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## Coverstory

# Living Legends And Their Legacies

**The Legacy Awards honor people in the Hawaii music scene whose combination of talent and perseverance over the years keep them front and center. Here's an intimate look at a few of those who will receive the award on Thursday**

Wednesday - March 15, 2006

By Bill Mossman

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Nathalie Walker photo  
Cha Thompson

The busiest person at Thursday evening's Legacy Awards will undoubtedly be Cha Thompson, co-owner of Tihati Productions Ltd. and self-described "hustler" from Kalihi.

Aside from providing props and entertainment for the Music Foundation of Hawaii's star-studded dinner concert, Thompson will be on hand to accept two awards: one with husband Jack for Best Show, the other for Don Ho, who is being honored with the Mayor's Performing Arts Award.

Ho, it seems, doesn't really care for the whole award scene and asked his longtime friend to do the honors.

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"Don called me up and said, 'Bebe, you go talk for me,'" explains Thompson, her voice slowing down and dropping to its lowest register until she sounds remarkably like Mr. Tiny Bubbles. "I said, 'Why? 'Cause I the only one that can talk haole?'"

"But honestly, I don't mind," she quickly adds. "I've known Don all my life and I adore him. He's an entertainer's entertainer and certainly no phony."

The same can be said for the Thompsons - the two Farrington High School sweethearts who've operated the Islands' largest entertainment company since the early 1970s. Of course, Tihati (Tahitian word for "Jack") Productions is more than just a Polynesian revue, and its impact is farther-reaching than just Hawaii. Its shows have been performed for millions of people around the world, and the company currently numbers more than 1,000 employees, all of whom the Thompsons try to treat with respect.



Nathalie Walker photo  
Jack Thompson

Several years ago, for example, Cha Thompson went to the Hyatt Regency Maui for one of the company's shows and, while backstage, peeked into one of the dressing rooms. Suddenly, a company employee stepped forward and, unaware who Thompson was, promptly shoed her away.

"She told me no one was allowed in the back area and I said, "Oh, OK," and walked away. I really wasn't offended because I was thinking, 'Eh, this kid is doing her job. I like it. I like it.'

"Anyway, a few moments later, I heard this huge scream and this beautiful 18-year-old girl came running up to me and said, 'I'm very sorry.' And I told her it was OK. And she said, 'You know, we should put your picture on the wall.'"

**SPOTTED**

Charlie Criscola and DJ Betty



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Of course, that's when Thompson put her foot down. "I said, 'Oh, no - not unless you're going to put a picture up there of me when I was 18!'"

All jokes aside, Thompson says she has much to be thankful for, including a thriving business career, a marriage that is still going strong, and of course, a Legacy award to proudly display on a bookshelf.

"To me, the Legacy Award means one thing - and that is continuing to do whatever it is that you do well," she says.

*MidWeek* caught up with several other Legacy Award winners also and asked them, among other things, what they thought of this latest honor. Here's how they responded:



Nathalie Walker photo  
Jimmy Borges

**Jimmy Borges *Male Vocalist***

As smooth and comfortable as he's always appeared on stage, Jimmy Borges admits to nearly succumbing to a case of the nerves once in his career.

It happened back in 1958, when as a 23-year-old up-and-coming singer in Las Vegas he performed in front of Shirley MacLaine, Nat King Cole and several members of the famed "Rat Pack" - most notably, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr.

"My first night, I opened up in the showroom of the New Frontier, and front and center were all these famous people.

They all came to see me out of respect for Shirley, whom I had become friends with while living in San Francisco," Borges remembers.

"Of course, when I saw all of them sitting there, I became petrified."

After chasing away the butterflies flitting about in his restless stomach, Borges next peeled his suddenly dry lips free from his pearly whites, swallowed hard and proceeded to belt out a few memorable tunes, leaving the luminaries in awe by show's end. What followed were compliments and career advice from both Cole and Davis. Even Sinatra seemed impressed with the fledgling entertainer because years later, when Borges requested access to his musical library in order to do a tribute album, Ol' Blue Eyes issued a simple one-line response through a mutual friend of theirs: "Let the kid have 'em!"

"I tell you what, Mr. Sinatra and Sammy and all the others gave me a lot of confidence to carry on and continue in my career," Borges admits.

And what a career it's been. In the half-century since he began as a jazz/pop crooner, Borges has not only worked many of the best clubs in America, but in Japan and South America too. He's since given up the nightclub circuit, but the Kalihi-born performer still keeps busy by doing several corporate functions each month, not to mention the numerous benefits he participates in locally.

"I really believe that all of us have to recycle ourselves at some point in our lives," Borges says of his philanthropic work. "My philosophy is that we should all give back to our communities, no matter who we are."

Aside from his professional career, Borges also makes himself available to work on the Honolulu Police Commission, teach a music course at Citrus College in California, and sneak in a few rounds of golf each week.

At the ripe age of 70, he says his health has never been better.

"I quit smoking and drinking back on Jan. 20, 1989," Borges states. "I started smoking when I was about 17, and at that time it was hip for a guy to have a cigarette hanging from his lips. But I finally realized I had to give it up if I wanted to hang around a little longer."

Hopefully, long enough to continue entertaining the masses and adding awards to his list of accomplishments.

"The Legacy Award is certainly nice," Borges adds before joking, "but my feeling is once you're around long enough, someone is bound to give you something!"

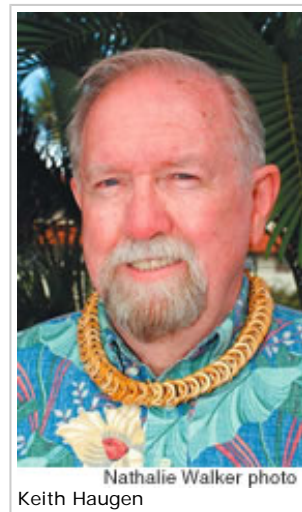
### **Keith & Carmen Haugen *Musical Group***

Make no mistake of it - Keith Haugen was born to write.

And well.

As one of the most gifted and prolific songwriters/poets in Hawaii, Haugen has composed well over 300 poems (all under the nom de plume Hans Christian Haugen) and written some 200-plus songs, many of which have been recorded by such artists/acts as Ledward Kaapana, Ohtasan, Diana Aki and the Lim family. His arrangements have been used for the Aloha Bowl half-time shows, while another was included in a textbook for the state Department of Education.

His words, it seems, are everywhere.



“I guess you could say that I’ve been very busy,” says Haugen, who first developed a taste for the arts while growing up in Minnesota. Still, it wasn’t until he joined the U.S. Army and was stationed in the Islands in the late ‘50s that he penned his first song, *In Your Eyes*. The love of Hawaiian music soon followed and with it came an intense desire to immerse himself in the language.

And so Haugen, a former *Star-Bulletin* reporter and press secretary to Gov. Ariyoshi, enrolled at the University of Hawaii, where he earned a B.A. in Hawaiian language. Today, he’s one of the most sought-after instructors in Hawaiian language and music.

But as proficient as he is in the subject, he still cringes whenever

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