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MUSIC



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Burton White of Hawaii Theatre is not only its manager, but he's the producer of the popular Hawaiian Hana Hou! series.

Hana hou, only better

The Hawaii Theatre music series will expand, plus reward the faithful

By Gary C.W. Chun
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For the fans and faithful subscribers of the Hawaii Theatre's long-running Hana Hou! Hawaiian Music series, Friday night's tribute to the historic "Hawaii Calls" radio program will signal the end and fresh beginning of the series.

Artistic director and theater general manager Burton White has decided to change the emphasis and scheduling of Hana Hou! a bit in the upcoming 2007-08 season.

White said "a loyal patron base of 500 subscribers" have regularly attended the Friday evening single performances over its 11-year-plus history. In keeping with the original purpose of refurbishing and reopening the grand downtown theater, "we wanted to offer something of the

'Radio Hula'

Place: Hawaii Theatre

Time: 8 p.m. Friday

Tickets: \$33 (\$5 discount for theater members, youth 17 and under, students, military with valid ID, and groups of 10 or more)

uniqueness of Hawaii -- namely, traditional Hawaiian entertainment. So it was prudent of us, as being the best venue, to present programming of this nature and pay homage to the kahiko and oli."

Call: 528-0506 or online at hawaiitheatre.com

But since the origin of the series, White said the opportunities to see and hear Hawaiian music have grown to include restaurants, challenging him to rethink how Hana Hou! will be presented at the theater.

"Starting next season, it will no longer be a subscription series," he said. "Right now I need the latitude to open up the programming and scheduling." White plans to create what he calls a "Hana Hou! Hui" that will give all of the series' current subscribers early opportunities to buy seats for the theater's Hawaiian programming, including the popular and profitable Brothers Cazimero Christmas show, which used to be available only through the theater's Encore series.

Besides offering multiple performances of any given Hawaiian-themed event, White wants to expand the variety of the newly dubbed Hana Hou! Hawaiian series to include hula programming that would showcase Oahu halau, and maybe some Hawaiian opera as well.

The rescheduled "Be Steel My Heart" show highlighting the steel guitar on June 22 will technically be the first show of the new series.

BACK TO "Radio Hula," White said the genesis of the idea came to him back in 1991 when he was director of operations with the Honolulu Symphony. "When we here at the theater, we did a 'Radio Hula' show four years ago. It was well-received. We highlighted hapa-haole songs as well as familiar hula standards. The show 'Hawaii Calls' had such a big impact on me."

So much so that White is currently in negotiations with Hula Records president Flip McDiarmid to use and recreate the "Hawaii Calls" format, to which the record label holds the rights, to do a show sometime next year that includes a simulcast.

The '07 edition of "Radio Hula" will feature the singing talents of Tony Conjugacion, Marlene Sai and Aaron Sala. Conjugacion will serve as musical director as well, and be part of the house band Friday night, playing ukulele along with bassist Danny Kiaha, guitarist Mark Yim and Jeff Au Hoy on steel guitar.

A line of three lithe dancers will include Kawena Mechler, Namahana Fuller and Latasha Seagrave, plus comic hula danced by Aunty April Villa (who performed with Lena Machado) and a male soloist in 2006 Keiki Hula master Connor Kahaia'ai Meers.

SPEAKING OF "master," Tony C., as he's known as, is a top-notch falsetto singer in his own right, and currently promoting his latest album, "Na Hula Punahele," on the Mountain Apple Company label.

"Burton and I feel that a show like this is important because this part of Hawaiian music is disappearing, and it has such a rich history. Hawaiian music was at the height of its popularity worldwide during the '30s to '60s, thanks in large part to 'Hawaii Calls' broadcasting during World War II.

"I wanted to include a fresh face in the program, and that is Aaron, who won the Most Promising Artist Hoku award last year. He's the kind of youngster who taps into the old music, and we love helping him do that. In the Hawaiian culture, we call him a punahele, someone who learns well and retains the information. What I like about Aaron is that he's not one to embellish, and keeps to the old style of the music, but yet he's innovative in his own right.

"But I admit I'm taking him out of his comfort zone by placing him out front without his piano."