

MUSICIANS - A CASE STUDY OF THE ROYAL HAWAIIANS
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Of all the dance spots in Honolulu, including the Hotels, dance halls, clubs, etc., the Royal Hawaiian Hotel is considered the top spot for musicians. Atmosphere provided for tourist trade, the tourist trade itself and the hotel connections with the Matson Company, are all factors which tend to make the Royal Hawaiian Hotel the top spot for musicians in Hawaii.

I have chosen the Royal Hawaiian orchestra because they are recognized as the premier Hawaiian dance band here, as well as on the mainland.

The orchestra consists of 14 members, who's ages are between 23 and 40. The majority are below 30. Like most orchestras, the entire personnel of the band is made up of men. Again like most dance bands, it is made up of different racial groups, the chief difference here being, that in Hawaii it includes a greater variety of racial color. A brief description of the personnel of the band follows.

The first violin player is of Italian descent, in his late twenties, slender, of medium height, married to a mainland girl and has one child. Joined the band after finishing his contract at the Young Hotel. Been a musician for probably fifteen years. Is primarily a classical man. "(in the jargon of dance musicians he is known as a "legit" man.) However, jobs for classical men got rather scarce a few years back, and it was either take up dance music or starve. So, since even musicians must eat, he took up dance work. Also does arranging.

The second violin player is of Scotch descent, short and stout, between the ages of 35 and 40, comes from the mainland, and married to a school teacher also from the mainland. Is strictly a "legit" man. Became leader of the Royal Hawaiian's some years ago and held that position until the present leader took over. He has been a musician probably 20 years.

The first trumpet man is in his late thirties, medium height, slender, married to a mainland girl and has two children. He is of Scotch descent, and originally from San Francisco. He accepted the job at the Hotel when he was passing thru on one of the passenger liners. Been a Musician since he was in high school.

The second trumpet player is of English descent, in his late twenties, medium height, slender, comes from the mainland and is married to an ex-stenographer also from the mainland. They have one child. Been a musician about twelve years. Also arranges.

The 1st sax man is an all around man in the band. Sings, arranges, plays alto sax, baritone sax, clarinet, flute, piano and guitar. Born in Hawaii, 25 years ago, tall, well built, heavy

set, of Hawaiian, Tahitian, English, Chinese and Portuguese descent. This is a typical example of our Hawaiian born. Is married to a school teacher who is also island born. Been a musician about 8 years.

His brother should be mentioned here. Also born in the islands, two years younger, tall, well built, heavy set also married to an ex-stenographer who was born in Hawaii. Has been a musician for about 8 years. Besides playing the steel guitar in the band and singing, he is undoubtedly the finest spanish guitar player in Hawaii today. The two young men are the only brothers in the band, and are extremely loyal to each other. They are also noted for their natural talent and ability.

The second sax man plays tenor sax, clarinet and violin. Of Slav descent. His wife is also of Slav descent and is an ex-stenographer also from the mainland. Joined the band after playing at the Pleasanton Hotel with Larry Bellis and His Orchestra. Is about six-feet tall and rather slender. He is about 28 years of age.

The third sax player is also Hawaiian born, of Norwegian and Japanese descent, about 27 years of age, short and slender, married to a mainland girl and has one child. Plays alto sax, baritone sax, clarinet and sings. Joined band four month ago.

The pianist is also Hawaiian born, part Hawaiian, 24 years old, married to an island girl also an ex-stenographer. Middle height and slender. Was originally in band before the present leader took over.

The bass player is under thirty, Hawaiian born, of Scandinavian descent (also Portuguese). Medium height, slender, married to an ex-stenographer from the mainland. Was originally in the band before present leader took over. Also sings.

The guitar player is in his early thirties, Hawaiian born, descent, Hawaiian and (unknown), medium height, rather stout, weighs around 225 pounds. Married to an Hawaiian girl and is the father of ten children. He is also the featured Hawaiian singer.

The drummer is also Hawaiian born, about 32 years of age, short and slender, married to an ex-show girl from the mainland. He has lived most of his life on the mainland. Was already in the band when the present leader took over.

The featured artist of the band is of Hawaiian Irish descent, tall and slightly stout, born in the states, married to an island girl, has four children and is about 35 years of age, possibly more. Well known on the mainland and Hawaii, made numerous recordings, and is very popular.

The leader of the outfit hails from the mainland and is in his late thirties. His racial descent is a matter of conjecture among the members of the band. Although he appears to be of Jewish descent, he is a staunch Roman Catholic. Medium height, slender and is married to a mainland girl. They have one child. Also plays trumpet and does most of the arranging.

This detailed study shows that the band is made up of young men. The dance business is a young man's job. Very few old men are in the dance business today, because a dance orchestra must reflect youth and vitality to be a success. Old men in the dance business are there because they have become famous for their type of music; then they are either composers or leaders, never players. Many musicians make their money before old age, and much of this money is made writing dance tunes.

Contrary to appearances, most musicians lead a perfectly normal life. They have a certain time to rest, a time for work, a time for play, etc, like any other normal men. Here at the Royal Hawaiian, all of the members of the organization are married. All of their wives are from the middle class. Once married, most musicians usually stay married. The reason probably being that when they are single they travel so much and meet so many people, especially women, that when they do decide to get married they usually pick on a woman who will be a steadying influence in their hectic and short careers. The entire orchestra members seem to be happily married. Probably due to their romantic and demonstrative temperaments. In conversing with some of the wives of the boys in the orchestra, I have found that, when asked how they liked being married to a musician, the usual answer was something like this. "Its awful to be moving all around the country and not knowing what job will come up next or where it will be, but who cares anyhow when my husband is so loving and attentive."

The job, it can be seen, has little to do with the physical make up of the individual. In the Royal Hawaiian the racial background has much to do with determining the physical make up. We note that most of the members of Hawaiian descent are large. In fact they are referred to over the radio as "800 pounds of Hawaiian."

All of the members of the orchestra come from middle class families. All of them have graduated from High school and a few have gone thru college. Some have had one or two years of college. Most of them were raised in urban communities, considering that Honolulu is urban in this respect. From this it can be seen that dance music for entertainment is one of the characteristics of an urban community.

Education outside of music, has very little to do with the qualifications of a musician, except where one intends to be a leader. The requirements of a musician in a dance band are: Good musicianship (for dance music), a clean cut appearance, a good temperament, and most important of all dependability. Quoting the first sax player: "Dependability is positively the most important requirement. No matter how good you are in any line of the music game, if you aren't on the job sober and on time

you get kicked out. In the dance game no one is ever so important and "good" that he cannot be replaced. Just try and quit and see how fast some one is appointed to your job." Thus we see the highly commercialized characteristic of the dance business, typical of an urban community.

As far as getting to the top is concerned, let me again quote one of the Royal Hawaiians: "This racket of getting to the top is 95 percent "drag" and 5 percent good musicianship". They all stress the importance of making contacts.

The leader's qualifications differ a great deal from the members of the organization. First of all he must be an average musician, he must be able to command respect from the rest of the band. Besides these things he is the contact man. He must be able to flatter, scheme and barter. He must be constantly on the alert for choice spots. He must be a diplomat. He must be able to get along with every class of people, especially his employers. I observed the leader one nite after one of the dances. He spent about 2 hours after the dance, talking, shaking hands, holding ladies hands, and telling jokes to the managers. His wife sat calmly waiting in the lobby of the hotel for him. "Aren't you tired of waiting?" asked one of the musician's wives. "Yes," she smiled and answered, "but he's still working." His qualifications are those of a trader. The leader must sell himself and his band.

The rest of the orchestra members never come in contact socially with their employers, that is, the people they play for.

Working conditions are extremely satisfactory as far as working hours are concerned. Work usually starts from 8:30 P.M. and ends at 12. They work every nite except Tuesday, which is their night off, and on Sunday nite, except for one hour of concert music. There are rehearsals at least twice a week, held in the afternoons, for about 2 hours. However, the rehearsal days vary a good deal, thus making it almost impossible for the band members to hold any kind of a job during the day. However, many of them do minor jobs, like playing on sponsored radio programs, giving private lessons and arranging for other orchestras. There is a considerable amount of time for leisure. Some of the members have hobbies such as amateur radio, fishing, and wood working. A few of the very ambitious ones spend much of their time practicing their instruments.

The nature of the work itself is pleasant, including surroundings. Long intermissions, about twenty minutes out of each hour makes the task a very light one. The only alternations of this work come when the orchestra plays an extra hour a week for the mainland broadcasts or on their nite off for some ball given by the hotel for benefit purposes. There is no extra pay for these extra jobs under the hotel. However, private parties after dances bring in a very fair sum of extra money for the boys. The usual price for after dance parties is Five dollars per man an hour.

The pay is average, compared to that of a middle class job. It can be compared to teacher's salaries, bank clerks, and skilled laborer's salaries. However, considering the hours of work put in, the return is considerably high compared to middle class jobs. No member gets less than \$35.00 a week. That being the lowest pay in the band. The main draw-back of this is that when illness occurs, a member is not paid during the period of illness. To quote one of the members: "When we play extra jobs for the hotel we don't get paid a cent extra, the hotel saying that we get paid by the week. However when one of us gets sick the hotel asserts that we are getting paid by the day and only for days we work." Despite this fact I think the rate of turn over is rather great considering the actual hours put into work.

The personnel of the orchestra varies a great deal as far as far as dispositions are concerned. The entire band is very friendly towards each other on one day and on the next, extremely hostile. Members will remain for hours after working hours to argue over some foolish subject that isn't worth an argument. Most often neither side knows the correct answer or cares. Members will part extremely angry with each other. Then the next morning all will be well again. When they see each other they will go to the trouble of shouting clear across the street at each other and have a regular "rag fest" with not a word mentioned of their night's bitter battle or even remembered. They are always complaining to their wives about the pay, the leader and the music they play. As one wife stated, "They are always kicking about what they do for ever and ever, and they have the nerve to call what they do "work". I'd sure like to do what they do and bring home the money."

The leader of the band is hired by the hotel. He comes down from the coast and takes over the band already here. However, it is his privilege to hire and fire members. Thus, there is the feeling of insecurity that keeps members from speaking as freely as they wish. And it is from this that the "stooge" has emerged. There are one or two members who are regarded as (in the musicians lingo) "Stooges" (to a musician there is no lower thing than a snake, no more odiferous thing than a skunk except a "stooge" (a tatteltale) by the other members of the outfit. They are notorious for carrying tales to the leader in order to get next to him.

Most of the members are traders and creators. They make up their own songs or programs and then sell them to publishing houses. They are shrewd, though not very good business men. However, every musician is a born "chisiler" when it comes to buying or selling anything he has created or want as for instance a song he writes or composes or when he wishes to buy a certain instrument.

In summing up their outstanding traits, I would state that they are in general, tempermental, forgiving shrewd, intelligent, extravagant generosity. Quote one of the wives: "Did you hear of the dollar and a half they gave to the little Japanese man who takes care of the lights at the Hotel? His son died and they wished

to make a collection of \$25.00 to give to him. Gee, we hardly know the fellow and they go donating \$1.50 just like that. I should think that 50 cents from each fellow would have been plenty. Its, give here and give there. They collect for the waiter, they collect as much as \$2.50 a man for gifts for the boss. You would think they made a heck of a lot of money."

A musician thinks nothing of giving his last dollar to another musician. They borrow and lend freely to each other. They indulge in expensive luxuries for themselves. They do not hesitate to order the very best in food, and buy the finest clothes. However, the wives they marry are usually just the opposite, and since most of the husbands hand the entire pay check over to their wives, their extravagant indulgent nature is curbed somewhat because of their lack of ready cash.

I have already described the diplomacy and agreeable traits a leader must possess in order to be successful. I have pointed out that the leader in this orchestra is not selected by the members, but hired by the hotel. Most leaders decide to be leaders and go out and gather up a group, train them and then manage an orchestra. His main function is to see that his boys are working. He too possesses practically all the above traits of the rest of the members. The "easy come easy go" attitude of spending money is present in the leader too. He has a tendency to live beyond his means. This is due to the social prestige that must be kept up in order to impress the people he plays for. I would say that the "easy come easy go" attitude of the musicians is due to the insecurity of their type of employment. They are so often subjected to hard times that being broke means so little to them.

Quoting one of the members: "I had a hard time when I first came to Honolulu. I lived on one can of beans a day, for weeks. I had no more money to spend. But I wouldn't write and ask my folks for money. I always told them that I had plenty and was getting along fine." This idea of getting along without their parents help is solely so because most parents object to the line of work as dance music. They know of the insecurity and short number of years it offers its following. Therefore, we have the objection of parents and the pride of the musicians.

The dance musician has developed a vocabulary that is distinctly their own in regard to their work. One would classify this vocabulary as musicians slang. Here are some of the outstanding phrases used:

nanny goat vibrato-----used to designate a type of singer with a very fast tremolo.
corn-----music of the vintage of 1915
fish horn-----a straight saxophone
slip horn-----a trombone
he can't cut it-----he can't play his part
gob stick-----a clarinet
jam-----to play what you feel
daddy long hairs-----a concert musician in a dance band
faking-----playing your own version of the song
going to town-----a corn expression for getting off
sour puss-----a musician without a sense of humor

The Royal Hawaiian Hotel orchestra has one outstanding superstition. The member who has been in the band for the longest period, states that ever since he started, "picture taking" has been a bad business. He states: "some one gets fired everytime we take a picture. Something goes wrong--the orchestra may lose its job. Then if one man is fired we can be sure of losing at least 2 more. Everytime one man goes you may expect two more to go with him."

Because the group is always changing and moving about, there are no chances for the development of any sort of culture or myths or legends. Again we note that the group as an organization is distinctly a city group. They lack magical performances and ceremonies. The only simple ceremony common is the drinking of toasts to celebrate when ever some good fortune befalls the band or one of its members. All of the tips the orchestra gets are put into what is called a "kitty". When there is quite a bit of money in the "kitty" the boys either throw a party or buy drinks with it. A few of the Royal Hawaiians do not drink and instead of the drinks they receive the money. One member distinctly dislikes the taste of liquor or anything with liquor in it.

The group ideal is good musicianship. Quoting one of the musicians: "We admire any fellow who can "cut it" and play anything upside down." Members who arrange try to out do each other by producing unique arrangements even if no extra pay is forthcoming. These are usually the "natural" musicians who play music especially because they love it. All of these musicians seem to cherish some fantastic dream of making a fortune before they are forty. The desire to make a huge sum of money with some hit tune, then expect to live very comfortably afterwards. Another objective is to gain recognition in some way. The Royal Hawaiians are trying to make a mainland trip so as to gain recognition and perhaps obtain better music jobs away.

Very few musicians attend religious services of any kind. The only one that I noted who went to a church was the leader. He is a Catholic and goes to church every Sunday. He also partakes of communion--and goes to confession--things that are essential for a good Catholic to do. Nearly all the rest of the group are not religious in any sense of the word, excepting where law and righteous living are concerned. In fact some of their views on religion and church are positively radical. One of the members when asked what he thought about religion replied: "Religion is a racket worse than any racket ever produced in this world from the beginning of time. It is the only racket that did not suffer during the depression. I don't believe in going to any church. If you live right every-thing will come out o.k., but if you live wrong everything will come out wrong." This member judged right and wrong according to law and mores handed to him from his parents. Another member said, "Religion is the cause of all wars, it has been the direct cause of all wars since time immemorial. When religion is abolished the world may begin to have peace." Still another: "I go to church if my wife goes but thank goodness she feels sleepy in the morning too. Religion is o.k. if you have time for it." The above quotations express the views of the majority of the group on religion. On the other hand the wives are slightly more religious. A good number of them go to church. A few are

Catholics. However they don't seem to be troubled by the fact that their husbands do not go.

The Royal Hawaiians are law abiding citizens. The outstanding faults among them are arrests for speeding, which are rare and bill collectors. There is a tendency among the musicians to live beyond their means and a few of them have been forced into bankruptcy. Their attitude toward laws expressed in this statement: "You might as well pay 'cause you can't get away with it." They abide by the laws of their apartment houses and seem to make good tenants. This is probably so because they wouldn't have time for parties and other disturbances because they are out working almost every night, and sleep most of the day.

Affairs of state, the new ideal, the president are much discussed among the members of the band. They are interested in their country--are loyal--they like to read about it in the newspapers. They discuss almost everything from peeling brazil nuts to flying to the Moon and Mars.

A good many of the Royal Hawaiians regard their profession solely as a job and no more. Perhaps quoting one of the members will give a pretty good slant on their opinions and views. "We work because we want the "dough" and because we have to eat. All I'm interested in is the pay check at the end of every week."

Some of the other members have an attitude something like this. Quote--"Nothing is better than playing music in a good dance orchestra and in a good spot." Still another--"I'd rather play than dance anytime. I get a greater kick out of it." Still another states--"I am going to make a lot of money and become a big shot some day. Then I'll show my folks how much I know about the music business."

The musicians seem to have a tolerant attitude towards sex and scandal. They say very little about it. They do not make a member an outcast if he indulges in women chasing. As one member stated--"Think nothing of it, if he chooses to enjoy himself that way its his business."

The vocation provides excitement, travel and the meeting of new people constantly. Although the Royal Hawaiians actually do not travel so very much as compared to other orchestras, most of the members have done a great deal of traveling already. Some have traveled around the world, playing on a ship making the trip. Most of them have traveled thruout the United States. Thus we note that it is very easy for musicians to adjust themselves to new surroundings and to make new friends. Most of the members at the Royal are tired of remaining here so long. They live in hopes that the rumor that they are to make a mainland tour, soon will come true.

This profession offers a great deal for prestige in the eyes of the public. Their artist singer is well known thruout the mainland and many of his records are sold there. Those who write tunes are also well known. The leader is known thru his now famous tune "Hawaiian Paradise." It is played over radio stations throughout the country. His most famous tune is "Linger Awhile"

which he wrote in conjunction with Fred Rose and Paul Whiteman a few years ago. Those who make money in the music game, make it while they are young enough to really enjoy spending it.

However, the main draw back in this sort of work is the unsettled character of their home life. It does not pay a musician to own too many things. It is foolish for him to buy furniture or a home. The more he owns the more he has to take along when he moves to another job. That is why most of them live in rented apartments or houses. The wives buy very little clothes so as to save a lot of trouble when they move. Another draw back is that since playing dance music is a young man's game, members who learn the game without having found their pot of gold, are unprepared for other types of work. The hours and returns of other jobs are difficult for a musician to adjust himself to. On the other hand, he may flatly refuse to adjust himself. However, they all realize that one cannot hang on very much longer after the age of forty or so. Quoting one of the members--"I am leaving the music business in a few years. My days are over. I haven't made my dough yet and it's too late now. I'll go home and open a hot dog or hamburger joint. I might buy a little piece of land and settle down."

Musicians who have children do not wish them to become musicians. One of the members stated--"My boy always says he is learning to play the clarinet so as to be a musician like me. I tell him, sure it's o.k. to know how to play but if you don't knock their eyes out of their heads when you play or perform, then you better not be a musician, because then the only kind of a job you'll be able to get will be playing in small time "joints". No, I tell my boy, you are going to be something else, maybe an engineer or a business man." Quoting one of the wives--"My Billy is not going to be a musician. One musician in the family is plenty. He's going to be something bigger, maybe a doctor or a lawyer or most anything except a musician."

Most of the wives envy women who live in their own homes, and whose husbands bring home a steady monthly salary year in and year out. One of them stated--"I sure would like to have my own home so I could fix it up real cute. I'd like to give tea parties and bring out fancy linen and silver. But what's the use of having anything nice when one has to lug it around to dumps all over the country. I have 3 trunks full at home in my father's basement. I got tired of parking it around." Another stated--"I sure envy my girl friend. Her husband works in a bank and she can depend on his salary for a long time to come. I always worry about my husband's orchestra losing their job. I wonder what we'd do next."

The above views show the insecurity of a musician's job and constantly tend to disorganize the lives of most of them.

Territory and county politics play a very unimportant part in the lives of musicians. Many of them do not even bother to vote. The general attitude is "Who cares, we may not be here next year any way."

The Royal Hawaiians all belong to the Musicians Local Union except the featured singer who is not a musician. Many of them also belong to Unions on the mainland. The main purpose of the Union is to protect members from exploitation by their employers. The local Union dues are 20 dollars to join and \$1.50 a quarter. Various unions thruout the country vary in the amounts paid as well as in dues. The Union operates like any other Labor Union in the country. The members attitude towards the Union is passive. When asked what he thot of the local, one of the musicians said--"Oh, its o.k. only it isn't very effective here in Hawaii. You have to keep your mouth shut if you want to keep your job."

One of the outstanding demands of the Union is that all members shall be paid the minimum quota per hour for all music as stated in the rules and regulations. Also a musician must have 2 weeks notice with pay before he can be dismissed on any job. The local Union has been effective in this last demand.

Some of the Royal Hawaiians belong to the Musicians Cooperative Association. It is usually called the MCA. This association has its following throughout the mainland. Its purpose is to secure jobs for its members. However, after joining, even if one gets his own job, he has to dig up ten per cent of his salary every month and hand it over to the MCA. The attitude of the musicians towards this association is one of extreme bitterness. Here are statements gathered from some of the musicians in regard to the MCA. "Its a chiseling association." "Its a graft." "Somebody is making a heck a lot of dough and making the poor suckers pay. You pay ten percent nomatter how little you make. "There a bunch of crooks sitting back on their tails and making a lot of jack while we poor suckers have to fork over a percent of our wages."

There are a few associations who actually help the musician make a good bit of money with a very small compensation. The leader belongs to one, the ASCAP. "The American Society of Authors, Composers, and Publishers. Only musicians who have written hit tunes may become members. Its purpose is to protect the song writer from having his tunes infringed upon. It also sees that its members get just compensation for the rights to use their or his compositions. The dues are ten dollars a year. Although this may seem rather high, there are members who receive from the ASCAP compensation as high as 15,000 dollars a year.

The members of the Royal Hawaiian orchestra usually spend their nights off with their wives usually at a show. Sometimes they all go to the Young Hotel Roof and have a dancing party. The conversation of the men usually tends towards a criticism of the orchestra then playing. They pick the band to pieces, or they praise and compare them with themselves or other members of their own band. They also tear off to a show every Sunday nite, after their usual Sunday nite concert at the Moana Hotel.

The Musicians as a group have few outside social contacts besides their kinship groups. They work and play together. Once in a great while the hotel gives them a party or a dinner. These

occasions are very enjoyable to the members. However they are suspicious of all favors bestowed on them by the hotel. They seem to smell a rat, usually being that they have to play some extra job on their nite off or something.

When they entertain at dinner they usually entertain some other member in their group.

They all spend a great deal of time at the beach, surfing, swimming, and getting tanned.