Chumba (w/ Hal Johnson) (2:16)
- **Quiet Village** - Sake Rock (2:00) / Firecracker (2:25)
- **Exotica – Volume 3** - Manila (2:25) / Bamboo Lullaby (2:12)
- **The Enchanted Sea** - Flotsam and Jetsam (2:33) / Cross Current (2:25)
- **Romantica** - Love At Sight (1:40) / Aloha, I Love You (2:36) / Blue Paradise (2:15)
- **Latin Village** - Sugar Cane (2:32)
- **20 Golden Hawaiian Hits** - Diamond Head (2:02)
- **Exotica Today** - You Don't See My Love (2:37) / Snowflakes in Summer (2:34)
- **Hawaii** - Hawaiian Rhapsody (2:20) / Oro (God of Vengeance) (2:15)
- **Exotica Classica** - For Lovers (2:43) / I'll Love You Forever and Ever (2:35) / Exotica Classica (2:28)
- **A Taste of India** - Indrani (2:25) / Hypnotique (with sitar) (2:43) / A Touch of India (Pearl of the Sea) (2:17)
- **Exotic Love** - Love Exotic Style (3:51) / Voodoo Love (3:16)
- **The Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny (Capitol 2 CD set)** - Isle of Love (1961) (previously unreleased) / Manila / When First I Love / Time and Tide (1961) (previously unreleased) / Hypnotique/Hypnotique (with Sitar) / Firecrackers (1959) / Oro (God of Vengeance) / August Bells (w/ Baumgart) / Jungle Madness (w/ Hal Johnson) / Tsetse Fly (w/ Hal Johnson) / Exotica/Voodoo Love (1958/1967)
- **The Very Best of Martin Denny – The Exotic Sounds (Japan EMI-Toshiba)** - American in Bali (2:25) / Hawaiian Rhapsody (2:22)
- **From Maui With Love** - Firecracker (2:05) / From Maui with Love (1:45) / Island of Dreams (2:11) / Raffles (1:56) / Aloha, I Love You (2:23) / Blue Paradise (2:59)
- **The Enchanted Isle (assuming Denny is composer)** - Happy Island (2:37) / The Enchanted Isle (2:49) / Sugar Train (2:41) / Friendly Island (2:25)
- **Exotica '90** - Burma Train (3:10) / Blue Paradise (3:51) / Sake Rock (2:44) / Mayumi (w/ Bob Nelson) (3:08) / June (When Love Was Young) (w/ Bob Nelson) (3:57) / Firecrackers (3:52) / From Maui With Love (w/ Alex Anderson) (3:28)
- **Baked Alaska** - Burma Train (w/ Hal Johnson)
- **The Forbidden Sounds of Don Tiki** - Exotica '97 (3:06) / Forever & Ever (2:29)
- **Breakfast of Champions** - Exotica / Forbidden Island / Oro (God of Vengeance (w/ H. Johnson) / Cobra / Hypnotique (w/ M. David)

Martin Denny Albums on YouTube: As of this writing, you can listen on YouTube.com to several of Martin Denny' Exotica-themed, “honey sound,” and other albums. Click on each album cover below for link to a YouTube

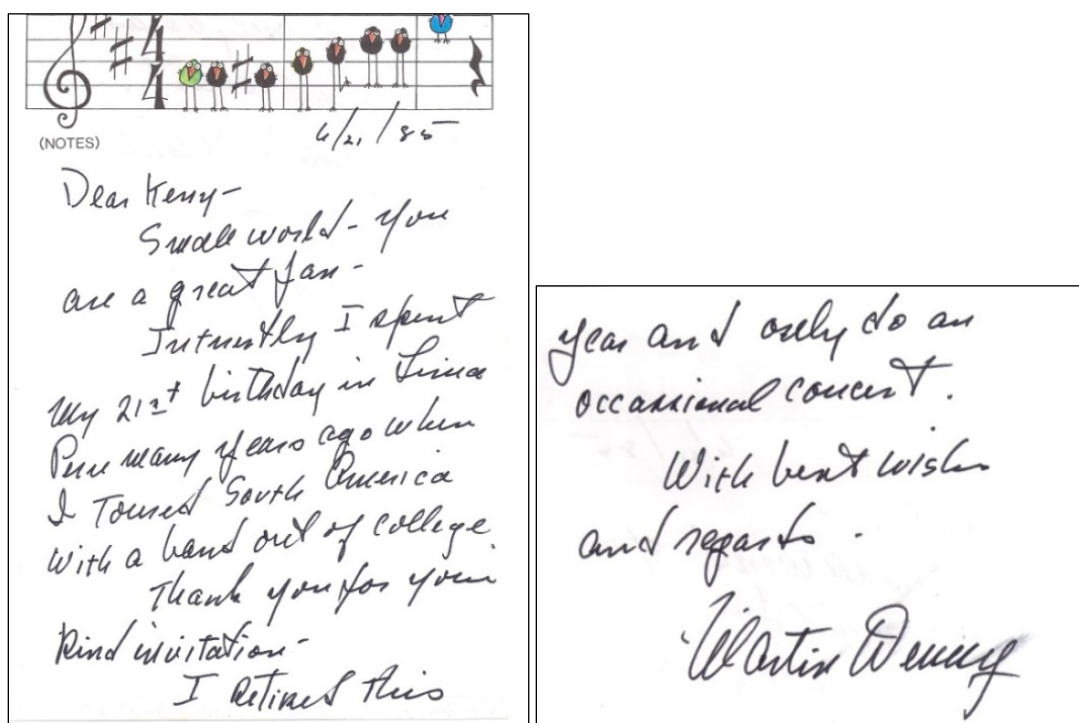
video of that album's music (links current as of this writing in June 2018). Search on YouTube for other Denny albums now available.



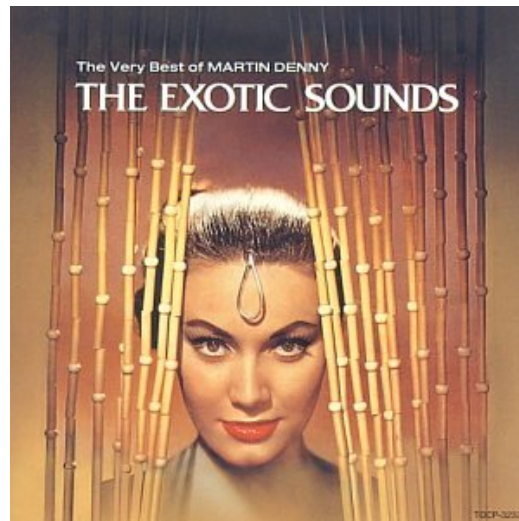
Click on album cover to hear album's music on YouTube.

Flight Log Memories: One Sunday morning in 1991, my wife surprised me with the news that I received a phone call from Martin Denny, who asked that I call him back as soon as possible. A long-time fan of the Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny, I recalled a trip that I had made to Lima, Peru in 1985, on assignment for USAID. One consultant on our team, Mead A. Kirkpatrick, lived in Hawaii and was a pioneer in organizing the export of Hawaiian fresh produce to the U.S. mainland.

As Mead and I walked back to our hotel after dinner, I mentioned that I was envious that he, living in Hawaii, had ready access to one of Hawaii's greatest musical treasures, Martin Denny, and then I babbled on about how much I loved Denny's music. Mead replied that his father knew Martin as both were Rotary members. To make a long story short, and with Mead's assistance, I mailed to Mead several Martin Denny album jackets, with a note asking Mead's father to see if Martin would autograph the albums for me. Some weeks later a package arrived in the mail with the album jackets autographed by Martin along with a note (see below), dated 6/21/85, stating his appreciation to me for being a great fan.



A few years later, in 1989, shortly after Tower Records opened a store in northern Virginia's Tysons Corner, my father and I stopped at that store to see what CD goodies might be in stock. Looking through the instrumental CDs, I found the following CD: *The Exotic Sounds: The Very Best of Martin Denny* (EMI Manhattan CP32-5657). On discovering that this CD compiled songs from Denny's Exotica-themed LP albums of the late 1950s, I purchased it and wrote to Martin to tell him about my discovery that his earlier Exotica recordings were now appearing on CD. This news was a surprise to Martin and the reason my wife was surprised one Sunday morning when she answered the phone and learned that the caller was Martin Denny. Upon returning home and Sonia telling me that Martin had called, I quickly went to the phone and dialed the number Martin had left.



Martin said that he appreciated receiving my letter with the news about the release of a CD of his Exotica recordings on the Liberty label, which label he told me had been purchased by Capitol, which in turn was owned by EMI in London, with this CD appearing in Japan on EMI Toshiba's Manhattan label. Martin told me that he wanted to make sure that he would be paid his royalties but that he had not been able to find the CD in any of the record stores in Honolulu and offered to mail a check to me so that I could purchase a copy of the CD to send to him. I replied that I would be glad to help out and, in fact, went ahead and mailed my copy of the CD to him in advance of receiving the check.

This phone call opened the door to a budding friendship with Martin, where I felt comfortable writing letters to him or calling him on the phone, and not being as tongue-tied as I had been years before when I blew my chance to interview Les Baxter. Over the years we carried on an exchange of phone calls, letters, and Christmas cards. At some point during the 1990s and while Martin was still in good health, he shared that he was taking a writing class at the university to learn how to write vignettes, one of which he shared with me and asked for my input on it. The edited vignette that I sent back to Martin follows:

A Chip (or Chap) Off the Old Block? (by Martin Denny as edited by Kerry)

My agent called one Saturday morning to ask if I was available to play for a party that afternoon. Such spur-of-the-moment engagements were not unusual, and this one sounded interesting. Joe E. Brown, the well-known actor and comedian, was giving a party in honor of his daughter's graduation from a girls' finishing school. While Brown appeared in many pictures and starred in "Harvey," a popular stage play about an invisible six-foot rabbit, he is remembered best for his trademark wide mouth -- Brown would grin, open his mouth to an untypically large circumference, and say in a very small voice "Helloo."

Later that afternoon I arrived at Brown's Brentwood residence, to find a house swarming with guests; while the crowd was primarily comprised of teenage boys and girls, there were a few adult relatives and family friends. On introducing myself, Mrs. Brown escorted me into the large living room, where there was a grand piano. Guests milled around the piano as I played but no one really paid much attention to me except a rather elegant gentleman, somewhere in his sixties, who was sitting on a nearby barstool. He seemed vaguely familiar but he stared so intently at me that I really felt uncomfortable.

Finally, he spoke in a rather upper class London accent, like one hears on the BBC radio programs. "May I ask you a rather personal question?" Shrugging, I replied, "What is it?"

“Have you ever played piano in a whore house?” Stunned, and not quite knowing what to make of this, I replied. “No.”

“Well, my lad, you don’t know what you’ve missed. That’s where I first met my wife.”

Frankly, I was embarrassed by this impropriety, not knowing how to respond to such a tasteless remark. “I say,” he went on, “you don’t believe me. Come with me.”

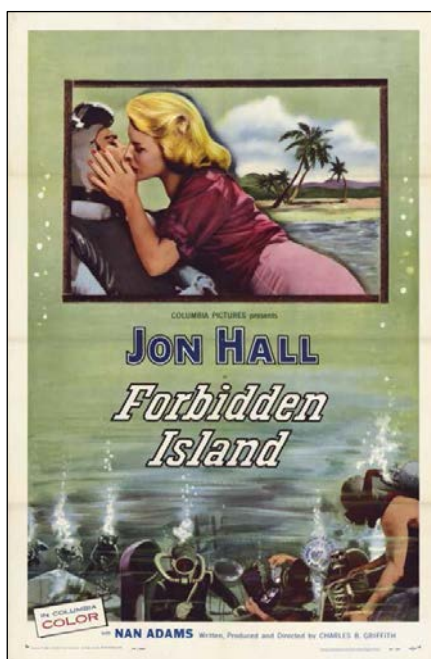
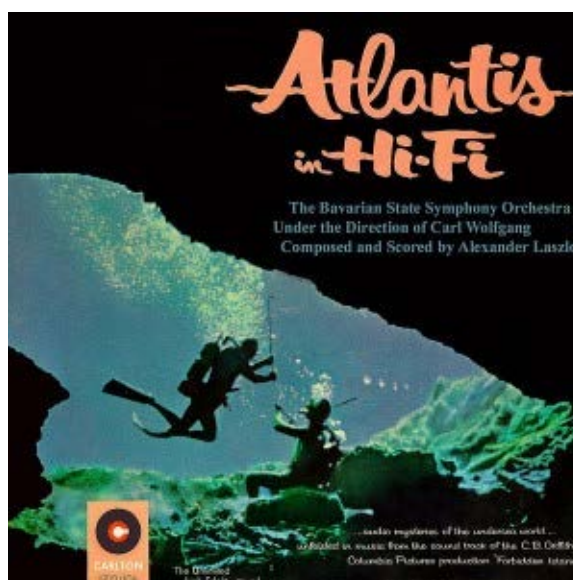
He took me by the arm and led me to a nearby room where a group of matrons was gathered. We stopped before a bosomy but otherwise dignified lady who was knitting what seemed to be a sweater. Addressing her in his urbane British accent, he said, “My dear, would you be kind enough to inform this young man where we met?” She smiled up at me, batted her eyes and, without missing a stitch, replied, “In a whore house.”

I blushed beet red and glanced sheepishly around, but no one laughed or paid the slightest attention to anything that had been said. Suddenly, I realized I’d been had. This dignified chap was none other than Arthur Treacher, well known for his ability as an actor to play the perfect English butler in the movies. I’d just been exposed to English humor at its best--or worst. This old chap went on to even greater fame from his television commercials for Arthur Treacher’s Fish ‘n Chips. So Arthur really was a chap--or chip--off the old block!

Martin’s vignette on Arthur Treacher would later become an influence – and inspiration – for me to write vignettes such as the one you are now reading. Another Denny-related influence got me started writing about film music. In the spring of 1997 I read an article in the *Film Score Monthly* magazine in which the author, John Bender, reported that Martin had composed the score for the film *Forbidden Island* (1959). Already knowing John from an earlier exchange, I called him to say hello and mention that his FSM article had mistakenly credited Denny as composing the *Forbidden Island* score.

When John asked how I knew that, I answered: “Because Martin told me that he had not composed that score.” Further, I owned a dub of the film on VHS (from TV) which I reviewed after reading John’s article – and found that while Denny appears in a bar scene at the beginning and end of the film, playing the piano and quipping some dialogue, the film’s score was composed by Alexander Laszlo (available on the Carlton record label under the title *Atlantis in Hi-Fi*). John responded: “You know Martin Denny?” Mustering as much modesty as I could, I told him a little bit about how I had met Denny. John suggested I send a short note to FSM so the magazine could publish a correction. But that short note turned into a two-and-a-half page article – “Martin Denny and the Sound of Exotica: A Road Map to Soundtrack Exotica” (FSM, Vol. 2, No. 4, June 1997)–that FSM publisher, Lukas Kendall (see vignette), published in his magazine.

Sadly (for me), the cover of the FSM issue with my article featured the stars of the film *Men in Black* (see below) rather than the cover of the *Atlantis in Hi-Fi* LP (see below) that contains the recording of the Alexander Laszlo score for *Forbidden Island*. Of course, my vote for the cover would have been to print the photo of Martin Denny with his *Forbidden Island* co-star (Nan Adams as shown in earlier photo) or the Exotica Girl (Sandy Warner) who graced all of Denny’s early exotica-themed albums for Liberty Records, including his *Forbidden Island* album (see below) that includes the song “Forbidden Island” that Denny had composed and played during his scenes in the film.



In 1992, 1998, and 2004, Sonia and I vacationed in Hawaii, our target destination each time being the Waikiki neighborhood of Honolulu on Oahu. Before each visit, I wrote to Martin to ask if it might be possible to visit him and he graciously responded that I should just phone him once we had checked into our hotel. During the first trip, I visited Martin once in his home on Black Point Road, just down the street from the house that film and TV actor Tom Selleck lived in while filming the TV series *Magnum, P.I.* (1980-88). On arriving at Denny's home, he introduced me to his wife June and then talked about his career.

Martin showed me various awards he had been given, including the Gold Record for his hit "Quiet Village." He also played several songs on his grand piano, including "Quiet Village" and "Firecrackers," the latter a *Chopsticks*-like tune Denny had composed and, at about 80 years of age, still played at breakneck speed with virtuoso brilliance—and, Christina recalls, still did "3 weeks before his death – a month short of 94!" (Christina Denny, personal communication).



L: Martin Denny (1998) / R: Martin Denny with my wife Sonia and son Shannon (1998)

During our family's 1998 return trip to Hawaii, Sonia and my son Shannon accompanied me for two visits to Martin's new home, a beautiful hillside condo in Hawaii Kai, with a living room having a nearly 180-degree panoramic view of the Pacific Ocean to the left and the Kahala mountain range to the right (see photo below).



Denny described his beautiful condo in a March 1996 interview:

I lived on Black Point for thirty-two years. I sold my home there four years ago. However, I live in a condominium and we can see the ocean and the bay. I live in what they call a bubble apartment. It's oval and glassed in, so I have a view all the way from Coco Head clear down to Black Point. I have a very large living room, about 1,620 square feet. I have my Baldwin concert grand piano up against the wall and underneath the piano I put some of my exotic instruments. I have things like an Indian sitar and tamboura and then I have different percussion instruments from different parts of the world – gongs, and feathered gourds (MD1).



Kerry & Martin's Poodle (Tita) Next to Martin's Piano and Exotic Instruments (1998)

Martin especially enjoyed visiting with Sonia who came from the same town (Cali) in Colombia where Martin, as a member of the Don Dean Orchestra, performed during a three-and-a-half year (1931-1935) tour of South America, playing the rooftop restaurant of Cali's Hotel Alférez Real (1927-1972) (see photos below) in early 1932, the same hotel where Sonia and I dined from time to time while dating in 1969. To think that, at that time in 1969, I only missed catching Denny (at that time Weissner) performing in that hotel by 37 years!

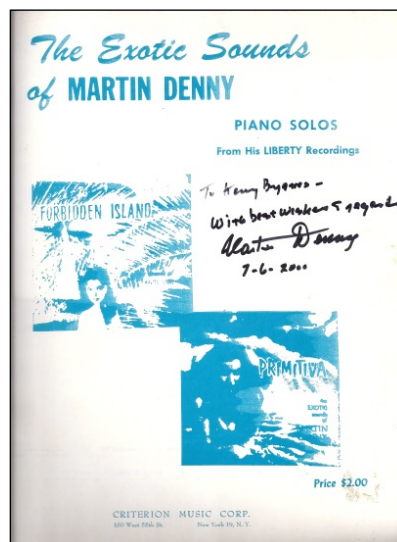
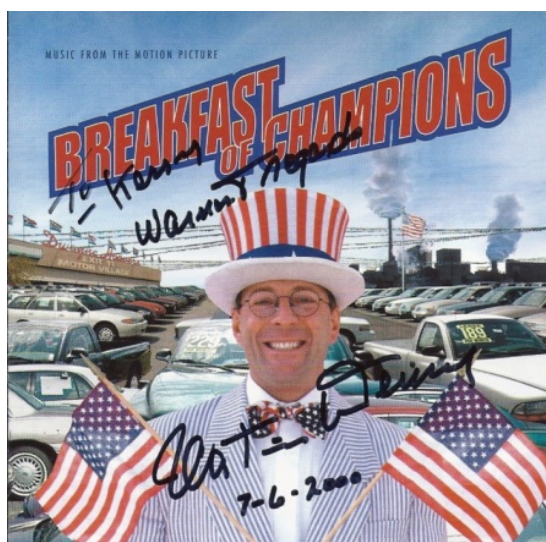


Cali's Hotel Alférez Real (1927-1972) (Source: *El Pais*)

Martin sat with Sonia to review his scrapbook of press clippings and photos from those years when he toured South America. Sonia later commented that Martin, touring Latin America as a young, good looking, and eligible gringo, “must have had one hell of a good time!”

Martin and his wife June were most kind in inviting us twice to dine at one of their favorite Hawaii Kai neighborhood restaurants. One of these experiences was at Jeff's Table, especially memorable as this restaurant's owner, Andreas Knapp and his wife Cathleen, played a cassette tape of songs Denny had composed and recorded on solo piano as a potential album release. Unfortunately, these recordings have yet to be released.

The other highlight was that the owner, being such a fan of Martin's music, allowed Denny's poodle (Tita) to sit on a chair at the table and eat off a plate just as if Tita were another human dining at the table—and seated next to me on my immediate left! During a more recent visit to Hawaii in late 2014, we learned that Andreas had retired and that his former restaurant is now operating as Maile's Thai Bistro.



The last two times that I visited Martin was in 2004, by which time his health had greatly deteriorated. Since visiting Martin in 1998, his wife June had died in 2001, and their daughter Christina (see photo below) had come to live with Martin as his caregiver. While Martin was still quite sharp at 93, I had to keep my visits short, about an hour, in order to not overly tire him.

I continued to ask Martin about his career, in part, because I had offered to take on writing his biography. A local university professor had written a short biography of Martin's life but Christina told me that she and her father were not satisfied with the draft. Subsequently, the biography project was put on hold to attend to Martin's health-related needs. On returning home to Reston, Virginia, I prepared a prospectus or outline of how I would approach writing a biography of Martin's life, and sent this to Martin. Given Martin's failing health, neither he nor Christina was able to follow up with me on my proposal but I keep my fingers crossed that an opportunity to collaborate with Christina on the biography might be afforded in the future.



Martin, Christina, & Kerry (2004)

For this 2004 visit to Hawaii we had gifted my son Shannon, his girlfriend Jeannine, and her son Matthew with frequent flyer tickets to come out and spend a week or so with us during our visit. After dinner one evening, we all went over to the Hilton Hawaiian Village to soak up that hotel's ambience, particularly to spend some time in the hotel's famous Shell Bar inaugurated in the 1950s with the Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny as the bar's first featured musical group.

Sitting in the bar, Sonia and I enjoyed our drinks as we listened to a small musical group perform, lamenting this was not the same experience one would have been afforded listening to Martin Denny's group perform in this same lounge back in the 1950s. But the overall experience of visiting the Shell Bar was saved by one redeeming feature of the bar that had not changed over the preceding half century – those frogs were still croaking in the small pond just outside the bar!



The Shell Bar in the Hilton Hawaiian Village Hotel



A few days after Martin's passing on March 2, 2005, I received a phone call from Christina to convey the news of Martin's death, thank me for having been one of Martin's many fans, and tell me that Martin had considered me one of his friends. One measure of that friendship was shown during my last visit with him in 2004. While Martin was resting in bed, he shared a piece of Exotica history that I had never seen reported in the same way, as told to me by Martin, in any article written about Martin's career. While Martin was under contract with Liberty Records, he was required to record several albums per year, which contractual requirement was difficult to meet given that his musical group had to be on tour at the same time doing live performances to promote his albums.

During this period, Liberty Records released an LP titled *Exotica Suite* (Liberty LSS-14020) with a jacket cover referencing not only "The Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny" but also two other musical giants: Les Baxter (see vignette) and Si Zentner. The album cover (see top photo below) credits the songs as composed by Les Baxter and recorded by Si Zentner and His Orchestra. As arranged by Bob Florence and recorded by Si Zentner's orchestra, the recordings had more of a big band jazz feel than the Exotica sound given that album jacket prominently referenced "The Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny." According to Martin, "The Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny" and appearance of model Sandy Warner were featured on the album's cover as a marketing ploy to promote album sales. (Note the *Exotica Suite* LP is now available on CD as shown below in the bottom photo.)



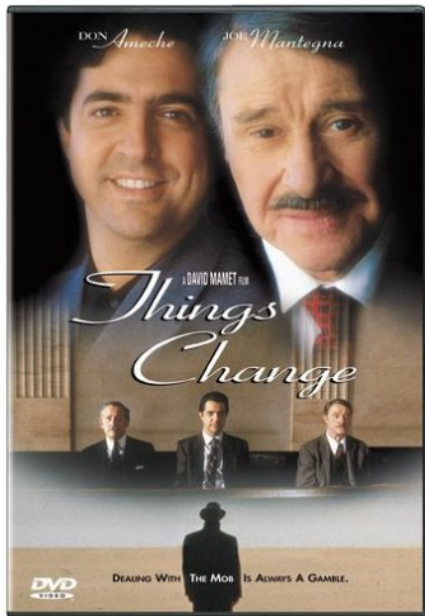
But Martin confided that his only contribution to this album – and this is the piece of Exotica history that I’ve never seen reported elsewhere – was that once the album was recorded, Liberty mailed a tape of the recording to Martin, asking him to listen to the songs and give each an Exotica-flavored title. Martin came up with the following titles for the album’s Exotica-themed songs: Temple Pageant, Tiki, The Enchanted Sea, Demons and Dragons, Legend of The Island Gods, Bali Monkey Dance, Pagan Ritual, Jungle Train, Stolen Idol, Lotus Pool, Tribe of the Moon, and Calabash Annie. In effect, these song titles plus Sandy Warner’s photo on the album cover were the only Exotica elements of this Liberty product that otherwise contained Si Zentner big band-type recordings of Les Baxter compositions.



Martin, Tita, and Kerry (2004 in Hawai’i Kai near Honolulu, Oahu, Hawaii)

In the end, as we noted at the outset of this vignette, Martin Denny is often remembered as the “High Priest of Tiki” and “King of Exotica.” However, as this vignette has illuminated, Martin’s ancestral roots were really not in New York City where he was born or in Honolulu, Hawaii where he died. As you’ll recall, Martin was the son of parents who had emigrated from Russia to the United States. To my way of thinking, going forward we can now see that Martin Weissner was destined, from the day he was born, to become Martin Denny – the founding “Tiki Tsar of Exotica Musicians.”

The More “Things Change,” The More They Stay the Same



“**Gino**, an Italian-American shoe-shiner with a remarkable similarity to a certain mafia don, is paid to take the rap for a murder. Jerry, a two-bit gangster on probation, is given a chance for redemption by guarding Gino for the weekend. But instead of sitting around a dingy hotel room, Jerry decides to give Gino a weekend to remember, taking him to Lake Tahoe. Jerry’s bragging to his friends of his important charge, as well as Gino’s dignified, quiet demeanor, soon result in much complication for them both” ([Source](#)).

Gino: *“Just when things were going so well...”*

The film *Things Change* (1988) illustrates the lesson that in life things can and do change. A few months after my left hip replacement surgery in 2011, I traveled to East Lansing, Michigan to attend a 50th year reunion of my St. Thomas Aquinas classmates, each of whom surely was amazed how old everyone else looked!

I took some time to drive out to the old homestead at 4528 South Hagadorn Road where I found that the house my family had moved into nearly 60 years before was gone, torn down a few years before, leaving just an empty lot that once sported the house in which my parents, brother Kevin, and sister Kathryn had lived, the house that was once surrounded by the extensive landscaping our family had put in to beautify our home and the lot on which our house had been built. Now that lot was barren and waiting for a buyer to invest in the property. Now all that remained was the barren earth where our house once stood, surrounded by a blacktop parking lot. Looking back I am reminded of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus having written that “one cannot step into the same stream twice” ([Source](#)).

In early 2015, Sonia and I returned to Cali, Colombia for a two-month long visit with family and friends. Near the end of our visit, we took a tour of the city, with Sonia visiting each of the three homes in which her family had lived during the years she was growing up, only to find the first of these homes no longer existed. The home had been torn down and also replaced by a parking lot.

Earlier that day we walked around Cali’s downtown and visited the site on which the Hotel Alf  rez Real once existed, the same hotel where a young Martin Denny (then Martin Weissner) played piano with the Don Dean Orchestra during the group’s visit to Cali in 1932. Sadly, while one can visit the site where this hotel once stood, one can’t travel back in time to those days when Martin was playing piano at the Alf  rez Real. Indeed, a wave of nostalgia about this hotel has triggered many of the citizens of Cali to realize what a mistake had been made to allow the Hotel Alf  rez Real to be torn down in 1972, only to be replaced by the Poet’s Park (see below photo). Many of those citizens now rally to a Facebook [page](#) that calls for the Hotel Alf  rez Real to be rebuilt on its original site.



As best I could, as shown in the right photo below, I stood that afternoon at the edge of the Parque de los Poetas, trying to put my foot into the “same stream” a second time by standing approximately at the same spot where the Hotel Alf  rez Real’s front door once was located (see below left photo). That stream no longer flowed into the front door of the Hotel Alf  rez Real but rather now also had been turned into a park with a paved pedestrian area. How could I have not been reminded of the Joni Mitchell song lamenting how “They paved paradise And put up a parking lot.” Sadly, too many of my memories of an Exotica paradise were being paved over by a parking lot!



Hotel Alferez Real (L) Replaced by Parque de los Poetas (R)

Indeed, over time, “things change”! While Martin (then Weissner) Denny was playing jazz piano as a member of the Don Dean Orchestra at the Hotel Alferez Real in 1932, that era’s music now survives on acetates, 78-rpm records, and film (movies), though some of that music was reissued years later on LPs and CDs. Indeed, by the time that Martin Denny’s “Quiet Village” became a hit in the late 1950s, one could yet purchase “Quiet Village” on a 78-rpm record as shown in the below photos of the only two 78-rpm records in my collection – one the original version of “Quiet Village” by Les Baxter from his 1951 *Ritual of the Savage* album, the other Martin Denny’s 1956 hit version of this same song from his original *Exotica* album.



“Quiet Village” on 78 rpm – Les Baxter (L) & Martin Denny (R)

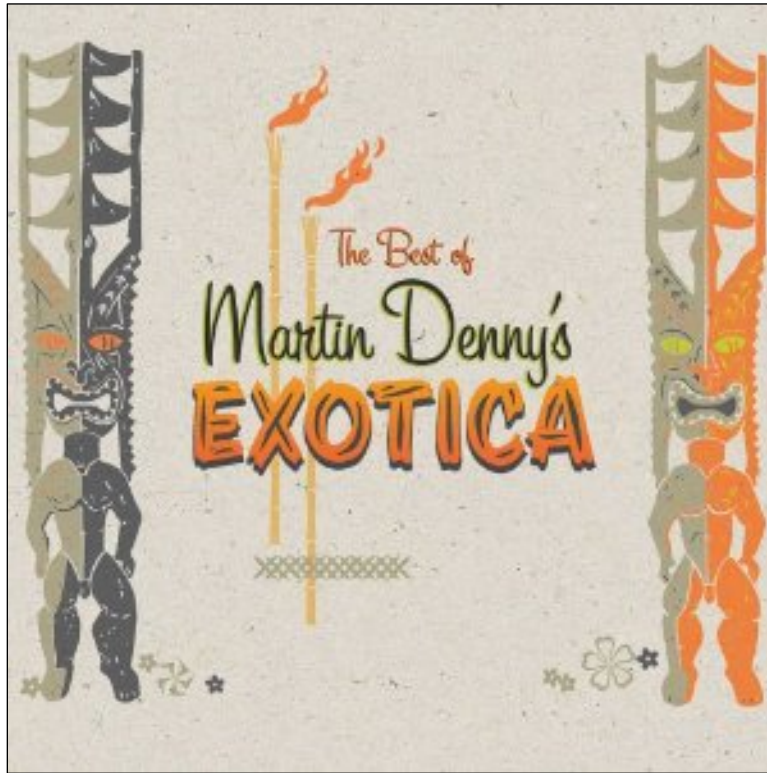
Martin Denny lived through a remarkable period in the era of recorded music. As new recording formats came on the scene, Martin Denny’s recordings were released on 78-rpm, 45 rpm, and 33-1/3 long-playing records, on various tape formats (reel-to-reel, 8-track, and cassette), and, most recently, on compact disc (CDs) and DVDs (e.g., Denny’s music used in the film *Breakfast of Champions*). Even as the CD format now wanes, increasingly replaced by the “cloud,” one can download or stream Denny’s “exotic sounds” over the Internet from sites such as Amazon.com, Pandora.com, Spotify, and YouTube.com – and listen to this wonderful music right on one’s computer, tablet, Smart Phone, Smart TV, or even a Smart Watch with a Bluetooth connection to one’s Bluetooth earphones. Yet no matter how much “things change” in the world of recorded music, the “Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny” as heard in his earlier albums are as fresh today as when Denny originally recorded those tunes over 50 years ago.

After Martin's passing, Christina asked me if I would assist in reviewing and editing the liner notes she had written for *The Best of Martin Denny's Exotica* (see photo above), a 2006 Capitol CD compiling Denny’s exotica records. Those liner notes contain the following penned by Christina:

“Zealous for life, never thinking himself old, one morning near the end he said ‘I don’t think I want to grow to a ripe old age.’ ‘It’s a little late’ [Christina replied]. He smiled, ‘I guess I am a little over ripe.’”

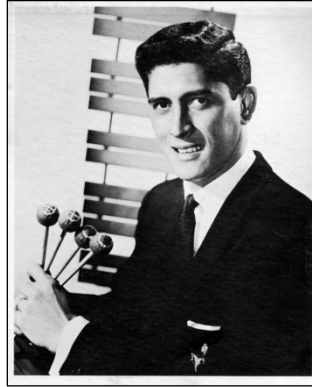
Building on that quote, I added the following sentence that Christina graciously included in the liner notes:

“Like a fine vintage wine, Martin Denny’s exotica sounds only get better with age, leaving the listener yearning to return to a *Quiet Village* on a *Forbidden Island* on some far away *Enchanted Isle* in a land of Exotica. (a fan)”



Having had our close encounters with **Les Baxter** and **Martin Denny**, our next vignette introduces us to one of Denny’s protégés, **Arthur Lyman**.

Arthur Hunt Lyman (2/2/32 – 2/24/02)



I never thought my music was exotic....It was natural to me—the crash of the waves, the rustle of the palm trees, the birds.

Arthur Lyman, known as “Ata” among his friends, was an American jazz vibraphone and marimba player who helped to popularize a style of faux-Polynesian music during the 1950s and 1960s that came to be known as Exotica. Lyman was born in 1932 on the island of Kauai in the U.S. territory of Hawaii, the same year that Martin Denny (see vignette), Arthur’s future mentor, traveled from Los Angeles to Colombia to perform as the piano player in the Don Dean Orchestra that toured South America for several years before Denny eventually began playing piano in Hawaii nearly two decades later and would recruit Arthur into the Martin Denny group. Arthur was the youngest of eight children of a Hawaiian mother and a father of Hawaiian, French, Belgian and Chinese descent. After Arthur’s father, a land surveyor, lost his eyesight in an accident, the family relocated to Makiki, a sub district of Honolulu on the island of Oahu. As a child Lyman wanted to be a fireman and would hang around the Makiki fire station. But his father insisted that Arthur pursue a career in music. The father was very strict with Arthur and would lock him in his room each day after school under order to play a toy marimba along to Benny Goodman records “to learn what good music is.” From those old 78-rpm records Lyman learned every note that vibist Lionel Hampton recorded with the Goodman group.

Lyman debuted publicly at eight years of age, playing “Twelfth Street Rag” on his toy marimba on radio station KGMB’s *Listerine Amateur Hour*, winning a bottle of Listerine. Along with his father and brother Arthur later played USO shows at the Kaneohe and Pearl Harbor military bases. “In fact,” he recalled in a 2002 interview, “we played on the aircraft carrier (USS) Hornet when it came into Pearl Harbor. We used to do things like ‘Rose Room,’ ‘Honeysuckle Rose’ – you know, the old songs” ([Source](#)). Over time he became adept at playing 4-mallet style that makes it possible to play a greater range of chord-forming options. By the age of 14, while attending McKinley High School, Lyman turned professional, joining a group called the Gadabouts, playing “George Shearing material and other ‘cool’ jazz (which was in vogue at the time) for about \$45 a week” (Jeff Chenault, “Arthur Lyman – King of the Jungle Vibes,” *Cool and Strange Music! Magazine*, Issue #25, May ’02 -August ’02, p.36). He recalled: “I was working at Leroy’s, a little nightclub down by Kakaako. I was making about \$60 a week, working Monday to Saturday, from 9 to 2 in the morning, and then I’d go to school. So it was kind of tough” ([Wikepeida.org](#)).

On graduating from McKinley High School in 1951, Lyman told his father that he was putting his music career on hold to get a “real” job working as a desk clerk at the Halekulani Hotel. There, in 1954, he met pianist Martin Denny (see vignette) who had come to Hawaii in January of that year to play at Don the Beachcomber in the International Market Place, across the street from the Halekulani Hotel. Denny was “recruiting a vibraphone player for his newly formed combo and had heard about Arthur’s musical dexterity” (Chenault, p. 36). On hearing Lyman play, Denny

offered the 21-year old a spot in his band. Christina Denny (personal communication) recalls her father saying “Arthur didn’t want to leave his ‘secure’ income as a bell boy to join Dad ... He didn’t think he’d make as much.” However, with Lyman only making \$280 a month as a hotel desk clerk, Denny’s offer of \$100+ a week persuaded Lyman to join the Denny group.

In early 1956, after a couple of years of playing at Don the Beachcomber, Denny landed a contract for his group to open and play the Shell Bar in Henry J. Kaiser’s newly constructed Hawaiian Village Hotel. Denny’s other band members were Augie Colón on percussion and John Kramer on string bass.

The Shell Bar had a beautiful, open-air exotic setting: the wall of the bar resembled an ocean floor with sand and various types of shells, starfish and all sorts of aquatic creatures; palm trees surrounded the room; and behind the stage was a pond with some very large bullfrogs. It was here at the Shell Bar that the “exotica” sound was discovered completely by accident. The frogs would inadvertently enhance the music with croaking sounds. The audiences were so thrilled and delighted to hear this new sound that they began to request the songs with the frogs. Before long, birds and other tropical sounds were added as well; Exotica was born (Chenault, p. 36).

In late 1956 Denny’s group (with Arthur on vibes) recorded their first album, *Exotica*, at the Webley Edwards studio in Honolulu. Recorded in mono and released in 1957, *Exotica* included the song “Quiet Village” that already was a hit in live performances. “Quiet Village” as a single earned a gold record and the album a silver record. Si Waronker, then president of Liberty Records, “chose the album’s title, which would later name an entire genre of music” (Chenault, p. 37).

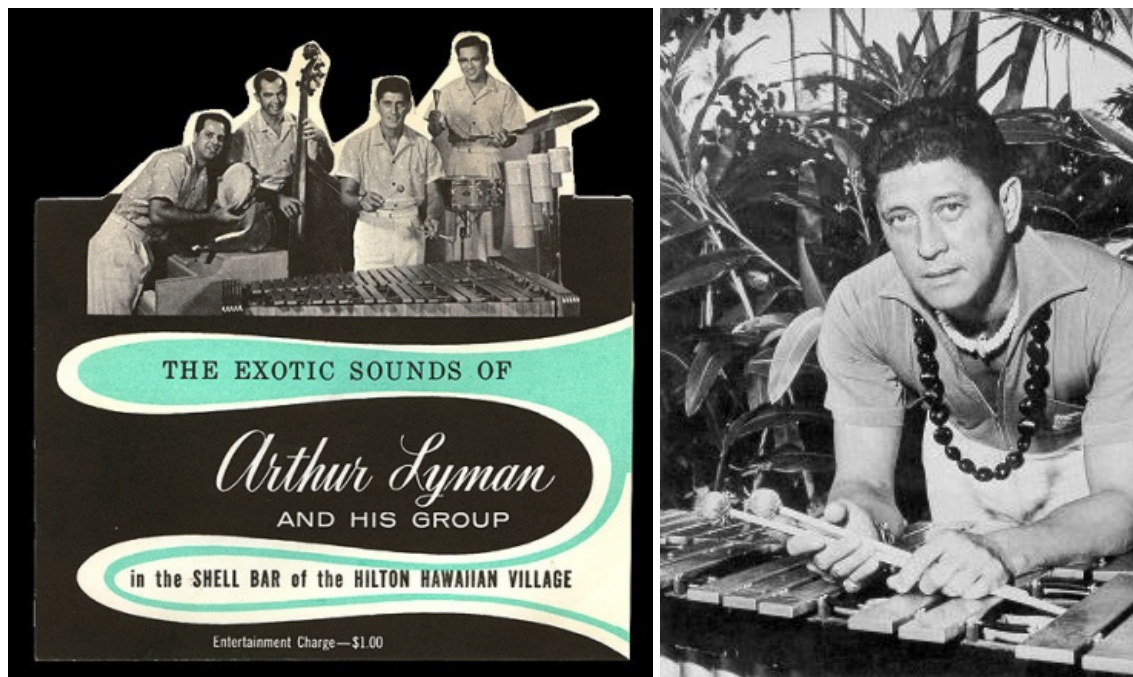
The following year Denny re-recorded *Exotica* in stereo but with a new vibraphonist, Julius Wechter, having replaced Lyman who no longer was with the Denny group because Kaiser, owner of the Hawaiian Village, wouldn’t agree to renew Denny’s contract on the terms Denny requested. With Denny’s contract nearing its end, Kaiser offered Lyman a contract to form his own group and replace Denny’s group as the feature act in the Shell Bar. On completing his contract with Kaiser at the end of 1956, Denny signed a contract with Don Beach for Denny’s group to return to Don the Beachcomber. When Denny re-recorded the *Exotica* LP in stereo in 1957, including “Quiet Village,” the single of that song became a smash hit, went to #1 on the charts, and earned a gold record, triggering a national mania for all things Hawaiian, including tiki idols, exotic drinks, luaus, aloha shirts, straw hats, and Polynesian-themed restaurants like Trader Vic’s.

When Lyman left Denny’s group to form his own group and play the Shell Bar, John Kramer also left the Denny group to join the Lyman group. While Lyman’s music continued to a large extent in the same style as Denny’s, his group’s sound was built around Lyman playing the vibes. The composition of the original Arthur Lyman Group that played the Shell Bar was:

- **Arthur Lyman** – vibraphone, marimba, xylophone, bird calls, congas, bongos, guitar, and percussion (including wind chimes, ankle spurs, timbali, cocktail drums, boobams, ass’s jaw, guido, conch shell, tambourine, snare drums, wood block, finger cymbals, cowbells, castanets, samba, Chinese gong and sleigh bells)
- **John Kramer** – string bass, bass guitar, percussion, ukulele, guitar, bird calls, flute, and clarinet
- **Alan Soares** – piano, celeste, glockenspiel, guitar, clavietta, marimba, and percussion
- **Harold Chang** – percussion, marimba, xylophone, and bass (an uncredited Chang also played drums and percussion on Denny’s original *Exotica* album)

Shortly before appearing at the Shell Bar, HiFi Records signed Lyman's group to a recording contract and actually recorded their first album before the group appeared publicly.

In May of 1958, Arthur released his first album called *Taboo*. The recording session...was recorded inside the Kaiser Aluminum Dome – a unique auditorium on the grounds of the Hawaiian Village, which seated 1500 people. This was acknowledged as the venue with the finest acoustics on the island (on some of the recordings you can actually hear the creaking of the dome and other extraneous sounds). Richard Vaughn, who was the producer and recording supervisor for most of Arthur's albums, was sent in to oversee the recording session (Chenault, p. 37).



Tiki News co-editor Otto von Stroheim, observed that: "If Martin Denny was the haole link to Hawaiian exotica, Arthur Lyman was the Hawaiian link between Pacific Rim exotica and American jazz." While this observation oversimplifies, it

does explain a fundamental difference between the two musicians. Lyman's group...heeded a jazz impulse more intently, aspiring to create music that transcended merely exotic appeal. And they received almost immediate attention for it; mere months after the group's inception, producer-engineer Richard Vaughn heard about Lyman's eclectic sound and flew to Honolulu to make an album, using his revolutionary new high-fidelity ("Hi-fi") recording technique. Vaughn recorded Lyman's group onstage in [the auditorium of] the Henry J. Kaiser Aluminum Dome, the space-age auditorium near the Hilton's entrance. Hi-fi, a crude precursor to stereo sound, required the musicians to run across the stage mid-song to switch microphones for a stereo effect. This made for some frantic moments. And Lyman described another hassle: having to record in the early morning hours, when traffic outside was light ([Source](#)).

Lyman's debut album *Taboo*, released in early 1958, immediately became an international hit, spending 62 weeks on *Billboard*'s charts, peaking at #4, and selling over two million copies. In early July 1959 the album's title song ("Taboo") peaked at #55 on the *Billboard Hot 100*.

Taboo showcases Lyman's distinctive vibe playing while conjuring up images of the islands through his use of birdcalls and Harold Chang's battery of percussion instruments. Aided by Allen Soares on piano and John

Kramer on string bass, Lyman's sound was immensely popular. *Taboo* had put the Arthur Lyman group on the map, and on the charts. With this album – as with the many others to follow – the innovative sound quality and provocative cover [also see below the album cover for *The Legend of Pele*] contributed to its early success (Chenault, p. 37).



In the early days of stereophonic LPs, Lyman's albums, with their elaborate and colorful percussion, deep bass, and having been recorded on a three-dimensional soundstage, were often used by record and stereo equipment vendors as stereo-effect demonstration discs. Lyman's early albums continued to be recorded in Kaiser's dome because this space provided:

unparalleled acoustics and a natural 3-second reverberation. His recordings also benefited from being recorded on a one-of-kind Ampex 3-track 1/2" tape recorder designed and built by...Vaughn. All of Lyman's albums were recorded live, without overdubbing. He recorded after midnight, to avoid the sounds of traffic and tourists, and occasionally you can hear the aluminum dome creaking as it settles in the cool night air. The quality of these recordings became even more evident with the advent of CD reissues, when the digital mastering engineer found he didn't have to do anything to them but transfer the original 3-track stereo masters to digital. The recordings remain state-of-the-art [now more than] 50 years later ([Source](#)).



Kaiser Geodesic Dome Auditorium (while still standing as a Hilton property)

As also had been the impact of Marin Denny's music,

Arthur Lyman's music struck a chord with the WWII GIs who returned from the war with a taste for the exotic. In this way, Arthur helped Hawaii come to the foreground of America's consciousness as it was

gaining its statehood. Exotica music provided the perfect background for the Polynesian supper clubs and Tiki lounges that sprouted up across America during this time. The Exotic craze spawned restaurants like the Hawaii Kai in New York, The Luau in Beverly Hills, the Mai Kai in Florida and even the Kahiki in Columbus, Ohio. The backyard luau was “in,” the tiki torches were lit, and leading the way was the Arthur Lyman group with music which conjured up images of a jungle paradise filled with both the romantic and the forbidden (Chenault, p. 37).

Lyman’s second album, *Hawaiian Sunset*, released in 1959, explored

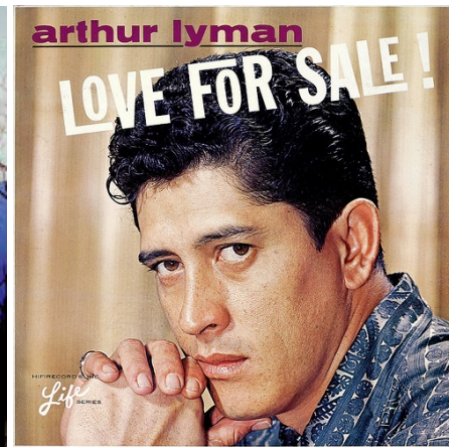
his Hawaiian heritage while weaving in cool-jazz elements. ... *Hawaiian Sunset* features an array of authentic Hawaiian instruments as well as Arthur himself playing on slack-key guitar. The liner notes describe *Hawaiian Sunset* as “a sound painting of one of the most beautiful spots on the earth, the Hawaiian islands. Sounds of the sea, trade wind breezes through palm trees and the rainbow coloring of flowers are expressed in songs.” (Chenault, p. 37)

Lyman’s biggest pop single, “Yellow Bird,” hit the charts in 1961, staying 10 weeks and peaking at #4 in July; the song would become Lyman’s “signature tune for the rest of his life” (Chenault, p. 38). “Love for Sale,” Lyman’s last charting single, reached #43 in March 1963.



When his group was not in the recording studio or performing at various venues in Hawaii (e.g., the Waialae Country Club and the Canoe House at the Ilikai Hotel at Waikiki), it toured the mainland, appearing in locales such as the Bali Hai in Southern California and at Chicago’s Edgewater Beach Hotel. Indeed, in 1962, the Arthur Lyman group headlined the “Edgewater Beach Hotel, playing two sets a night, six nights a week. That same year he produced six more albums for HiFi Records. Exotica music was a hot commodity and almost everyone in the recording industry released a Hawaiian album (Chenault, p. 38). Interviewed by Nate Chinen of Honolulu’s *Star-Bulletin*, Harold Chang, Lyman’s percussionist, recalled the fast pace of the group’s performances:

“It all had to be done live,” recalled Chang, who bore the brunt of the percussive busywork. “The stage looked like part of Harry’s Music Store: We had huge chimes, we had huge gongs; everything was on stage.” And the fast pace of the show was musically and physically demanding. “My right hand was doing one thing, and my left was doing another,” Chang said. “Each of us played about six instruments, and in the course of a tune, we would change instruments every two or three beats -- that’s why I couldn’t ever sit down” (Source).



Shelter Island's **BALI HAI**

Exotic Sounds of ARTHUR LYMAN
NIGHTLY IN THE HAWAIIAN VILLAGE
September 4th thru 16th

Your Host, TOM HAM
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THE ILIKAI HOTEL

Hawaii's Bright Spot After Dark

the canoe house
Located on Lobby Level

The Exotic Sounds of
ARTHUR LYMAN
& HIS GROUP

Romantic Polynesian atmosphere charged with the pulsating rhythm of Lyman's exotic musical stylings.

*Nightly except Sunday
Three shows — beginning at 9 p.m.*

The Arthur Lyman Group's original configuration played and recorded albums from 1957 to 1965. From 1965-1966 Archie Grant joined the group replacing John Kramer, continuing with the group until 1975. Clem Low (piano), Lyman's daughter Kapiolani (percussion, marimba, flute, hula, and vocals), and Kaipualani (percussion, hula, and vocals) joined the group in 1965, with this configuration in place until 1975. From 1975 to 1978, several group members changed: Paul Reid replacing Clem Low on piano, Randy Aton replacing Archie Grant on bass, and Pat Sombrio replacing Harold Chang on drums, with Neil Norman as an occasional guest guitarist. Over the nearly two-decade period that the Lyman group performed from 1957 to 1965, the group recorded more than 30 albums and earned three gold albums.

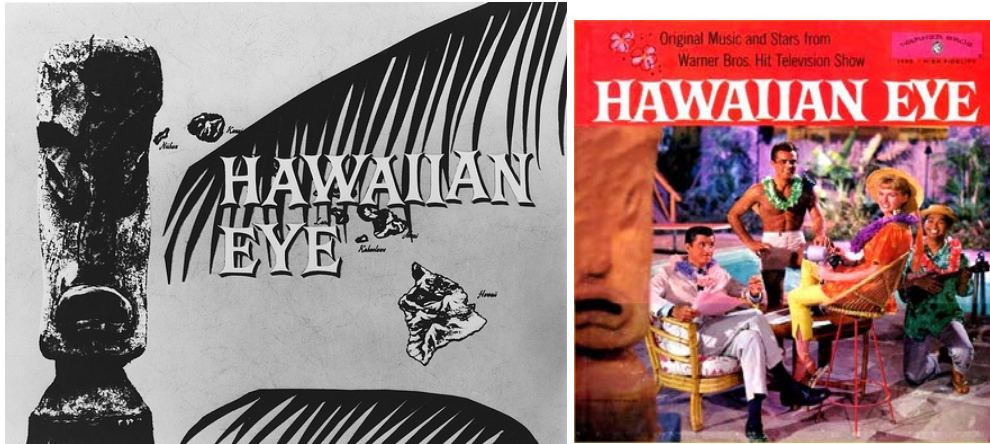


In 1964 the Arthur Lyman Group performed in Seattle, Washington on Pete Barbutti's *On the Town* show with Chang on percussion, Soares on piano, Kramer on bass, and Lyman on vibes. Their performance included "Taboo" and "Otome-san"



Lyman's group appeared on other TV shows including *The Andy Williams Show*, the TV shows of Red Skelton and Steve Allen, and on an ABC-TV special *An Evening With*. Previously the show had featured such artists as Sammy Davis, Jr. and Ella Fitzgerald, and on 10/29/65 the focus was on *An Evening with Arthur Lyman*.

Harold Chang, Lyman's drummer, recalled that the group "did 10 episodes for *Hawaiian Eye* [starring Robert Conrad and Connie Stevens] and we filmed and recorded it in Burbank, California. We went on the set, Connie Stevens, Poncie Ponce, Robert Conrad; they were all there. They had a mock set-up of the Shell Bar where we played" (Source). Unfortunately, the Warner Bros. soundtrack album for *Hawaiian Eye* did not include any of the music that the Arthur Lyman group had performed on any of those ten episodes, and this TV series has yet to be issued on DVD.



After recording albums on the Hi-Fi label for many years, some of Lyman's later albums appeared on two other labels, Life and GNP Crescendo, including one, *Puka Shells*, featuring Lyman's daughter, Kapiolani, singing, playing instruments, and appearing on the cover.

While Denny and Lyman would remain friendly rivals over the years, they occasionally appeared together with many of their former bandmates, including Lyman rejoining Denny for the recording of Denny's 1990 CD *Exotica '90*. Most albums that Lyman recorded during his career eventually were reissued on CD – and in 2001 some of Lyman's music was used in the remake of *Ocean's Eleven*, notably Duke Ellington's "Caravan."



Arthur Lyman with daughter Kapiolani, left, and another dancer in the 1970s

However, after a little over a decade, “everything changed and the Arthur Lyman group came back home to an early retirement in Hawaii. They could not hide from the British Invasion and the very-growing popularity of rock ‘n’ roll. Almost as quickly as it had started, the Exotica wave came crashing down. It was the end of an era” (Chenault, p. 38). Indeed, as reported by Otto von Stroheim in a Facebook post:

In 1962, the year [Lyman] turned 30, he earned \$120,000, same as Willie Mays, big money in those days. He was headlining Chicago’s Edgewater Beach Hotel, playing two sets a night, six nights a week. That same year he produced six albums in 45 days.

Five years later, exotic was old hat, the Beatles were hot, and Arthur Lyman was out of a job. The band broke up in Vegas in 1968-the year Janis Joplin appeared on Newsweek's cover-and they all came home to early retirement in Hawaii. ([Source](#))

Even as late as 1968 Lyman was yet releasing albums on Life Records, including *At the Port of Los Angeles*, *Latitude 20*, *Aphrodisia*, *The Winners Circle*, and *Today’s Greatest Hits*.

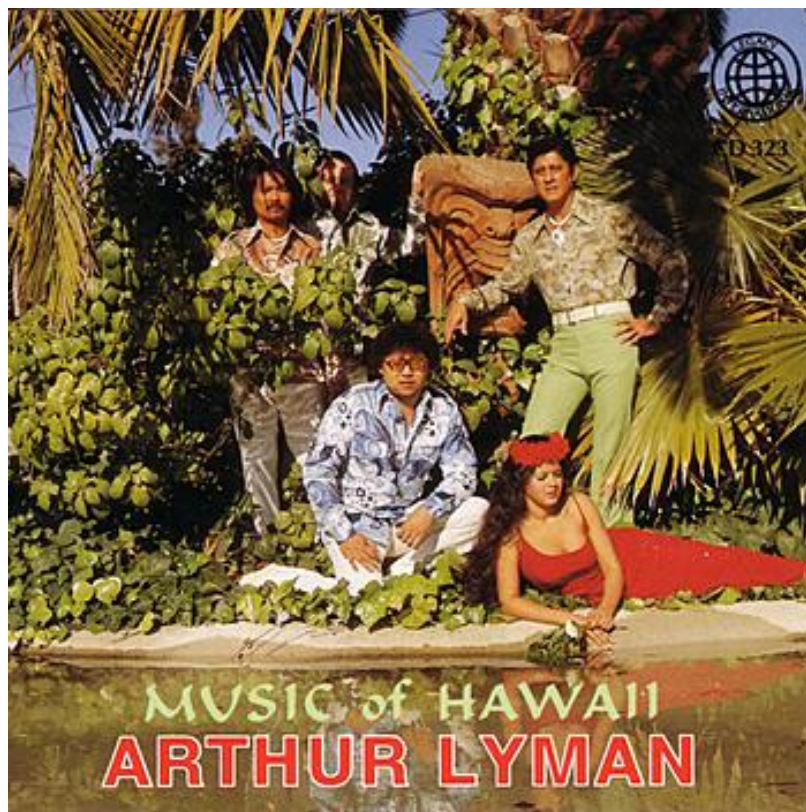


The decline in popularity of “exotica” music in the 1960s could well have led, in 1972, to both Martin Denny (see vignette) and Arthur Lyman getting “TOGETHER AGAIN!” for “ONE WEEK ONLY” IN 1972 for a joint appearance at the Latitude 20 nightclub in Torrance, California.



Yet, while music trends were changing and the fascination with Polynesia was fading, Lyman's combo played to tourists at the New Otani Kaimana Beach Hotel in Honolulu on many a Friday and Saturday night throughout the 1970s and even into the 1980s and 1990s. However, as was the case with the music of Martin Denny, Lyman's music also enjoyed a resurgence in popularity in the 1990s, with the lounge music revival and reissue of most of his albums on CD.

The nineties saw a brief resurgence of the Exotica sound with reissues of Les Baxter [see vignette], Martin Denny [see vignette] and Arthur Lyman. Rykodisc did an incredible job in rereleasing the albums *Taboo*, *The Leis of Jazz*, *Hawaiian Sunset*, *Taboo 2* and *The Legend of Pele*. The albums were digitally remastered in their entirety – complete with the original cover art and liner notes. They also released Arthur's Christmas album *Mele Kalikimaka* (retitled *With a Christmas Vibe*) and a compilation of later tunes called *Sonic Sixties*. ... In March 2002, Varese Sarabande released *The Very Best of Arthur Lyman*, a compilation highlight the best of Arthur Lyman's incredible career (Chenault, p. 38).



In his later years, Lyman would appear each Friday in the open-air lobby of the New Otani Hotel from noon to 2 p.m. playing the vibes. Nate Chinen of Honolulu's *Star-Bulletin* described the scene:

He stands with his back to the ocean. Wraparound sunglasses obscure his eyes. He bends ever so slightly at the waist, hands fanning out over the grid of a vibraphone. Felt-covered mallets brush against the bars gently, almost tenderly. And amid the quiet bustle of bellhops, a dozen listeners seem transported. At their applause, he nods appreciatively and reaches for his drink. Then it's on to the next tune. ... Affable and ageless, he played every Friday afternoon in the open-air lobby of the New Otani Hotel, then rolled his vibes down the sidewalk for storage at the Elks Club. His audience was small but loyal, mostly transplanted mainlanders who remembered the Lyman of yore ([Source](#)).

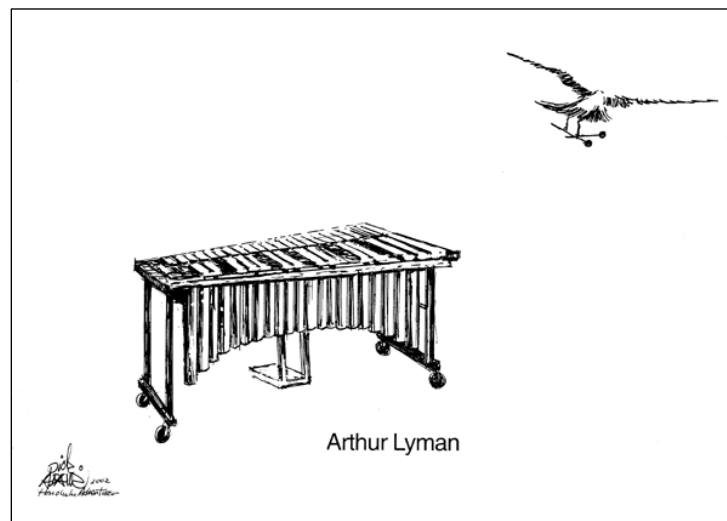


By the 1990s, Lyman's performance schedule had become purposively light. While receiving occasional offers for reunion tours, especially in Japan, he chose to stay close to home, where he played weekly gigs at the New Otani Hotel and Oahu Country Club. In the early 2000s Lyman took ill with thoracic cancer and "ended his...engagement at the New Otani Kaimana Beach Hotel only when he became too sick to play" (Chenault, p. 38).

Christina Denny (personal communication) recalls her father Martin as having "arranged a benefit for Arthur as he was dying – for hospital costs – and visited him frequently. They made their peace before [Arthur] died. Always [the competition] who was #1. At the end, both said the other was #1" (Christina Denny). Having become known as "the King of Lounge music," Lyman died on February 24, 2002, just 22 days after his 70th birthday, at St. Francis' Hospice.

Martin Denny, who regularly visited with [Lyman] in the hospital, said, "he had a keen ear for music and a great imagination, and I would say that his success and exposure paralleled mine. There [were] debates on who came first, but as far as I'm concerned we did it together." (Chenault, p. 38)

Services for Arthur Lyman were held at "his beloved Elks Club, on the beach in Waikiki. In a very emotional and heartwarming ceremony, the Pat Silva Trio played 'Yellow Bird' on [Lyman's] vibes, while outrigger canoes carried his ashes beyond the reef where 24 yellow birds were set free. Martin Denny said in a beautiful eulogy 'You are the true spirit of aloha, and may God speed you to your celestial vibes'" (Chenault, p. 38).



Source

Flight Log Memories – While I had collected all of Martin Denny’s LPs over the years, I had passed on collecting the LPs of Arthur Lyman, perhaps because my record budget would only go so far and I put a higher priority on collecting soundtrack LPs. During one trip to visit my parents in New York City in the 1980s, I was making the rounds of the city’s record stores in search of “cutout” soundtrack LPs. The term “cutout” meant that the album’s record label was discontinuing the album as it was going out-of-print. The term “cutout” also referred to such LPs having a corner clipped, a spine notched, or a hole punched in the LP’s corner--and the album’s price being slashed to a significantly reduced price (e.g., two for a \$1.00 or another low price such as \$1.98 rather than the LP’s original retail price, say, \$4.98). In hopes of finding some “cutout” soundtrack LPs, I went into one of the city’s Sam Goody record stores to look through the cutout section for soundtrack LPs when I spotted a large number of Arthur Lyman LPs on sale at cutout prices, probably as I recall at \$1.98 or so apiece. Right in front of me was an opportunity to build an instant Arthur Lyman collection and I passed in favor of saving my money to buy soundtrack LPs, a decision I would later regret.

Years later I would go on a collector’s binge trying to expand my Martin Denny collection to include other Exotica artists, starting with Arthur Lyman’s LPs and having to do it by resorting to bidding on his LPs on eBay.com. Eventually, as costly as this was, I rounded up a complete collection of Lyman’s LPs, including those LPs I could have bought factory-sealed at dirt-cheap prices in that Sam Goody store back in the 1980s. To make matters worse, by the time I acquired all of Lyman’s LPs through eBay, those LPs were starting to be reissued on CD by various record labels. Of course, I couldn’t pass on collecting the CD reissues as they offered improved sound compared to listening to the often used (i.e., scratched) LPs I won on eBay. Ultimately, when most of Lyman’s LPs had been issued on CD and added to my collection, I sold my Lyman LPs on auction at eBay to at least recover some of my capital outlay.



Arthur Lyman Playing the Vibes and Quiet Village at the New Otani Hotel in Waikiki

In 1999, my wife Sonia, son Shannon, and I made a family trip to Hawaii. I had previously learned that Lyman, now retired, still played the vibes each Friday from noon to 2:00 p.m. in the lobby bar of the New Otani Hotel in Waikiki. Abandoning my wife and son to their tourism priorities, I drove over to the hotel an hour before noon to get a good seat. Lyman arrived on time and began playing on solo vibraphone the various tunes he had recorded years earlier on Hi-Fi and Life Records.



Arthur Lyman Playing "Quiet Village" at the Makai Bar of the New Otani Hotel

While I enjoyed Lyman's performance and selection of tunes, notably, *Quiet Village* and *Yellow Bird*, it was a great frustration to discover before his performance that my camcorder battery had died and that I hadn't brought a backup battery in spite of my Boy Scout "be prepared" training. But to the rescue came a very kind couple with whom I struck up a conversation as we waited for Lyman's performance to start. Longtime fans of Lyman, they offered to take some photos of me with Lyman as shown below.



Arthur Lyman Playing the Vibes at New Otani Hotel, Waikiki, Honolulu, Hawaii (1999)

Not too long after my 1999 close encounter with Lyman, he began a battle with throat cancer that, sadly, resulted in his death less than three years later. Recently, in the process of researching and writing this vignette, I was able to get in touch by phone with Lyman's daughter Kapiolani who shared information helpful in writing this vignette. Mahalo, Kapi!

Over the years, the passing of Les Baxter, Arthur Lyman, and Martin Denny left up in the air the question of who would pick up the Exotica torch and keep Exotica alive into a new generation. While a number of groups have come forward on that front (e.g., The Waitiki 7 among others), little did I know when visiting Martin in 1999 that he would introduce me to that next "new era" torch bearer for the sounds of Exotica – and that person was Lloyd Kandell as recounted in our next vignette.

Lloyd Scott Kandell (2/16/51 – present)



The music side is just for joy and following your passion—thus the birth of Don Tiki. In advertising, you're using your creative talents to help make other people's dreams come true. My partner is the one who writes the songs and has the struggles there, but it's all artistic expression and joy for him, too. I'm visual and contribute concepts and song titles, but he's the musical genius, and he's the composer. ... We're reinventing exotica.

Lloyd Kandell was born in Glendale, California and grew up in Southern California where his parents would play the records of Martin Denny (see vignette) at tiki-themed parties in the family's backyard. When Kandell family went to Disneyland, Lloyd's top priorities were the Tiki Tiki Room and the Jungle River Boat that featured several selections of Martin Denny's music. Ironically, it was their success on the mainland that precipitated Kandell and Sherri (his wife of 40+ years) eventually moving to Hawaii. As Kandell recalls:

Escape from the planet of the apes (Los Angeles). Sherri...and I had a fruit stand/farmer's market by the sea on the corner of Pacific Coast Hwy 1 and Topanga Canyon, the start of Malibu. Our customers were the artists, musicians and hippies of Topanga, the rich and famous of Malibu, and all of Southern California on their way to the beach. It was a huge success and we soon had more money than ever imagined by our mid-twenties. More money, more problems and the big supermarkets 'influenced' the city [and] county bureaucracy to shut us down (long story). Disillusioned that our fun and profitable business, much beloved by the local community, was over, we began to ponder our future. We read an article in the travel section of the *Los Angeles Times* about Molokai just opening for tourism for the first time. It painted a romantic picture that made it sound like it would be akin to Gauguin arriving in Tahiti over 100 years ago. The "Friendly Island" turned out to be not quite ready for us and vice versa so we found our way to the "Garden Island" of Kauai where we discovered our personal paradise and decided to move there in September 1976. We lived in Haena, one mile from the end of the road, on the lush North Shore for four years. As free-spirited entrepreneurs, we had several small businesses – from concert promotion to food distribution to starting "Kauai's Own Swap Meet and Flea Market," a monthly event. This allowed plenty of time to "be here now," as was the ethos, and to bodysurf at my favorite spot, spectacular Lumahai beach where scenes from *South Pacific* were filmed. It was here that I earned the nickname "Fluid Floyd" which became my alias in Don Tiki. (Lloyd Kandell, personal communication).

While living in Kauai, Kandell learned of a musical genius, Kit "Perry Coma" Ebersbach (now his collaborator in Don Tiki), who was living on Kauai's North Shore and, as it turned out, the two shared the same eclectic taste for music. Kandell started taking piano lessons from Kit and enlisted the latter's musical services,

hoping the instructor could transpose some of [Kandell's] favorite music. "So I showed up with the first punk records that were coming out; Sex Pistols, Elvis Costello, Mink DeVille, Devo, that kind of stuff. Kit was very excited by all this because it had that kind of do-it-yourself philosophy. Believe it or not, new wave and early punk rock became their common bond; their musical glue" ([Source](#)).

But when the Kandell's first son Keith was born, "we realized it was time to, as they say on Disneyland's Jungle River Boat Ride, 'now for the most dangerous part of our journey, the return to civilization.'" So, in 1980, following Ebersbach having moved to Oahu, the Kandell's decided also to move to Honolulu to focus on establishing their family and careers. With a referral from Ebersbach, Kandell landed a job DJ-ing at a local radio station. Kandell recalled:

My first jobs on Oahu were radio DJ [at Jack Law's Wave Waikiki radio station], radio salesperson, and club DJ. Kit also moved to Oahu with his family and soon after formed the island's first punk/new wave band, The Squids. They played at what was to become Honolulu's premiere nightclub, Wave Waikiki. He brought me in to DJ between their sets. The club owner asked me to put some radio spots together. I did and it helped put them on the map and was voted "most popular radio campaign" at the 1981 ad awards event. It also helped establish Kandell Advertising, Inc. My day job remains advertising, PR and event coordination. My dream job will always be Don Tiki (Lloyd Kandell, personal communication).

In 1994, Kandell had his own close encounter with **Martin Denny** (see vignette) who, at the time, was 80 years old. That encounter with Martin Denny occurred:

at a Steinway piano recital [in Honolulu where Denny] was one of their signature artists. Warm, affable and a great raconteur, he told me that he was in his 40's when he hit the top of the Billboard charts with "Quiet Village." Inspired by his story, I brought my concept of an exotica revival group to my good friend and collaborator, Kit "Perry Coma" Ebersbach. Much like Denny, Kit is a brilliant pianist, composer and arranger, and we share the same eclectic taste in music ([Source](#)).

Further reflecting on that initial encounter with Denny, Kandell recalled that Denny "told me his life story, of how his 'Quiet Village' was on top of the charts for nearly the entire year of 1959, keeping other acts like Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley at bay, and all of this happening when he was 49 ... oh, excuse me, 39! ... After I heard this, I saw Kit, grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him, saying 'Look! We can do this too, at our age!'" ([Source](#)).



L to R: Don Tiki's Kit "Perry Coma" Ebersbach, Violetta Beretta, and Fluid Floyd aka Lloyd Kandell)

Lloyd's encounter with Martin triggered the idea of collaborating with Kit to create the contemporary Exotica group, known as [Don Tiki](#) that features Hawaii's top musicians with experience ranging from jazz fusion to world beat to the Honolulu Symphony to Waikiki Showrooms. On stage, Kandell is "Fluid Floyd," the band's "congenial host" known on occasion to bang on whalebone or blow a mean ocarina, a flute-like wind instrument. As described on the Don Tiki website:

South Seas fantasies beckon with the neo-exotica group, Don Tiki. They draw inspiration from the original Mid-Century masters of the exotica sound, Martin Denny, Arthur Lyman and Les Baxter and bring their evocative music into the 21st Century. In fact, Denny gave the band his seal of approval when he played on two tracks on their 1997 debut album, *The Forbidden Sounds of Don Tiki*. Further deepening Don Tiki's authenticity is its percussionist and bird caller, Lopaka Colón, son of Augie Colón, who had the same role in Denny's band ([Source](#)).

That first album on CD (Taboo Records) featured Martin Denny playing two of his compositions on piano: "Exotica" and "Forever and Ever" – the latter a romantically flavored song composed by Denny for his wife June. One of the original members of The Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny was percussionist Augie Colón, whose son Lopaka is now Don Tiki's percussionist. Kandell recalled having the opportunity to work with both Augie and Martin:

Augie was also thrilled that we were bringing this evocative, almost lost genre of music into the 21st century. We did a big tribute concert here at the historic Hawaii Theater entitled, 'PRIMITIVA! Don Tiki's Tribute to the Exotic sounds of Martin Denny.' Both he and Martin were in attendance and we called them up to perform two songs at the end of the show. First, Augie played "Bacoa" and wowed the crowd with his bongo fury and birdcalls. His son Lopaka (Augie Colón, Jr.) on congas and percussion was on the opposite side of the stage and they exchanged rhythm patterns and jungle sounds. It was a chicken skin...goose bumps...moment duly noted by all that Lopaka was genetically coded to carry on his dad's role with Denny! (Lloyd Kandell, personal communication)



Augie Colón, Lloyd Kandell, and Martin Denny (courtesy: Lloyd Kandell)

"Mr. Denny never missed one of our live shows and often referred to us as 'the Don Tiki' orchestra because our show is so large with the addition of singers, dancers and choreography." ([Source](#))

"[Denny] was almost a surrogate father, very supportive, very accessible.... He'd come to our gigs and show his enthusiasm." ([Lloyd Kandell](#))



Don Tiki performing "Bwana Banana" at Doris Duke Theatre, Honolulu Academy of Arts (12/17/11)



Since Don Tiki's inception, the group has performed at various locations from Europe to Hawaii and points in between such as their first mainland gig in 2000 at the Kahiki, the historic tiki bar in Columbus, Ohio. "It was wild," Kandell recalled. "You walked in and the first thing you saw was a three-story-tall moai statue, like on Easter Island, with a fireplace in the mouth and two 80-watt red light bulbs in the eye sockets. One wall was all tropical fish tank, the other a tropical bird cage." Sadly for all the lovers of lowbrow, the gig was to celebrate Kahiki's closing." ([Source](#))

Sadly, while on the historical registry, the Kahiki was torn down to make way for a pharmacy. Don Tiki has also headlined the Wassermusik Music festival in Berlin and played for Microsoft employees at the Grand Wailea on Maui, a Google convention on Kaua'i, and a Cisco Systems meeting at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in Waikiki. Unfortunately, the gigs of the Don Tiki troupe are infrequent, in part because it's hard to get 18 busy people together at the same time. "We are also very selective," says Kandell. "We don't want to be overexposed" ([Source](#)).





As of this writing, the Don Tiki band features a dozen or so of Hawaii's top musicians, including **Kit Ebersbach** (keyboards, band leader), **Lopaka Colón** (congas, bongo, bird calls), **Hai Jung** (bass, vocals), **Sherry Shaoling** (vocals, dancer), **Abe Lagrimas, Jr.** (vibraphone, percussion), **Ryoko Oka** (keyboards), **Jason Segler** (drums), **Tim Mayer** (reeds), **Violetta Beretta** (dancer), and **Lloyd Kandell** (producer and host). The group's principal male vocalist, **Delmar deWilde** (real name: [Fritz Hasenpusch](#)) died on August 5, 2012 while hiking in Hawaii.



Delmar deWilde and Don Tiki Perform "The Natives Are Restless Tonight"

For the uninitiated who have not had a chance to see a Don Tiki performance live and in person, there's Plan B—catching some videos of the group on YouTube.com, or Plan C—listening to the group's debut CD *The Forbidden Sounds of Don Tiki* or any of Don Tiki's follow up CDs (*Skinny Dip with Don Tiki*, *Don Tiki Adulterated: The Remix Project*, and *Don Tiki South of the Boudoir*). These various CDs feature a number of the songs that the group performs in its live concerts. According to Kandell, the continuing fascination with Exotica music is based on the music being “a lush, slower, almost cinematic sound that paints pictures in one's imagination. It's the perfect escapist soundtrack for these hectic times.” ([Source](#))

“Don Tiki has been carrying the torch for—and now rekindling interest in—tiki lounge music, which began in the 1950s when exotica pioneers like pianist Martin Denny, vibraphonist Arthur Lyman and composer Les Baxter developed a campy but irresistible blend of Polynesian, South American and African rhythms and melodies. Redolent of the jungle and the lounge equally, exotica music classics like ‘Yellow Bird’ and ‘Quiet Village’ were part of a new wave of Polynesian pop culture that crested in the '60s. (Tiki culture officially goes back all the way to 1934, when Don the Beachcomber opened the first tiki bar in L.A., and Victor Bergeron opened the first Trader Vic's in Oakland in 1937.) Don Tiki's popularity is aided by yet another wave of appreciation for the tiki aesthetic (which seems to run in cycles but never quite dies), infused now with a modern electronica/lounge chillness” ([Source](#)).

Flight Log Memories: In 1999, while my family and I were vacationing in Hawaii, I had agreed with Martin Denny (see vignette) to meet him at the One Kalakaua Senior Living Nursing Home at which he played piano each month for the home's residents. While I was a big fan of the Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny going back into the late 1950s, I had never had the opportunity to see him perform live in person – other than when I visited his home in 1992 and he had played a few songs for me on his piano. Indeed, since March of 1963, when my father and his family had made a week-long stop in Hawaii in route to his new job in the Philippines, I have always regretted and kicked myself that it had not occurred to me to ask my father if we could look into the possibility of seeing Martin Denny and his group perform while we were in Honolulu. The more I think about this, the more upsetting it becomes to even let the thought cross my mind that he might have been performing just a few blocks away from the Waikiki apartment that my parents had rented for the week. Well, no point crying over spilled coconut milk!



Ko'olau Golf Course on the Windward Coast of Oahu in Hawaii

I was delayed in getting to the nursing home on time for the 3 p.m. start of Martin's performance because of having to drive from Oahu's Windward Coast back to Honolulu that afternoon. As it turns out, my son Shannon had scored some freebie golf time to play that same day at the Ko'olau Golf Club which is on the opposite side of the island from Honolulu. It was like pulling hen's teeth to get my son off the golf course and into the clubhouse so we could eat lunch before dashing back to Honolulu in time for Martin's performance.

By the time we arrived, Martin was about to start when Sonia suggested that I ask Martin if it would be OK with him to videotape his performance. Fortunately, I had just enough time to ask him, before he started playing, for permission to record the session—and he said that I could. Unfortunately, I missed some of Martin's initial playing because of fumbling around to get my camcorder up and running, but eventually there I was videotaping a Martin Denny concert though, sadly, without any of his former group's members, all having passed away leaving only Martin for this gig.



Martin Denny at One Kalakaua Senior Living Nursing Home (1999)

After Martin finished his performance, we went up to tell him how much we enjoyed the songs he played and offered to accompany him to his car. Along the way, once out on the street, Martin introduced me to **Lloyd Kandell** who also was there for Martin's performance. I also learned of Lloyd's association with the musical group **Don Tiki**.

On returning home from Hawaii, I purchased *The Forbidden Sounds of Don Tiki* CD and found it quite listenable, in effect, the group's interpretations the next generation of Exotica. I've continued to buy each new Don Tiki CD as it is released. But little did I realize at that time, the key role Don Tiki's Lloyd "Fluid Floyd" Kandell would play in ushering in the next generation of the Byrnes clan.

Well, now that I knew of Don Tiki and had begun purchasing the group's CDs, I made a mental note that I'd try to catch their show the next time I was in Honolulu. But things didn't quite work out that way. In 2003, my wife and I began making plans to vacation in Hawaii in 2004. A month or so before the date of our departure, I sent an email to Martin to ask if we could again visit him during our stay in Waikiki – but I didn't hear back from him.

I had not known at the time that Denny's health had deteriorated since last visiting him in 1999. So I sent an email to Lloyd Kandell to ask how Martin was doing and inquire if he could get in touch with Martin to see if it would be OK to visit him while we were in Hawaii. I mentioned that I also was hoping to meet with Lloyd and get his autograph on a Don Tiki CD. One evening a week or so later, when I got home from work, Sonia told me that Lloyd had phoned to tell me Martin would be happy to meet with us.

Another highlight of this 2004 trip was that I gifted my son Shannon, his girlfriend Jeannine, and her son Matthew (by her first marriage) with frequent flyer tickets to come out and spend a week or so with us in Hawaii. My son's "tour group" arrived a week or so after our arrival and we began making plans for what we would do together and what Shannon's group would do on their own.

One morning at breakfast Jeannine told Sonia that, the night before, Shannon had asked Jeannine if she would marry him and, if so, if he could talk with Matt to see if he also would say yes. Jeannine gave her permission for Shannon to talk with Matt who also was two thumbs up to the proposed marriage. Sonia asked Jeannine what were their plans for a wedding and Jeannine said that they were thinking about possibly getting married in Hawaii but had not made any definite plans.

In any case, they had made plans to go that morning to see Pearl Harbor and, after breakfast, took off in our rental car for the tour of Pearl Harbor. With no disrespect to the many military and civilian personnel who died on December 7, 1941 at Pearl Harbor, I wondered, with the clock ticking toward the date of our return flights home, if the next generation should be putting a little higher priority on – and urgency about – finding out what might be involved in getting married in Hawaii.

With the days dwindling on the remaining days of our planned stay in Hawaii, and having already had an initial visit with Martin Denny a few days before, I realized that I better contact Lloyd to make sure we could arrange a time for Lloyd and me to get together—after all, I wanted to get him to autograph my Don Tiki CD. On talking with him by phone, I mentioned that a complication had arisen that might impact on the time I would have available to get together with him. I proceeded to tell him that we had just learned that my son and his girlfriend, also with us during our visit, had made an on-the-spot decision to possibly get married in Hawaii. Lloyd immediately asked if they had made plans and I replied that they had not but had taken off to visit Pearl Harbor.

"Well," he replied, "let me tell you a little about myself," proceeding to tell me that he is not only Fluid Floyd in Don Tiki but also Father Lloyd. Having been ordained as a minister during the Viet Nam War era, he was [licensed in](#)

[Hawaii to perform weddings](#). He proceeded to tell me the details about what Shannon and Jeannine would need to do in order to get married and how he could assist – and I told him that I'd pass the information along to them.

I then called Jeannine on her cell phone to pass along the message and learned they already were driving back to the hotel because there were just too many people waiting in line to take the boat out to see the Arizona Memorial. On their return to the hotel, Jeannine phoned Lloyd and made an appointment to meet at his house on Black Point Road that afternoon at 5 pm. As it turns out, Lloyd's house was near, almost across the street, from the house where Martin Denny lived when I first met and visited him in 1992. When Shannon and Jeannine returned to the hotel from their meeting with Lloyd, they were very excited about meeting with him as they found they liked him as well as all the guidance he had provided about arranging the marriage which took place a few days later.



Now, in the liner notes for the CD reissue of Martin Denny's *The Enchanted Sea* album, Martin described the stage on which Father Lloyd would marry Shannon and Jeannine:

The concept of *The Enchanted Sea* goes back to June of 1959 after I bought our home on Black Point Road, on the island of Oahu.... The house was located on the highest point of Black Point, giving it a spectacular view overlooking the ocean. As the tide swept over the reef, along the palm tree-covered shoreline, we could see Koko Head in the distance. When the incoming waves broke against the cliff, the spray would fall into a man-made splash swimming pool that had been dug from a lava rock basin. (Scamp SCP 9715-2)



Shannon, Jeannine & Matthew Ready for Their Limo Ride to the Wedding Site

Over the next few days, we prepared for the wedding, buying appropriate clothing for the ceremony and following Father Lloyd's recommendation on a photographer to contact, where to buy flowers and leis in Chinatown at a good price, and so on. On the afternoon of the wedding, the Byrnes clan (Kerry, Sonia, Shannon, Jeannine, and Matthew) arrived in a rented limousine at Lloyd's home on Black Point Road. Shannon and Jeannine handled the paperwork legalities with Father Lloyd and then [walked down onto the lava rock overlooking the ocean and adjacent to the swimming pool noted in the above quote.](#)\



Shannon and Jeannine Sign Paperwork with Lloyd



Wedding Party Walks to Wedding Site

The wedding party included two others, the witness and his wife, the witness being one of Shannon's former Virginia Tech friends now living in Hawaii and with whom Shannon golfed just the day before. As the sun was setting, Father Lloyd performed the wedding, the photographer took photos, and we toasted the newlyweds with a bottle of champagne served in plastic cups. Then Shannon, Jeannine, and Matthew took off their wedding clothes to reveal the swimming suits they were wearing and all three jumped into the swimming pool.



Shannon & Jeannine Wedding



Wedding Party



Shannon, Jeannine, & Matthew in Black Point Pool

Soon thereafter we got back into the limousine to ride back to the hotel to get ready for dinner that we had at the Bali by the Sea restaurant in the Hilton Hawaiian Village hotel. When I was paying the limousine driver, he commented that this was the first time he had ever brought the bride, after her wedding, back to her hotel dressed in a swimming suit.



Dinner after the Wedding

As Lloyd and I were walking back up the hill to the limousine after the wedding, I mentioned to him that it was unfortunate that Don Tiki wasn't performing in the Waikiki area before we had to return home in a week or so. Then Lloyd told me that Don Tiki would be performing at Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville in Las Vegas in October on the Saturday evening of the Columbus Day weekend. I immediately said: "Sonia and I will be there!"

Well, I was half right. While we purchased tickets to fly to Las Vegas, Sonia came down with a bad cold and was not able to travel. As our airline tickets and hotel were purchased on a use or lose basis, I flew by my lonesome to Las Vegas on Friday, wandered around town the next day and took in the *Star Trek Experience* at my hotel), and then headed to Margaritaville to get dinner before the start of the show. Arriving at Margaritaville well in advance of the show, I was able to find a good seat for watching the show—and even stayed on to enjoy the late show!

During the break between shows, I went up to the stage to greet Lloyd and introduce myself to **Lopaka Colón** who, in addition to being Don Tiki's conga and bongo player, does the bird calls, just as did his father, Augie Colón, years before as a member of the Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny. Some photos of Don Tiki that I took that night in Las Vegas are shared below.



Don Tiki's Lopaka Colón (son of Augie Colón) (photo by Kerry)





Don Tiki performs at Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville, Las Vegas (2004) (photos by Kerry)

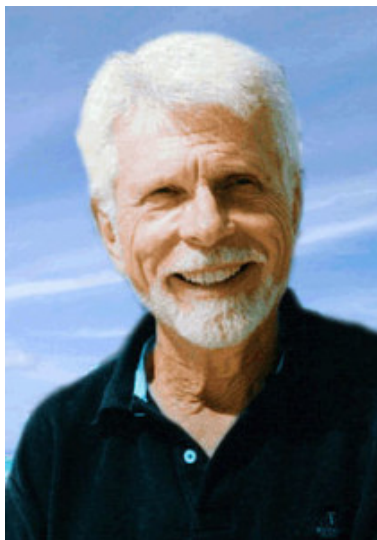
Four stunning women sashay across the stage wearing skimpy costumes and gold high heels. They sport novelty-sized cocktail glasses balanced on their lovely heads. One glass holds a martini, another a rum concoction topped with pineapple and a tiny umbrella, the third a hoppy brew of some sort, the fourth ... well, it's not clear, but filled with alcohol of some kind for sure.

Behind the spirit goddesses struts Delmar deWilde, who looks like an unholy love child of Wayne Newton, Hugh Hefner and Jethro from The Beverly Hillbillies. Delmar's dressed in Las Vegas-formal with hundreds of karats of bling dangling from his neck. He croons into his cordless microphone while cavorting with the dancers. The women gyrate, undulate and do other not-for-prime-time things that end with -ate. ...

Later, the dancers will wear feather headdresses and voodoo dolls, portray a gypsy with a crystal ball, belly dance and balance swords. DeWilde will don a red smoking jacket while one of the dancers will become a sexy demon to his lounge lizard Satan by slipping into Victoria's Secret, red horns and a tail. Malo-clad males will preen and pose.

It's Polynesian pop gone amok. It's a Stardust Lounge act in the Pacific. It's the forbidden world of Don Tiki ([Source](#)).

Robert Drasnin (11/17/ 1927 – 5/13/2015)



I never thought it'd be anything, but it's come back to haunt me very nicely.

Robert Drasnin, born in Charleston, West Virginia in 1927, grew up to become a composer and clarinet player. At an early age he was interested in the clarinet and began taking lessons. Eventually his family moved to Los Angeles, attending primary school in East Hollywood, Starr King Junior High, and Los Angeles High School, where he joined the American Federation of Musicians. After graduation Drasnin joined the U.S. Army and served during the Korean War. Following military service Drasnin was soon on the road playing saxophone, clarinet and flute for bandleaders Skinny Ennis and Les Brown, performing with bands throughout the 50s. After Army service, Drasnin returned to UCLA as a graduate student and became associate conductor of the UCLA Symphony. In 1959, Drasnin received his M.A. in Music from UCLA. During the 1950s he also played with the Tommy Dorsey orchestra and Red Norvo's quintet.

While included here as a contributor to the Exotic genre, Drasnin spent the vast majority of his career composing scores for over 100 films and television shows. His scoring career began in the 1950s when he composed for live television dramas including *Climax*, *Studio One*, *Ford Startime*, and *Playhouse 90*. In 1955 he scored the film *One Way Ticket to Hell* and later *Ride the Whirlwind* (1966), *Picture Mommy Dead* (1966), *The Kremlin Letter* (1970), *A Taste of Evil* (1971), *The Candy Snatchers* (1973), and *Crisis in Mid-Air* (1979). Drasnin also composed scores for TV shows such as *Barnaby Jones*, *Cannon*, *CHiPs*, *Daniel Boone*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *I Spy*, *Lost in Space*, *Mannix*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Police Story*, *Streets of San Francisco*, *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Time Tunnel*, *Voyage To The Bottom of the Sea*, *Wild Wild West*, and *National Geographic Specials*.

Drasnin also served as music supervisor for several TV series, including *Gunsmoke*, *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*, *The Rookies*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Wagon Train*, while composing scores for more than a dozen made-for-TV movies, including the Lee J. Cobb version of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and early ABC telefilms as such as *Daughter of the Mind*, *The Old Man Who Cried Wolf*, *Crowhaven Farm* and *Dr. Cook's Garden*.

In the 1970s and up until his death, Drasnin was an active educator, teaching film scoring, orchestration, and music theory at Cal State Northridge from 1976 to 1991 and in the UCLA's film scoring extension program from 1993 through 2014. While Director of Music for the CBS Network from 1977 to 1991, he worked with the Grateful Dead in the 1980s on music for the revived "Twilight Zone" series, along with scoring several episodes himself.

While Drasnin was working with Tops Records in 1959, David Pell, the label's head, wanted to cash in on the popularity of Exotica-themed records such as those Martin Denny (see vignette) and Arthur Lyman (see vignette) had recorded. Pell approached Drasnin with a proposal that he create an Exotica album. Drasnin composed 12 original songs and spent the latter part of 1959 recording the album. Interestingly, the musicians performing on the album included a young pianist named John Williams (see vignette) who later became a film composer famous for his scores to such films as *Jaws* and *Star Wars*.



Drasnin's album, titled *Voodoo*, was released on the Tops/Mayfair label, with its cover artwork featuring a photo of a woman in a leopard print bikini dancing as two loin cloth-clad men play bongos in a dark jungle-like setting, bathed in red light. Years later, the original cover art was not used in the two different compact disc (CD) reissues *Voodoo*. In 2002, three selections from the 1959 *Voodoo* album were used in the soundtrack for the documentary film *Cinemanía*: "Desire," "Jardine de la Noche," and "Chant of the Moon."



In 2005 Robert Drasnin was invited to perform at The Hukilau—a 3-day Hawaiian/Tiki festival in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. For the performance a 16-piece orchestra was assembled, with the show consisting of selections from his 1959 album *Voodoo* as well as new Exotica-styled music Drasnin had composed after *Voodoo*. These new pieces would form the basis of the *Voodoo II* album, released in 2007.



In early 2007 Drasnin recorded *Voodoo II* which was released on Dionysus records in June 2007. Immediately following the *Voodoo II*'s release, Drasnin again performed at the Florida, Hukilau event with a 16-piece orchestra. The 2007 performance comprised compositions from both the *Voodoo* and *Voodoo II* releases.



In 2008 Drasnin was inducted into the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame, an event that included Drasnin's live performance of the WVU Fight (*It's West Virginia*) in the style of his *Voodoo* albums.



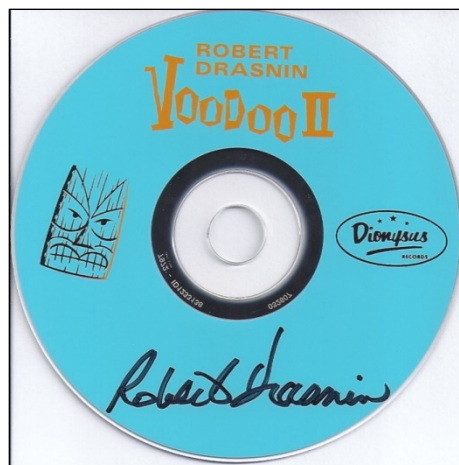
In December 2010 Drasnin appeared with The Waitiki 7 at Don the Beachcomber in Huntington Beach, California, performing Drasnin's "Hindara" and "In A Dorian Mode."



In 2015 word circulated that Drasnin was working on a new album to be titled *Voodoo III*. Sadly, he passed away on May 13, 2015, as the result of complications from a recent fall. While the album had not been completed, others stepped to finish it and get *Voodoo III* released not long after Drasnin's passing.



Flight Log Memories: I never had the pleasure of meeting Robert Drasnin in person or even speaking with him by phone but I did have a “postal exchange” encounter with him years after the release of *Voodoo II*. I don’t remember how but I learned one day that one could write directly to Drasnin to purchase a copy of *Voodoo II*. I sent off a check for the CD and soon after the CD arrived in the mail. I was pleasantly surprised on opening it that Drasnin had kindly autographed the CD (see photo below).



Paul Kenton Conrad (6/5/32 – present)



I'm now playing for some of the same people I played for 50+ years ago.

Paul Conrad was born on June 5, 1932 in McKees Rocks within Stowe Township of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Pittsburgh. Today, over 86 years later, Conrad lives in a suburb of Honolulu, still performing regularly, playing piano at Japanese weddings and for nearly two decades every Friday for an hour at a retirement community. When getting started professionally in the 1940s, Conrad performed with Herb Jefferies and Duke Ellington and was the piano player for Anita O'Day. He also performed with Hawaii's Trummy Young, Ethel Azama, Anne McCormick, Joanne Morgan, and the Fort Schafter Band. By the mid-1950s, Conrad was "deep in the heart of the exotica scene of Hawaii.... He worked with and knew not only Gene Rains but Martin Denny [see vignette], Arthur Lyman [see vignette], Ethel Azama [see below], Alfred Apaka, Webley Edwards of *Hawaii Calls* fame, and a host of other stars from the islands" (Source: *Quiet Village Podcast* #70 – Mark Riddle interview with Paul Conrad - 11/15/14).

During high school, at the age of 16, Conrad earned money playing piano at a tap dancing school in Pittsburgh. "There were stacks of sheet music of American standards on top of the piano," Conrad recalls. "Going through all those stacks of sheet music was how I learned to play so many of the popular songs of the day." After high school, Conrad studied music for five years at Carnegie Tech (Carnegie-Mellon). Following graduation, he was drafted into the army, where he spent his first eight weeks of basic training at Fort Knox and the second eight weeks in the band training unit at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

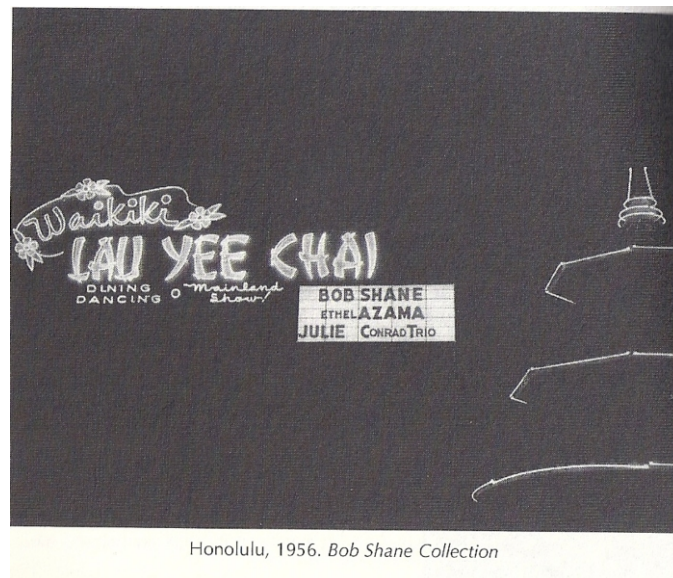
At the end of basic training, he received orders to report to the U.S. Army-Pacific (USARPAC) in Hawaii. He took a train to San Francisco, and from there went by boat to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, serving two years at Fort Schafter as a percussionist in the 264th army band and on the side as an organist at the Schofield Barracks chapel. When his tour with the army was completed in 1956, Conrad recalls, "I didn't feel like packing to go back to Pittsburgh, so I just stayed in Hawaii and started working in Waikiki right away" and also in Las Vegas.



Ethel Azama (8/28/34 - 3/7/84)

In the meantime, Ethel Azama, who was born in Honolulu of Okinawan ancestry, was singing American jazz and popular songs in various Honolulu venues. Azama had started her professional career in 1955 as an emcee at the Oasis nightclub in Honolulu. The club served as a venue for musical revues from Japan. In 1956, Azama began working as a standards singer in U.S. military clubs on Oahu such as The Cannon Club on Diamond Head. Pianist Paul Conrad usually served as her accompanist for her gigs. Conrad also wrote many of her arrangements.

That same year Azama and Conrad went to Las Vegas to perform at the Waikiki Lau Yee Chai nightclub, where the headline performer was singer Bob Shane who was soon to become one of the founding members of The Kingston Trio (see vignette). As shown in the photo below, two of the other acts included Azama and the Paul Conrad-led Conrad Trio (see photo below) that played some numbers on their own as well providing instrumental backup for Shane and Azama. By 1957 Azama had returned to Waikiki Beach and was singing at local nightclubs as the opening act for headliners such as singer Herb Jeffries and blues singer Josh White ([Source](#)).



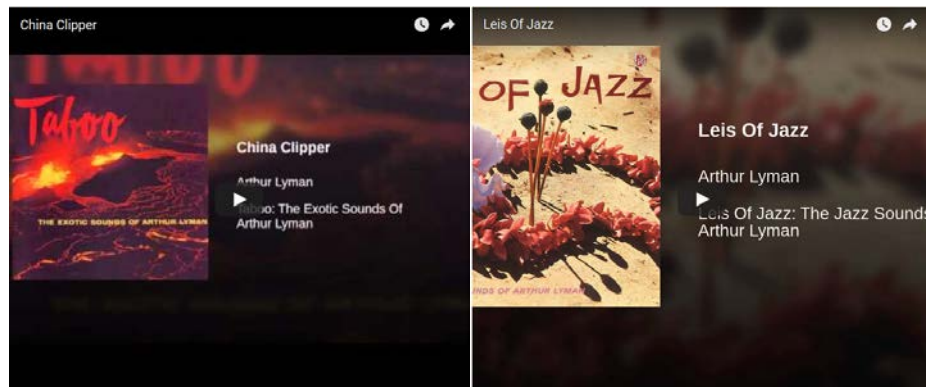
Source; Greenback Dollar: The Incredible Rise of The Kingston Trio (2013) (by William J. Bush)

In the meantime, by the mid-1950s, Martin Denny had been doing so well as a solo pianist at Don the Beachcomber's nightclub that he was able to convince Don Beach to provide a budget that would allow Denny to hire John Kramer (to play base), Arthur Lyman (to play vibes), and eventually Augie Colón (to play percussion and provide birdcalls). When the Kaiser Hawaiian Village Hotel's Shell Bar opened in 1956, the Martin Denny group was the bar's inaugural act. Conrad recalls that it was while working in the Waikiki area that he "hooked up with...guys like Martin Denny [see vignette] and Arthur Lyman [see vignette], doing arrangements for them while I was doing piano part gigs on my own."

By 1957, with Denny's "Quiet Village" and his early *Exotica*-themed albums on the Liberty label riding the charts, Denny convinced Liberty to contract Azama for a one-album deal. Denny contacted Azama and Conrad with the offer which included Denny's group providing instrumental background for Azama's singing. Denny proposed that Conrad arrange the songs for the album and play piano for the recording rather than Denny. *Exotic Dreams* was released in 1958, with Azama's vocals including standards ("Speak Low" and "Autumn Leaves") as well as a few *hapa-haole* numbers and a Japanese folk song. For the album, Conrad wrote a special arrangement of "Nightingale" that required two piano parts and invited Denny to play the other piano part. In all, Conrad worked with Azama over a six-year period.



When Lyman split off from Denny's group, Conrad received a call from Lyman who said: "I've got three things: a group, a job [at the Shell Bar], and a recording contract [with Hi-Fi Records]. But I don't have arrangements" (Paul Conrad, personal communication). Lyman offered Conrad a job to arrange songs for Lyman's group. Conrad did some of the arrangements for *Taboo*, Lyman's first album and also composed one of the album's songs ("China Clipper"). He later composed "Leis of Jazz" for Lyman's third album of the same name.



Earlier, while Conrad was still with the 264th Army band, musicians in that band as well as the Air Force, Army, and Navy bands would at times play in other service bands at the various military service clubs on Oahu. One day, Gene Rains, an Air Force Band vibraphonist, needed a piano player and invited Conrad to play in the band. As a result, Conrad played on various occasions with Rains' band. Then, one night when Conrad was playing with Rains' band at a show at Pearl Harbor, the show's emcee, also was an emcee at a night club in Waikiki, liked the way Conrad played and invited Conrad (who was scheduled to leave the army in a couple weeks) to play at his club (The Gourmet).

Beginning in 1957 Conrad played piano at The Gourmet for nearly three years, while also "doing charts" for Denny, Lyman, and Azama. One day, after Lyman had left the Denny group and had been replaced by Julius Wechter,

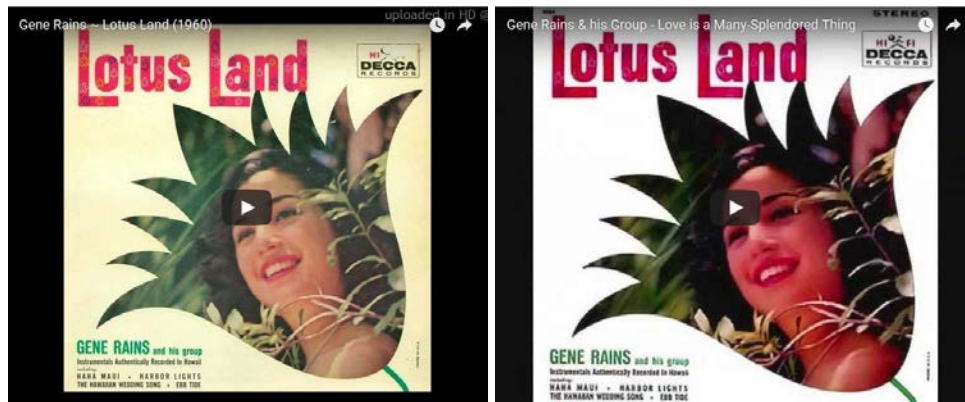
Conrad recalls that he was talking with Denny about the new celesta (celeste) that Denny had acquired. Conrad asked Denny if he would be willing to part with his old celeste. An agreement was struck that Conrad would acquire the old celeste in exchange for a cash payment and doing a couple of piano arrangements for Denny.

Conrad, happy with the acquisition of Denny's old celeste, was hauling it away when Julius shouted: "Marty, you finally were able got rid of that old dog" (Paul Conrad, personal communication). Years later, during the 1990s and no longer needing the celeste, Conrad asked Denny if he would like to have back his old celeste. Denny indicated that he would like to have it back and then gifted the celeste to a young Hawaiian musician.

In 1959, Gene Rains, who had left the Air Force and seen the success of Denny and Lyman, wanted similar success and felt Conrad, who had arranged for both Denny and Lyman, could help him. Rains invited Conrad to join the Gene Rains Group to play piano and do the group's arrangements. By this time, as Conrad recalls, "I was tired of playing for off-key singers in a piano bar" and decided to join the Gene Rains Group. At the time, singer Alfred Apaka, who performed in the Hawaiian Village Tapa Room and also was the hotel's talent director, booked the Gene Rains Group to perform in the hotel's Shell Bar, the hot spot for Hawaii's top performers, including Martin Denny and Arthur Lyman who had previously played the same venue.



It was Apaka who introduced Rains to Decca Records, the label recording Apaka's albums. When Sonny Burke (Decca Record's artists-and-repertoire director for 14 years) visited the Hawaiian Village Hotel to record an Apaka album, he heard the Gene Rains Quartet perform in the Shell Bar and contracted Rains to record the album titled *Lotus Land* for which Conrad provided half the charts, including arrangements for "Love Is A Many Splendored Thing," "Hana Maui," and "Hawaiian Wedding Song," and played the piano on all the album's tracks.



As one reviewer noted, "Conrad and Rains both succeed in blending orchestral and jazzy structures with their main instruments" ([Source](#)).

Conrad played with the Gene Rains Quartet at The Shell Bar for the first six months of 1960, before the group went on tour to the mainland in mid-1960. The group's first booking was in Chicago for six weeks in the Polynesian Village of the Edgewater Beach Hotel, opening there on June 14.



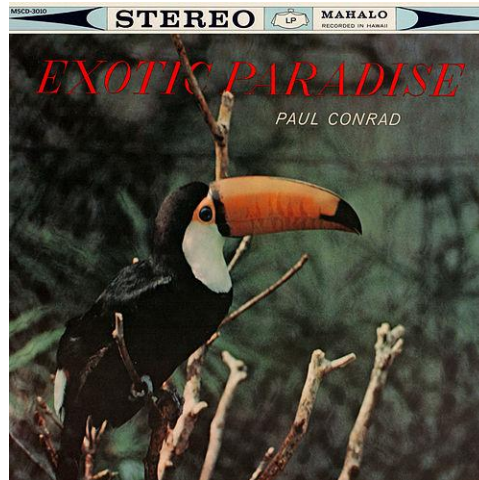
The Chicago Tribune June 12, 1960

A week later, Will Leonard, writing in *The Chicago Tribune* (June 19, 1960) observed that

The Polynesian Village has a relaxed, easy going show in the traditional style, with the Kent Ghirard dancers undulating, the Gene Rains quartet syncopating, and Kenny Black's orchestra cooperating. The Ghirard girls, playing a return, operate with split bamboos, feathered gourds, imaginary canoes, black light, and nimble torsos. Danny Kaleikini sings the good old 'Hawaiian War Chant,' two grass skirted beef trust gals called the Tu-Tus do a heavy footed hula, and the melodies of the 50th state fill the air... Coming August 1: Arthur Lyman and his group... ([Source](#)).

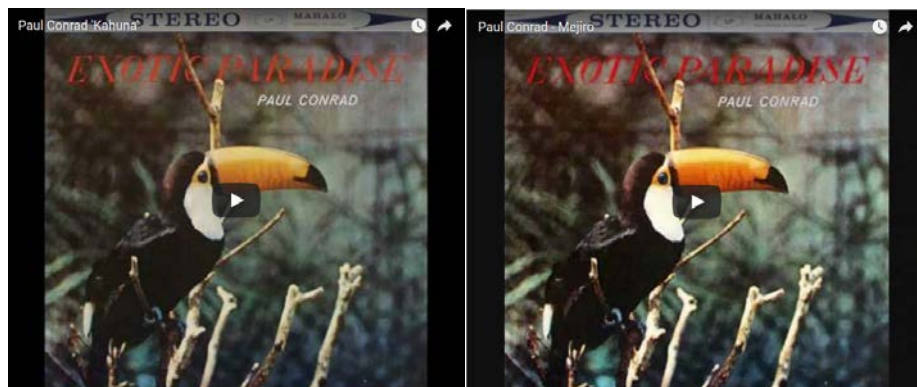
Following their Polynesian Village gig, the Gene Rains Group played in Nevada (Las Vegas and Reno) and Denver, Colorado. By late August of 1960 the group was in mile-high Denver where it was very cold and started to snow, quite a contrast to Hawaii's warm tropical weather.

Conrad recalled: "I had a gig waiting for me back home and that's when I gave notice and left Gene." While the Gene Rains Group, without Conrad, went on to record two additional albums (*Far Across the Seas* and *Rains in the Tropics*), a Hawaiian record label, Mahalo Records, asked Conrad if he would be interested in putting together a group to record an exotica-themed album.



I got to arrange some of the stuff that I liked and didn't get to arrange for either Arthur or Marty.

Accepting this offer, Conrad put together a group, and recorded *Exotic Paradise* (1960) that includes two Conrad compositions ("Kahuna" and "Mejiro").



Ambient Exotica reviewed Conrad's *Exotica Paradise* as follows:

On *Exotic Paradise*, “Conrad uses the piano and xylophone as his main instruments and occasionally adds a guitar. The percussive main ingredient consists of bongos. Although there isn’t an overwhelming pool of instruments used on the album, the reduced approach perfectly carves out the melodies. ... The superstructure of...*Exotic Paradise* is that of a cheerful Exotica feeling – well, that’s what hundreds of releases have to offer as well. But Conrad manages to add darker, meaner ascendancies to quite a lot of his songs which are, however, always reunited and merged with brighter, friendlier counterparts. These parts aren’t gloomy enough to deny *Exotic Paradise* its status as an Easy Listening album, but they add a welcome and unexpected mood shift to an album whose cover doesn’t prepare the listener for the things to come”
([Source](#)).

After Conrad’s involvement in exotica and the Gene Rains Group, he performed as a solo piano player at various Hawaiian hotels, including the Hawaiian Regent Hotel (Trappers), Ala Moana Hotel (Mahina Lounge), and the Hawaiian Village Hotel. The latter hotel proposed one day the idea of a Dixieland Band performing on Sunday afternoons. Conrad agreed as long as he was the group’s pianist.

Performing solo piano after returning from Denver actually began earlier as a gig paying piano bar at The Embers steak restaurant. During most of the 1960s, Conrad arranged for and accompanied Ann McCormick who sang Broadway show tunes and old standards on Friday and Saturday nights, with Conrad playing solo piano the rest of the week. Paul Livermore, the owner of The Embers and Ann's husband, had earlier known of Conrad's work with Ethel Azama and The Gene Rains Group, and told Conrad that he could come to work at The Embers once he returned from touring with Rains. So that is how Conrad knew in Denver, when he left the Gene Rains Group, that he had a gig back in Hawaiii.

While Conrad never performed on Webley Edwards' *Hawaii Calls* show, Capitol Records' A&R man asked Edwards to produce an album of instrumental Hawaiian songs, resulting in Conrad playing the Hammond organ on *Webley Edwards Hawaii Calls: Romantic Instrumentals of the Islands (Favorite Instrumentals of the Islands: Volume 5)*, with many of the same musicians who performed on many other *Hawaii Calls* albums.



Ten Years in the Life of Paul Conrad

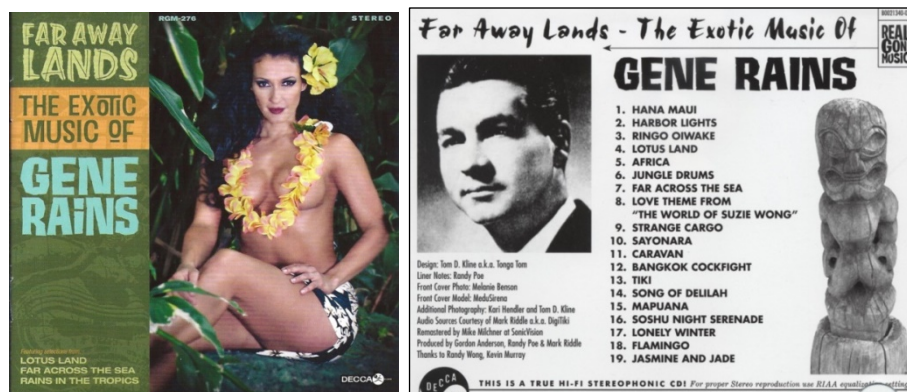
(Source: Honolulu-Star Bulletin, September 15, 1971)

By the late 1980s Conrad was playing solo piano at various Honolulu hotels. For example, as a *Chicago Sun-Times* article reported in 1988:

On the other side of Diamond Head, at the Kahala Hilton, visitors are drawn to the man-made lagoon with its giant turtles, colorful fish, penguins and Atlantic bottlenose dolphins. ... Kahala Hilton Teatime. Daily from 3 to 5 p.m. in the hotel's elegant lobby, you may order a \$9 traditional English tea: warm scones with cream and preserves, finger sandwiches, cake or pastries, and a choice of tea. It costs nothing, however, to relax on a comfortable sofa and listen to the soothing sounds of pianist...Paul Conrad (Source: "Honolulu bargains, from hula to leis," *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 16, 1988).

As a footnote on exotica history, in the early 1960s Conrad met a young singer who had recently graduated from Radford High School in Honolulu. Around 1961-62, after her graduation from high school, an associate asked Conrad to help put together a quartet to play in the pit for a Honolulu Theater for Youth show. It was at the first rehearsal for the show that Conrad saw and heard this young woman singing. About two years later, she called Conrad, told him she was going to New York City to seek her fortune, and asked if he'd write for her some audition arrangements for piano parts. Conrad charged her \$75 for the arrangements and, as he later noted, "the rest is history." That young woman just out of high school was Bette Midler.

While Bette Midler went on to a successful career, what became of Gene Rains is a bit of a mystery. As Conrad recalls, the last he heard was that Rains was "selling Cadillac cars in Seattle." However, in 2014, Real Gone Music released a CD titled *Far Away Lands-The Exotic Music of Gene Rains*. The CD compiles songs from the three albums of the Gene Rains Group, including several songs from the group's original *Lotus Land* album on which Conrad had played piano and for which he arranged many of the album's songs (e.g., "Hana Maui").



Flight Log Memories: A few weeks before the date (12/21/2014) on which Sonia and I would travel to Honolulu, Hawaii for a two-week trip to celebrate our 45th wedding anniversary, I listened to the *Quiet Village Podcast*. This edition (#70) featured the program's host Mark Riddle interviewing Paul Conrad. With the help of Lloyd Kandell (see vignette) I was able to phone the Musicians Association of Hawaii (MAH), where I reached a young lady who kindly agreed to pass along a message to Paul Conrad.

The next day or so our home phone rang and, on answering it, I was greeted by Paul Conrad. I explained my interest in meeting with him during my upcoming visit to Hawaii, and my desire to include a vignette on him in this memoir's section on *Tiki Encounters in the Realm of Exotica Musicians*. After sharing over the phone some memories of his career, Conrad asked me to give him a call after I arrived in Honolulu. A day or so after arriving in Waikiki, I phoned Paul and he agreed to pick me up at my hotel on Friday, December 26, and let me tag along to accompany him for his weekly piano-playing gig for the senior citizens at the Arcadia Retirement Residence in Honolulu.

After picking me up at the appointed time, Paul took me on a short tour where he pointed out the Punahou School where President Obama had attended high school as well as a chapel and reception hall where Paul often plays organ or piano at Japanese weddings (a booming business in Honolulu). Along the way I asked Paul to clarify some biographical points about which I had some questions based on the interview he had done on the *Quiet Village Podcast*.

As memorable as meeting and interviewing Paul was, the real highlight of this “tiki encounter” was hearing Paul play piano so elegantly at the young age of 82, with many in the audience older than him. Indeed, on this day, one lady was celebrating her 102nd birthday.



Not long after arriving at Arcadia, Paul sat down at the piano (a Steinway) and started to play. As he played, I wrote down each song’s title, though a few times had to ask Paul for help as to the name of a song. His repertoire on this visit to Arcadia started with “The Girl from Ipanema” and was followed by “Beautiful Lady in Blue” (popularized by Tony Martin), “Invitation” (composed by Bronislau Kaper for the film of the same name), “Ramona,” “Manhattan,” “Amapola,” “That’s All,” “Make Believe,” “On Green Dolphin Street” (Bronislau Kaper), “Tenderly,” “The Best Things in Life Are Free,” “Siboney,” and “I Can Only Give You Love That Lasts Forever.”

But, for me, the performance’s highlight, about halfway through, was Paul’s rendition of Les Baxter’s “Quiet Village,” earlier popularized by Martin Denny (see vignette) who had played it for me some 22 years before in 1992 in his home on Black Point Road. Seven years later, in 1999, during another family visit to Honolulu, I would hear Arthur Lyman (see vignette) perform this same song on vib during his weekly gig at the New Otani Hotel.

After Paul’s performance, he and I shared some *pupus* as Paul continued answering my questions, after which he drove me back to my hotel. Unfortunately, amidst the holiday season, with Paul booked to play a number of Japanese weddings during the following week as well as organ at church on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings, I didn’t have another opportunity to meet with him before departing Honolulu to fly home on January 3.

But I did ask Paul whether he ever goes back to The Shell Bar in what is now the Hilton Hawaiian Village Hotel, the site where he played piano with The Gene Rains Group. Paul responded that he had not had any reason in recent years to visit The Shell Bar.

My question, in part, was motivated by the plan Sonia and I had to hit The Shell Bar later that evening for some drinks and to listen to whatever musical group would be performing. Later that evening, Sonia and I along with my brother Kevin and his wife Joan, drove over to the Hilton Hawaiian Village Hotel, where we were fortunate in scoring a complementary VIP parking spot at the hotel entrance, complementary other than Kevin and I thanking the carhop with a hefty tip -- but at that cheaper than paying for parking and a lot more convenient than having to park in the nearby garage.

We immediately headed to The Shell Bar only to discover it was not there! Indeed, as the pictures below show, The Shell Bar is no longer even a shell of what it once was. The bar's name (The Shell Bar) had been stripped off the wall (see original photo in Martin Denny vignette). At the concierge desk I asked why the bar was no longer operating. The gentleman's reply was that he understood that the area formerly housing The Shell Bar was to become a Starbucks. Further research on the Internet revealed a posting that the bar had closed in 2011 or earlier and was going to be converted into a marketplace for vendors.

The Shell bar is no longer a bar (which is very sad). It was always such a wonderful place to hang out with it being open air and having the large tree growing in it. Now it has little carts where people stand and try to sell trinkets. It's called "The Bazaar" or something of that nature ([Source](#)).



The Shell Bar: No Longer a "Shell" of What It Used To Be

Indeed, on this evening, the space that once was The Shell Bar was hosting one vendor – a small business selling custom-made flip-flops (see bottom right photo above). Some further research turned up the [Hilton Hawaiian Village Master Plan](#) detailing the following: "Key modifications within the lobby area and adjoining walkways to...include the removal of the Shell Bar pavilion, the covered trellis walkway, and development of a landscaping plan for future plantings.... The anticipated result of these modifications will be an expanded recreational focal point, centered with the planned expansion of the Super Pool area" (p. 12 of [Source](#)).

What will become of the once famous Shell Bar is perhaps not clear. However, after dining in the hotel's Tropics Bar, I headed up the path leading to the pond just outside The Shell Bar, where the frogs had once croaked as Martin Denny's group, who originally opened The Shell Bar, played the song "Quiet Village" that would become Denny's biggest hit and signature tune.

Among the relics of what was once The Shell Bar, I spotted, hidden behind some construction materials and sitting on its original perch, the rock with its carving of a shell and the bar's name (The Shell Bar). On this evening, this rock sat like a neglected Sphinx in the desert, with not even a sound being heard from the frogs in the nearby pond who perhaps also were sad that Denny's group – or Lyman's group or Rains' group – no longer was in the house and that The Shell Bar, once the mecca for Waikiki's Exotica scene, had closed and was no longer hosting any musical group.



The Shell Bar Rock



International Market Place (January 3, 2015 - Gone But Being Rebuilt)

While several of today's musical groups (e.g., Waitiki 7, Dr. Ho's Orchestratica, and Lloyd Kandell's Don Tiki) are helping to keep the sounds of Exotica alive for a new generation, one can also revisit the realm of the original Exotica musicians by listening to their music on CD or streaming services (e.g., Pandora) which all carry music by Les Baxter, Martin Denny, Arthur Lyman, and Don Tiki. Evan Paul Conrad's contributions to the Exotica genre can be heard on the recently released CD titled *Far Away Lands - The Exotic Music of Gene Rains*.

Harold Chang (8/2/28 - present)



Harold Chang (Then & Now)

"We had at least 300 songs in our head every time we went on stage because I didn't know what Arthur [Lyman] was going to call. Depending on the mood he would feel the people out. Every set we go on we do a 30 or 40 minute set. We didn't know what we were going to do. We had requests so we have to fill all the requests – "Yellow Bird," "Quiet Village," "Taboo" ([Source](#)).

Harold Chang is a Hawaii-based drummer and percussionist who in the 1950s helped create the "Exotica" sound when he collaborated with Martin Denny and Arthur Lyman. A YouTube video recognizes Harold as "Mr. Percussion" and "Hawaii's Living Legend" based on a long career that began at a very early age.

Harold ("Hal") Chang was born August 2, 1928, in Wailuku, Maui. Harold's family, when he was very young, moved to Hilo on the island of Hawaii where he was raised. Not unlike other children, Harold liked to bang with chopsticks on jars and metal pots in his mother's kitchen which, he recalled, "were never in short supply in a Chinese household" (*Na Pahu Kani*, August, 1973, p. 4).



While Harold's mother told him to go outside to bang, his father, a dental technician, saw that his son had natural talent and encouraged him to practice drumming. As early as 8 years old, Harold was influenced by watching Gene Krupa films.

It was through the medium of film that Harold first saw and delighted in the joys of showmanship exhibited by Gene Krupa. Only eight-years old yet brimming with percussive talents, Harold saw and re-saw the movies that featured Gene Krupa solos and masterly rhythms. To young Hal, Krupa was the supreme showman who led the drums down to the front of the orchestra (*Na Pahu Kani*, August, 1973, p. 4).

About this same time, a cousin who taught music moved to Hilo and gave Harold his first pair of real drumsticks.

Harold got his first exposure to live big band and jazz music during WWII when many USO and Army bands passed through Hilo – and Harold would hang around and help out with the visiting bands during their shows. These experiences and listening to recordings of the era were the basis for developing, growing, and learning how to play drums as a dance or show drummer.

Once Harold's parents were convinced of his talent, they bought him his first complete set of drums. As early as 12 years old, Harold was playing semi-professionally around town, including in the well-known group The Blue Flames that "serenaded the city of Hilo and the surrounding communities" (*Na Pahu Kani*, August, 1973, p. 4). But Harold's formal musical training was received at schools in Hilo, starting with playing in the Hilo Intermediate School Spartan Band in seventh grade and continuing his musical studies while enrolled at Hilo High School. Further, Harold honed his skills playing in many live gigs.

After graduating high school in 1946, Harold joined the Army and received two weeks of basic training at Waialua's 13th Repot Depot (or, more formally, the 19th Replacement Depot). On completing training, the Army assigned Harold to the 264th U.S. Army Band of the Pacific at Fort Shafter, where he kept busy playing a variety of musical styles (march, big band, combo, and dance). After 16 months, he was discharged in early 1948.

In May of 1948, Harold became a member of Local 677 of the American Federation of Musicians. His first professional job was working with Pua Almeida at La Hula Rhumba Club in Honolulu. Harold began his first steady job playing at the Pago Pago Club where he played with Johnny Peterson and Rene Paulo.

While earning a pre-law degree in economics at the University of Hawaii, Harold worked nights at the Club Leroy. But going to school during the day and working late into the night was too much, so he switched to working at the Beretania Follies in Honolulu's Chinatown, where the show, he felt, was much more artistic and he could get off work at 10:30 p.m.

On graduating, Harold considered studying three more years for a degree in law. But with WWII having ended, many of the personnel leaving military service were enrolling at the university to study for a law degree. Harold projected this would lead to a surplus of lawyers, thus making it a less attractive career to pursue. So, rather than a career in law, Harold decided to continue pursuing a career in music.

So, after graduating in 1953, Harold left the Follies to play in the classical Japanese dance shows at the Club Hubba Bubba on Hotel Street. Up until that time Hotel Street had been mostly known for its strip shows. However, the Japanese dance shows were very popular and afforded their young drummer a lot of recognition. That recognition paid off when an opportunity arose for Harold to begin working in the Waikiki night clubs. One of those clubs was known as the South Seas Restaurant and Night Club.



South Seas Night Club (circa 1953)

What was that opportunity? One night the musical group working the South Seas was playing the “Can-Can” when, on the song’s last beat, the group’s drummer had a heart attack and died, thus creating an opening in the band for a drummer—and Harold was hired. Thus, through this very unfortunate ending for the other drummer, Harold broke “into the Waikiki entertainment scene, where he has worked ever since (*Na Pahu Kani*, August, 1973, p.54).

Harold worked at many hotels, including the Princess Kaiulani, playing drum with the Berne Hal-Mann Trio, six nights a week, for two-and-a-half years in the early 1950s. Harold first met Martin Denny in 1954 when Martin was playing solo piano at Don the Beachcomber and later that year when Denny was playing the Surf Room of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. As Harold recalled: “All musicians knew each other and respected one another” (Harold Chang, personal communication).

By late 1954 or early 1955, Denny had formed a musical group that initially worked at Don the Beachcomber. In late 1955, Denny’s group was hired to open the Shell Bar at Henry Kaiser’s Hawaiian Village Hotel, where the group played throughout 1956, the year in which Denny’s “Exotica” sound was born and Liberty Records contracted Denny to record his first album (*Exotica*) on which four musicians were credited: Martin Denny, Arthur Lyman, John Kramer, and Augie Colon. However, while not receiving any credit on the album’s liner notes, the recording sessions included a fifth musician, Harold Chang, who played percussion on all the songs, including the album’s rendition of Les Baxter’s “Quiet Village.”



Martin Denny’s *Exotica* with “Quiet Village”

During 1957, Harold worked with Pierson Thal for four months at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel but left the Thal group that year to join the Arthur Lyman Group that, after eight months of practice to learn the arrangements for several hundred songs, opened the Shell Bar at the Kaiser Hawaiian Village hotel.



The Arthur Lyman Group (Harold Chang on Right)



Harold Chang with the Arthur Lyman Group in *Hawaiian Eye* TV Series Episodes

Before actually opening the Shell Bar, the Arthur Lyman Group recorded its first album, *Taboo*, that Richard Vaughn's HiFi Records released in early 1958. Two months after recording this LP, its title song "Taboo" became a national best seller, with the LP spending 62 weeks on *Billboard* charts, peaking at number four. Their next album was *Love for Sale*.



Harold worked 18 years with the Arthur Lyman Group, during which time the group recorded a total of 28 albums. Most of the albums were recorded in Hawaii but a few were recorded, after hours, while the group was on tour playing gigs on the mainland. Three of the LPs received Gold Record awards for sales exceeding \$1 million, making the Arthur Lyman Group the only group in Hawaii to achieve this honor.



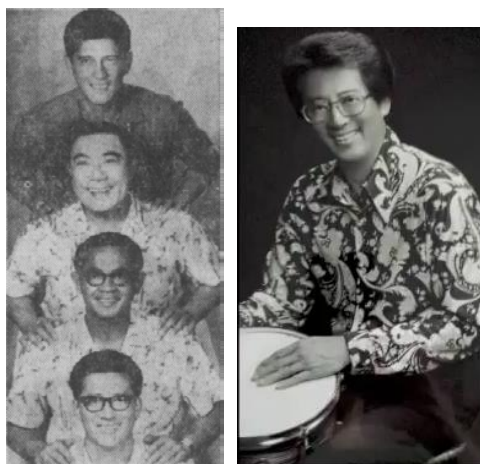
Honolulu Star-Bulletin (April 12, 1958 – p. 19)



Honolulu Star-Bulletin (November 3, 1959 – p. 32)

Harold traveled with the Arthur Lyman Group to many places all over the world, mostly the mainland U.S. and Canada in addition to performing in the Orient and on many of the major television shows (e.g., *The Andy Williams Show*), helping to spread the emerging sounds of “Exotica”:

With the invention of “HiFi” which is short for “High Fidelity Recording” came the ability to capture and produce more intricate sounds. That meant that listeners could now hear a wider variety of percussion and other instruments. This technical advance...helped in creating the musical style known as Exotica. Exotica uses the jazz form, unique rhythms and an elaborate array of instruments to transport the listener out of their living room right into a foreign city, a jungle, out into the ocean, or even flying through the air. It's a musical way of visiting or experiencing places all over the world. Exotica is the grandfather to what is now called World Music ([Source](#)).



L: Honolulu Star-Advertiser (June 2, 1967 - p. B-8) & R: [Source](#)

The following chart summarizes the various configurations of the Arthur Lyman Group in which Chang played from 1957 to 1975.

1957-1965	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arthur Lyman – vibraphone, marimba, xylophone, bird calls, congas, bongos, guitar, percussion (including wind chimes, ankle spurs, timbali, cocktail drums, boobams, ass's jaw, guido, conch shell, tambourine, snare drums, wood block, finger cymbals, cowbells, castanets, samba, Chinese gong and sleigh bells) • Alan Soares – piano, celeste, glockenspiel, guitar, clavieta, marimba, percussion • John Kramer – string bass, bass guitar, percussion, ukulele, guitar, bird calls, flute, clarinet • Harold Chang – percussion, marimba, xylophone, bass, ukulele, bird calls
1965-1966	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arthur Lyman – vibraphone, marimba, xylophone, bird calls, congas, percussion • Alan Soares – piano, celeste, glockenspiel, guitar, percussion • Archie Grant – bass, flute, guitar, ukulele • Harold Chang – percussion, marimba, xylophone, ukulele, bird calls
1966-1975	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arthur Lyman – vibraphone, marimba, xylophone, percussion, bird calls • Clem Low – piano • Archie Grant – bass, guitar • Harold Chang – percussion, marimba, xylophone, ukulele, bird calls • Kapiolani Lyman – percussion, marimba, flute, hula, vocals • Kaipualani – percussion, hula, vocals

The following provides a listing of the albums featuring Harold Chang's percussion work with the Arthur Lyman Group (28 original albums plus several album compilations of songs from earlier albums or reissues of earlier albums under a new title).

Leis of Jazz, Hi-Fi Records SR607, 1957

Taboo, Hi-Fi Records SR806, 1958

Hawaiian Sunset, Hi-Fi Records SR807, 1958

Bwana A, Hi-Fi Records SR808, 1958

Legend of Pele, Hi-Fi Records SR813, 1958

Babia, Hi-Fi Records SR815, 1959

Arthur Lyman on Broadway, Hi-Fi Records SR818, 1959

Taboo 2, Hi-Fi Records SR822, 1959

Percussion Spectacular! (Reissued as *Yellow Bird*), Hi-Fi Records L-1004, 1960

The Colorful Percussions of Arthur Lyman, Hi-Fi Records L-1005, 1962

Many Moods of Arthur Lyman, Hi-Fi Records L-1007, 1962
I Wish You Love (reissued as *Love for Sale*), Hi-Fi Records L-1009, 1963
Cotton Fields, Hi-Fi Records L-1010, 1963
Blowin' in the Wind, Hi-Fi Records L-1014, 1963
At the Crescendo, Crescendo GNP 605, 1963
Paradise (reissued as *Pearly Shells*), Crescendo GNP 606, 1964
Cast Your Fate to the Wind, Crescendo GNP 607 (reissue of *At the Crescendo*), 1965
Mele Kalikimaka (Merry Christmas), Hi-Fi Records L-1018, 1964
Isle of Enchantment, Hi-Fi Records L-1023, 1964
Call of the Midnight Sun, Hi-Fi Records L-1024, 1965
Hawaiian Sunset Vol. II, Hi-Fi Records L-1025, 1965 (compilation)
Polynesia, Hi-Fi Records L-1027, 1965
Arthur Lyman's Greatest Hits, Hi-Fi Records SL-1030, 1965 (compilation)
Lyman '66, Hi-Fi Records SL-1031, 1966
The Shadow of Your Smile, Hi-Fi Records SL-1033, 1966
Aloha, Amigo, Hi-Fi Records SL-1034, 1966
Ilikai, Hi-Fi Records SL-1035, 1967
At the Port of Los Angeles, Hi-Fi Records SL-1036, 1967 (compilation)
Latitude 20, Hi-Fi Records SL-1037, 1968
Aphrodisia, Hi-Fi Records SL-1038, 1968
The Winners Circle, Hi-Fi Records SL-1039, 1968
Today's Greatest Hits, Hi-Fi Records SL-1040, 1968
Puka Shells, Crescendo GNPS-2091, 1975

Years later, during the 1990s, many if not all of Arthur Lyman's album were reissued on CD. As Nate Chinen, a former student of Chang, recalled:

While the reissued discs might succeed in bringing the Arthur Lyman group back into our musical consciousness, it's unfortunate that there isn't a way to recapture the spirit of those nights at the Hilton Hawaiian Village. Lyman performed there for 20 years, playing to a perpetually packed house. The live Arthur Lyman experience was like nothing else in night-club entertainment.

"It all had to be done live," Chang remembers. "The stage looked like part of Harry's Music Store [see further below]. We had huge chimes, we had huge gongs, everything was on stage." The fast-paced energy of the show was musically and physically demanding – "My right hand was doing one thing, and my left was doing another. Each of us played about six instruments, and in the course of a tune, we would change instruments every two or three beats – that's why I couldn't ever sit down."



Harold Chang on the Arthur Lyman Years

In 1975 Harold made the decision to stop traveling and spend more time teaching the charts and percussion arrangements to younger aspiring drummers. Chang became the resident percussion guru at the Chang School of Drumming, a small studio in Harry's Music Store (Nate Chinen, "Hi-Fi Hawaii," *Philadelphia City Paper* – January 2-8, 1996, p. 26). Many of Harold's students went on to become professionals. One student, Nate Chinen, who began drum lessons with Chang at the age of 12, recalled being a Chang understudy:

Chang presided over the percussion department of Harry's Music Store, a crumbling island institution that functioned as a record shop, instrument supply and repair and ad hoc musicians' community center [on Waialae Avenue in Kahala, Hawaii]. Neither the namesake nor owner of Harry's, Harold taught drum lessons in a claustrophobic cubicle toward the back of the store; the soundproofed walls were plastered with posters, magazine articles and, in a place of prominence, the 1958 HiFi LP *Taboo: The Exotic Sounds of Arthur Lyman*. Chang had been the percussionist in Lyman's ensemble, which was largely responsible for the late-'50s ascendancy of tiki-lounge exotica; *Taboo*, one of the first albums recorded in stereo, had spent 62 weeks on the Billboard charts, peaking at No. 4. I hadn't known this when I started studying with Harold at age 12. But the album's lava-strafer cover image had struck me even then as mysterious and severe-bespeaking not only an unknown adult world but also a bygone era.

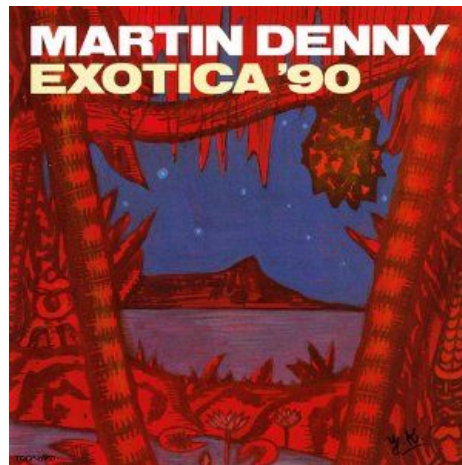
That was the era just before and after statehood, a heyday for Hawaii's tourist economy-and, coincidentally, for jazz. In the '60s, Count Basie and Duke Ellington routinely stopped in Honolulu en route from the Far East; both played the Hilton Hawaiian Village, Lyman's old stomping grounds. Another fairly frequent visitor was Louis Armstrong, whose All-Stars featured trombonist Trummy Young, who'd moved to the territory in 1947, and drummer Danny Barcelona, an islander Young had brought into the band. And these were only the big names passing through. All the while, the Waikiki nightclub scene was swinging-in every sense of the word.

This was all history by the time I came calling, although vestiges remained in the personages of Chang, alto saxophonist Gabe Baltazar, pianist Betty Loo Taylor and a handful of others-including Lyman, who played solo vibraphone on Friday afternoons in the open-air lobby of a beachfront hotel [the New Otani Hotel in Waikiki] ([Source](#))

A sideline for Chang was booking. Thanks to numerous mainland and Asian contacts, Harold booked local groups abroad, and mainland groups to gigs in Hawaii and on to the orient (*Na Pahu Kani*, August, 1973, p. 5).

As of August 1973, Harold also was doing night gigs, leading the Chang Dynasty at the Restaurant Asakusa. His group comprised Archie Grant, Jr., on bass, Roy Kimura on alto and tenor flute, Harris Ichida on piano, and Kalani High School graduate Madonna Silva as vocalist (**Na Pahu Kani**, August, 1973, p. 5).

In April of 1974 Harold again joined Martin Denny's group working at Canlis' restaurant – and for a number of years thereafter appeared with Denny's group in local venues around Hawaii as well on the recording of Denny's *Exotica '90* album that was recorded in Hawaii under contract with the Japanese Toshiba-EMI label for exclusive release in Japan.



Several videos on YouTube attest to Harold's talent and contributions. Of particular note, one [video](#) highlights Harold's career and contributions to Exotica and Jazz. In a second [video](#), Harold appears with the Arthur Lyman Group in various episodes of the *Hawaiian Eye* TV series. In a third [video](#), Harold recalls the "magic of the Exotica Lyman Years". A fourth [video](#) is a Tribute to Harold Chang. A fifth [video](#) (click on the far right video) is titled "Harold Chang: Hawaii's Iconic Drummer."



In his later years Harold performed with several groups, not only with Martin Denny (as noted above, both locally and in Japan in conjunction with Denny's Exotica '90 CD and Japanese tour) but also with Don Tiki, and the Waitiki 7.



Presentation by Johnny Kai (Music Foundation of Hawaii) to The WAITIKI 7, winners of the 2009 "Exotica Music" category in the Hawaii Music Awards. Award presentation followed by a performance of Quiet Village with Harold Chang, original percussionist in the Martin Denny and Arthur Lyman groups.

Interestingly, while playing with the Arthur Lyman Group for 18 years, Harold's recording career began with Denny's first album, *Exotica* in 1956 and ended with Denny's last recording, *Exotica '90*, some 35 years after recording Denny's *Exotica* album. In between, as noted, Harold played on the recording of all of the Arthur Lyman Group albums.



Source: Honolulu-Star Bulletin, April 28, 2003

Further, beyond Harold's contributions to Exotica, Harold remains a longtime contributor to Hawaii's Jazz scene and as a result Hawaii's jazz musicians continue to contribute to the Hawaiian musical scene. Indeed, for the past 40 years, Harold has been playing in a 17-piece jazz band known as the Monday Night Band and a group known as the Chang Bangers. Today, at 89, Harold Chang remains an active contributor to the Hawaiian jazz community and has been recognized as "Hawaii's Living Legend."

In 2015, Harold tried to bring back the “Exotica” sound under the guise of his group, the Chang Dynasty. Playing both Exotica numbers and other musical styles, Harold’s group sold out two dinner concerts at the Pagoda Hotel, the second of which had Alike Lyman (Arthur Lyman’s nephew) as the group’s bass player. But Alike went off to New York City to seek his fame and fortune there, and Harold was not able to keep the group together.

Today, Harold laments, the Hawaiian night life scene has greatly changed from what it was in the “Exotica” era of the mid-1950s through the 1960s, with Harold one of the few musicians yet alive who was there when “Exotica” was born – and who still knows how that genre’s music needs to be arranged and played if Exotica is to be true to its original pioneers – Martin Denny and Arthur Lyman.

Flight Log Memories: While working on another project, I had an email exchange with Jeff Chenault who thanked me for sharing a piece I wrote titled “Tiki Encounters in the Realm of Exotica Musicians.” Jeff mentioned he had met Harold Chang and was yet in contact with Chang through Harold’s girlfriend, Debbie Yeoh. I wrote to Jeff to ask if he’d introduce me to Debbie so I could share with her my interest in meeting Harold while on a trip to Honolulu that my wife Sonia and I were planning for September 2017. Debbie wrote back to Jeff that he could share her email with me.

I immediately wrote to Debbie to tell her about our upcoming trip and that I’d like to meet and interview Harold for a vignette on him to include in the “Tiki Encounters” chapter of my memoir (*Giants in Their Realms: Close Encounters of the Celebrity Kind*). She wrote back to let me know she and Harold would be in Hawaii in September (2017). What follows is a report on my “tiki encounter” with Harold Chang – “Hawaii’s Living Legend.”



Jeff Chenault with Harold Chang (October 2013)

Once in Honolulu, I met with Harold on Tuesday, September 5, at the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center, where we had a long discussion about his career. I took notes and then, once back home, revised my vignette on Harold to incorporate new information learned during the interview as well as make minor adjustments in the timeline of his career.

Fortunately, this was not my only meeting with Harold while in Honolulu as my wife and I had arranged, for my birthday on 9/11, to host a lunch not only for Harold and Debbie but also for three other Exotica living legends I had met over the years, including Don Tiki's Lloyd Kandell (and his wife Sherry), Lopaka Colon (a percussionist who is the son of Augie Colon and has played with the Don Tiki Group and the Waitiki 7), and Paul Conrad (a pianist who arranged music for Martin Denny and Arthur Lyman and played with the Gene Rains Group).



Kalakaua Avenue Entrance to the New International Marketplace

We hosted the lunch at the Eating House 1849 restaurant on the fourth floor of the new International Marketplace. The lunch afforded an opportunity for these four musicians – Harold, Paul, Lloyd, and Lopaka – to get together and discuss their careers as Exotica musicians. I share below some photos taken during and after the lunch.



Clockwise: Sherry Kandell, Sonia Byrnes, Lloyd Kandell, Paul Conrad, Lopaka Colona, Kerry Byrnes, Debbie Yeoh, and Harold Chang



Kerry with Lloyd Kandell



Kerry with Paul Conrad



Kerry with Lopaka Colon



Kerry with Harold Chang



Kerry with Lopaka, Harold, Paul, and Lloyd

Augie Borero Colón Jr. (12/19/63 – present)



Augie “Lopaka” Colón

Lopaka Colón, the son of Augie Colón Sr. (an original member of the Exotic sounds of Martin Denny), was born on December 19, 1963, Graduating from Moloka'i High School in 1992, he attended the University of Hawaii (UH) at Manoa on a scholarship. There he studied for six years, earning a B.A. with a major in Ethnomusicology and a minor in Spanish. (Source: http://www.alfonsowest.com/?page_id=68.)



Lopaka Colon and Augie Colon

Lopaka Colón – Son of Augie Colón

Lopaka is an established percussionist and multi “Na Hoku Hanohano” award winner (Hawaii’s version of the Grammy’s). He is a founding member of the Hoku Award winning group **Pure Heart** and, along with Jake Shimabukuro, the Hoku Award winning group Colon. Lopaka also performed with Henry Kapono on the Hoku Award winning album *Wild Hawaiian*".

While in the UH Music program, Lopaka performed as a member of the marching band and various symphonic and jazz ensembles. He also played Afro-Cuban rhythms off and on campus in the “Campus Drummers” percussion group. As a student, Lopaka integrated his UH schooling, his father’s mentoring, and private Afro-Cuban/Classical percussion lessons into his own unique style.

In the late 90's, Lopaka found musical success in a band named **Pure Heart** whose first album held the No. 1 spot in Hawaii from February through October of 1998. The group also has been recognized as one of the top 50 Hawaiian musical groups of all time and one of Hawaii's youngest musical groups ever to take the local music scene by storm in such a short period. The group later evolved into **Colón** (in honor of Lopaka's father). Both bands won the "People's Choice" award at the Hoku's as favorite Entertainers of the Year for two years in a row.



Over the years Lopaka has collaborated with a majority of Hawaii's top-notch musicians either doing studio work, live performances, or just having fun in "Kanikapila" (musical jam). He has been a key component in the success of several local bands, including the Grammy-nominated **Wild Hawaiian** project with the Henry Kapono band, the **Barefoot Natives** (uncle Willie K. & Eric Gilliom), living legends-C&K, the **Makana trio** (slack-key/world-fusion), the **Waitiki 7** (classic Exotica for modern listeners), and **Don Tiki** (a Las Vegas type Exotica show band) to name a few. Lopaka also has collaborated with Michael McDonald and Rock-n-Roll hall of fame drummer-Mick Fleetwood and his **Island Rumours Band** performing for corporate clients.



Lopaka Colon Performing at "Celebration Amumakua" - at Amy Hanaialii's CD release party at the Aloha Tower Marketplace on August 30, 2008.

In recent years, Lopaka played a key role in the **Mana Maoli Collective**, a non-profit group. This group supports the education of native Hawaiian children in Hawaiian charter schools via benefit concerts, cultural events, workshops, and CD sales. The group also represents Hawaii in the largest Polynesian festival focused on the cultural art forms of Polynesia in New Zealand called **The Pasifika**.



Lopaka Colon performing in Pearl Harbor with Henry Kapono at the 65th anniversary of the USS Missouri Battleship in January of 2009.

Until late summer of 2017 Lopaka performed six nights a week as part of a house band in the [Legends in Concert](#) show at the Royal Hawaiian Theater in the heart of Waikiki. The show features impersonators of musical stars such as Little Richard, Elvis, Michael Jackson, Madonna, Lady Gaga, Steven Tyler, and Elton John, among others. Lopaka also drums for **Tunui Tully and the Royal Polynesians**, a family Tahitian/Hula Halau that features story-telling, dance, and music of Tahiti and Hawaii.





Currently, Lopaka is spearheading **IntoxiKa**, his own group/band/t that blends esoteric and conscious themes with vintage interpretations of Exotica, fused with Funk, Rock, Dub(step), Latin jazz, and Hip-hop grooves while honoring the forefathers of Exotica and getting the next generations’ “groove on”.



Flight Log Memories – As recounted in the **Lloyd Kandell** vignette, I first met **Lopaka Colón** when he was playing percussion when the **Don Tiki** group was performing in Las Vegas at Jimmy Buffet’s Margaritaville on Saturday evening of the 2004 Columbus Day weekend. I had made flight and hotel arrangements for my wife Sonia and me to attend the concert but Sonia came down with the flu and I wound up having to go to Las Vegas on my own. But the upside, being on my own, was that I had the option to stay on for the second Don Tiki show that evening.

During the break between the two shows, I went up to the stage to say hello to Lloyd and introduce myself to Lopaka who, in addition to being Don Tiki's conga and bongo player, does the bird calls for the group, just as did his father, Augie Colón, had done so many years before as a member of **the Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny**. Two of the photos I took of Lopaka that night are shared below.



Some thirteen years later, as we were planning to vacation in Hawaii in September of 2017, Sonia proposed that, as my birthday present, we host a lunch for my Exotica friends in Honolulu. I was happy, with the help of Harold Chang and Debbie Yeoh, to get in touch with Lopaka and invite him to the lunch. I was even happier when I received his very enthusiastic reply to my invitation:

🌺 Aloha KERRY! "Mahalo nui for da invite...looking forward in catching up & having either a Zombie, Navy Grog or a Mai Tai w/ everyone!" Date held. Malama pono, be safe & stay Libated, lol
😊 Chow for now, 🍷 Augie "Lopaka" Colón Jr.

I'm not sure about the translation to English of some of those Hawaiian words but was even happier that Lopaka (and all those invited – Harold Chang and Debbie Yeoh, Lloyd and Sherri Kandell, and Paul Conrad – see the respective vignettes for Chang, Kandell, and Conrad) arrived for the lunch. I sat across the table from Sonia, with Harold on my left (across from Sherri) and Lopaka on my right, Lloyd across from Lopaka, Paul at the far end and Debbie at the opposite end of the table but behind Harold in below photo.



**Exotica Legends Lunch at Eating House 1849 Restaurant,
International Marketplace, Waikiki, Hawaii, September 11, 2017**

I mention who sat where because I wanted to be strategically located to listen in and participate in the various conversations looking back on the days gone by of Exotica music, our guests' various life experiences on their journeys through Exotica, and what each is now doing in their respective lives. But it was frustrating to quickly realize that I couldn't keep up with two to three conversations going on at the same time. In one Sherri was recalling her journey with Lloyd from California to Hawaii. In another Lloyd was talking about the challenges to, if not the impossibility of, bringing the Exotica sounds back to Waikiki, given all the changes that have taken place over nearly the past half century.

Paul recalled arranging for Martin Denny and Arthur Lyman. Indeed, as Harold had shared with me earlier in the week when I interviewed him, once Lyman's first album (*Taboo*) had been recorded and become a hit, Lyman brought together the members of his group, all jazz musicians - John Kramer, Alan Soares, and Harold Chang - and told them, in effect: "OK, we're going to record a jazz album so that you guys can get jazz out of your system. From now on we're going to play and record Exotica." This led to Paul composing a song for the album titled "Leis of Jazz" that also became the title of the album. On hearing this, Lopaka was surprised to realize that he was sitting next to the person (Paul) who was the composer of "Leis of Jazz."



Kerry celebrating his 72nd birthday with Lopaka Colón

Eating House 1849 Restaurant, International Marketplace

Waikiki, Hawai'i, September 11, 2017

During the lunch Lopaka kindly gifted me *the Best of Pure Heart* CD that, he pointed out, includes a track "Moloka'i Sweet Home" (see YouTube video above) on which Lopaka does the bird calls.



Lopaka and I talked about the changing musical scene in Hawai'i, his current freelance career (having recently left his six nights per week "Legends of Hawai'i" gig that kept him away from his wife and child who live on Moloka'i), and his ongoing efforts to advance his musical career as a solo artist or member of a band. I also told him I'd like to write a vignette about him to include in the "Tiki Encounters in the Realm of Exotica Musicians" chapter of this memoir – and asked if he'd help me in reviewing and commenting on the vignette. Lopaka, Mahalo, kindly agreed.

Shortly before sending a draft of this vignette to Lopaka I sent an email to him to thank him for joining us for lunch at the Eating House in the new International Marketplace in Waikiki – and added some reflections on that lunch. Below is a slight reworking of the tail end of that email:

I've lived through seeing the original International Marketplace (that was a venue for Exotica music in the genre's early days) to its destruction (seeing it in Jan. 2016 as a red earth lot with a banyan tree) to its revival as a "Gucci Pucci" mall with a banyan tree stuck in the middle. Further, alas, the vendors' carts have been moved down the street to Duke's Alley – and there's no evidence that any of the restaurants (on the same floor where we lunched at the Eating Place) had the vision to preserve at least a semblance, in one way or another, of the Exotica/Tiki era.

The closest to this that I've experienced in recent years – and we're talking more than a decade ago, was the "Rainforest Café" that opened in the Tysons Corner Mall here in northern Virginia – tropical ambience (trees, bird calls, and perhaps even some Exotica-style music playing over the speakers) but the restaurant's sales apparently suffered and just as quickly that restaurant eventually closed and was replaced by a Forever 21 store.

Passing of an era but I do hope that my efforts to write about and share my "Tiki Encounters in the Realm of Exotica Musicians" will help document the Exotica genre if not also, as Debbie Yeoh (Harold's girlfriend) wrote to me, "memorialize" that era and its wonderful musicians and unique Exotica sound, the birthplace of which was right there in Waikiki – but which had its origins in the life experiences of the genre's pioneers – Harold Chang, Martin Denny, Arthur Lyman, and Paul Conrad – who made their way, for one reason or another, to Waikiki from other parts of Hawai'i or the mainland and, within a relatively short period of time in the mid-1950s, made their individual contributions to the birthing of the sounds of Exotica – or, such as Lloyd and Lopaka, have made their own contributions to preserving those Exotica sounds in today's music scene.

In "Star Wars" Princess Leia voiced the following line of dialogue: ["Help Me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You're My Only Hope"](#). Lopaka, in a similar vein, one might also say "Help us, Lopaka Colón, You're Our Only Hope" for keeping Exotica alive. Well, maybe not our only hope, but, Lopaka, you are well placed to help preserve the sounds of Exotica and, as in *Star Trek*, boldly go where Exotica has not gone before.

Virtual Flight Epilogue

Looking back, had my father not purchased those two Martin Denny LPs in the late 1950s, in all likelihood I might never have discovered and taken the interest in the Exotica music that led to my *Tiki Encounters in the Realm of Exotica Musicians* shared in these vignettes. But Exotica music did become a musical passion and I was fortunate not only to collect all the albums of Les Baxter, Martin Denny, and Arthur Lyman but also to meet each of these "giants" – and personally heard Martin, Arthur, and Paul play "Quiet Village" on their respective instruments, not to mention having lunch with Les Baxter. Further, it was Martin who introduced me to Lloyd Kandell, this sparking my interest in the "new era" Exotica group Don Tiki.

As things turned out, my connections with these various Exotica musicians, notably Martin Denny, led to Lloyd Kandell presiding over the wedding of my son Shannon and daughter-in-law Jeannine, just less than four years after their marriage in 2004. Jeannine gave birth on September 17, 2008 to Braden Ezekiel Byrnes, our first and only grandson who is the next generation of the Byrnes clan. Reflecting back on my earlier trips to Hawaii (1963, 1992, 1999, and 2004) had left me yearning, as in the famous song “Return to Paradise,” to return to Hawaii in 2014, where Sonia and I celebrated our 45th wedding anniversary. Meeting Paul Conrad during the 2014 trip brought back memories of the opportunities that I had over the years to meet several of the “giants” of Exotica, so much of whose success (except for Hollywood-based Les Baxter) had its origin in Hawaii.

Sadly, a great fan of many thing Hawaiian, I never met any of the “giants” who were cast members over the years of Hawaii-based TV crime dramas such as *Hawaiian Eye*, *Hawaii Five-O* (the original series), and *Magnum P.I.* However, during our 2004 visit to Hawaii, on returning our rental car, I saw a television production crew next door in a cybercafé wrapping up a shoot of a scene for *Hawaii*, a crime show which premiered that fall on NBC-TV. On returning to the hotel, I told Sonia, who was in the shower, that I had stumbled on a production crew, in a cybercafé next to the car rental company, that was filming an episode for a new TV series. I added that the crew’s director had spotted me and asked if I’d be willing to play a tourist sitting at a computer in the cybercafe. Sonia was so caught off-guard that she started laughing and slipped in the shower. Fortunately, she was not injured and was more concerned with verifying that I was kidding than scolding me for causing her to slip. But she fared better than *Hawaii*. After the show’s debut on September 1 on NBC-TV, its ratings were so low that NBC cancelled the series after a short eight-episode run. While the director asking me to play a tourist in the cybercafe was a total fabrication on my part, I never saw the episode that included the scene shot in that cybercafe.

However, while visiting Hawaii that same summer, Martin had told me that Jack Lord, the star of *Hawaii Five-O*, returned to Hawaii after the end of that show’s run, to fulfill his childhood dream of becoming an artist. Unfortunately, I didn’t have a chance to track down and meet Lord before his passing in 1998. But Martin told me that Jack and his wife had lived in a condo in the Kahala area, the same community where Martin and his wife June were living, and that the Lord’s often frequented the Kahala Mall to have lunch at one of the mall’s restaurants. Further, Martin brought to my attention that a bronze bust of Lord had been unveiled at the mall earlier that summer on June 19. Sonia and I subsequently visited the Kahala Mall and located the bust of Jack Lord as shown in the photo below. Ironically, *Hawaii Five O*’s top cop who had become famous for “busting” crooks throughout Hawaii wound up with his own Hawaiian “bust” (see photo below).



Kerry Backing Up Jack Lord’s Hawaiian Bust



***Hawaii Five-O* souvenir from the International Market Place in Waikiki” “Book ‘Em Danno!”**

In the wake of our family’s 2004 trip to Hawaii, one more memorable event occurred that fall, a little over a week before my solo trip over the Columbus Day weekend to see Don Tiki in Las Vegas. On Saturday, October 2, Sonia and I hosted a wedding reception for Shannon and Jeannine since none of their friends and family, except Kerry, Sonia, and Jeannine’s son Matt, was at their wedding in Hawaii. I was to have prepared a toast to the new couple, being reminded of that by my wife just before I was about to take a nap on the afternoon of the reception.

While I napped, my sister-in-law Joan (my brother Kevin’s wife) did some research on the Internet and pulled together a page or so of wedding-related quotes for me to consider using. When Joan handed the list of quotes to me I was inspired to get on the computer and crank out a toast. But the toast turned out a bit longer than one could have imagined – and probably would be a strong candidate for the Guinness World Record for the longest, if not the most moving, wedding toast. I was so moved by the toast that by the time I had read the second paragraph I asked Sonia to read the next paragraph or so until I could compose myself from the tears of joy I was shedding. I share that toast with you now.

Captain’s Log: October 2, 2004, The Voyage of Shannon & Jeannine

Do you remember or recall one of the most famous songs of all, the one penned by Herman Hupfeld? In our lifetimes, we are gifted with many memorable songs but an even smaller number of truly "memorable moments."

These moments start small enough, say, riding a two-wheeler bicycle or throwing your graduation cap high into the air. These moments that we remember and treasure may, at times, be little more than the fleeting ripple of a stone dropped in a lake but, at others, be like the powerful waves that crash unceasingly on the shore of Hawaii’s Moanalua Bay just below Black Point where, on August 17, Jeannine and Shannon were wed.

As we look back on that afternoon, with the sun setting behind Diamond Head, we are reminded of the sailor for whom the mermaid wished—may your days be as happy and free as the dancing waves on the deep blue sea, may your misfortunes be as light as the foam, and may your joys be as boundless as the oceans are deep.

As one song says, love is like a ship on the ocean, a ship that has set sail on a long and uncertain ocean voyage into waters that, with life’s difficulties, will often be turbulent; on waters that are always uncharted since matrimony is the high sea for which no compass has yet been invented.

On this voyage always remember, as life’s waves may toss you to and fro, that safe harbor and tranquil waters are always as near as reaching out to give the love of your life a warm and loving embrace, while never forgetting that he or she is your ship’s captain.

It was not a ship's captain but a great captain of industry, Henry Ford, who said: "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success." No voyage can be successful, and no ship can reach port, without crew members who care for and look out for one another.

With the marriage of Shannon and Jeannine and the love they share, both the Long and the Byrnes families welcome these three new crew members – Shannon, Jeannine, and Matthew – aboard our families' respective ships, ever mindful that they now set out to design and build their own ship which they will christen "Our Home."

Sonia and I especially cherish the gifts of Jeannine, the daughter we never had, and Matthew, the "instant" grandson who has now come aboard as our ship's instant first mate.

A moment like this and the commitment that follows should be celebrated to its fullest and remembered, for as one Herman Hupfeld wrote:

"It's still the same old story,

A fight for love and glory,

A case of do or die!

The world will always welcome lovers

As time goes by."



And so, I ask all of you to help us ensure that this moment in the lives of Shannon and Jeannine does not go by un-remembered but instead becomes one of the "memorable moments" in all our lives. Please raise your glasses and join us in a toast to Mr. & Mrs. Shannon Byrnes. May "for better or worse" be far better than worse, may we all live to be present at your Golden Wedding Anniversary, and may your wedding rings always be your life preservers as you set sail each day. It is written: when children find true love, parents find true joy. Here's to your joy and ours, from this day forward.

Perhaps ironically, just a couple of months before our 2004 trip to Hawaii, I had a "tiki" experience in, of all places, Atlanta, Georgia, where I was staying at the Hilton Atlanta as a member of the TCB (trade capacity building) working group of the U.S. delegation to the second round of the negotiation of the U.S.-Andean Free Trade Agreement. As I recall, it was on the evening of June 17, the second day of our stay, that I discovered that the hotel hosted a Trader Vic's restaurant and Mai Tai Bar. No sooner than I learned this, I dined that and the following evening in Trader Vic's, soaking in the restaurant's ambience, listening to the recorded background music (including Martin Denny's music), and recalling the days almost 50 years before when my parents took the family to dine at Ziegler's Charcoal House and Boom Boom Room in the Frandor Shopping Center near East Lansing.

I share below some photos (found on the Internet) of Trader Vic's in the Hitlon Atlanta Hotel.



Now, over ten years since my most recent visit to Trader Vic's in Atlanta in June 2004 and our son's marriage that same summer in Hawaii, our flight veers away from the *Realm of Exotica Musicians*, setting its course for our next virtual stopover in a land much less carefree than the tropical isles of Exotica. This next stopover, presented in Chapter 16 (at the start of Volume 5) and inspired by the spirit of *Hawaii Five-O*, shares my ***Near-Miss Encounters in the Realm of Junkies, Jailbirds, and Other Persons of Interest***. Had *Hawaii Five-O*'s team of crack crook catchers been on the cases to be presented in Chapter 16, the long arm of the law might have been more successful in turning more of these suspects and persons of interest into arrests.



Bangladesh

Dr. Kerry J. Byrnes
International
Agricultural and Rural
Development
Advisor / Consultant



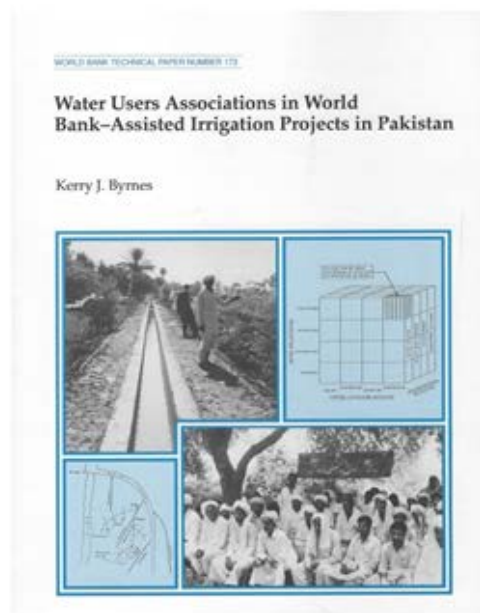
Guatemala



Indonesia



Report for USAID



Report for The World Bank