

THE WAITIKI 7

Randy Wong, Co-Founder & Leader

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Classic Exotica for Modern Ears

BAND BIO

The musicians of **The WAITIKI** (also known as **W7**) bring together a wealth of culture and superb musicianship. At its core are three of Hawaii's finest musicians: Percussionist & exotic bird caller **Lopaka Colon** (son of original Martin Denny percussionist & bird caller Augie Colon), jazz drummer **Abe Lagrimas Jr.**, and bassist/bandleader **Randy Wong**. Exotica has always had strong Latin jazz influences; in W7, these tenets are held taut by **Zaccai Curtis** (piano) and **Tim Mayer** (winds) — both of whom have received past Grammy nominations in Latin and jazz. Crossing over from the classical world comes the group's youngest member: twenty-one year old vibraphonist **Jim Benoit**. The brilliantly exuberant **Helen Liu** (violin) rounds out this phenomenal group. Six of the members compose and arrange for the group.

"Exotica," explains Randy Wong, the 28-year-old bassist, music director and co-founder of The WAITIKI 7, "floats in the zone between soundscapes and an early world music hybrid. Denny took popular WWII-era Hawaiian Island songs (themselves already set to jazz harmonies, and incorporating folk songs from the Far East) and a Latin feel and then added birdcalls. He took large orchestrations intended for full symphonic orchestra and pared them down to make them feasible in the combo context. But exotica just sort of stopped developing in the '60s."

Which is where The WAITIKI 7 comes in. Although they bow at the altar of Martin Denny and other exotica pioneers such as Les Baxter and Juan Garcia Esquivel, The WAITIKI 7—whose name cleverly fuses that of the famous Honolulu beach with the faux-Polynesian gods ubiquitous in pop culture—is a band for today. The WAITIKI 7 retains the essence of Denny-era exotica and reconstitutes it for contemporary audiences raised on a multitude of clashing musical genres and pop culture images.

The WAITIKI 7 emerged from a smaller band formed several years ago by Wong and Abe Lagrimas Jr., who plays drums, percussion, vibraphone and 'ukulele. That group evolved into The WAITIKI 7. While Wong, Lagrimas and Colon are the only members actually from Hawai'i—the others hail from Boston and the Bronx—all seven musicians share a love of the exotica sound and the associated tiki pop culture, which encompasses everything from art and design to painstakingly crafted tropical cocktails and cuisine.

Each WAITIKI 7 band member is an accomplished musician, bearing degrees from Berklee College of Music, New England Conservatory and other top music schools. Their collective performing and recording credits span the worlds of jazz, classical, film music, Broadway and beyond. Wong and Lagrimas didn't set out to revive the long-dormant exotica genre, but the more they discovered about its unique musical properties and cultural significance, the more they were drawn to the idea of giving it new life.

"There's no exotica scene in Hawai'i anymore, but growing up I used to go and hear Arthur Lyman, the original vibraphonist for the Martin Denny group," says Wong. "He was a good friend of my grandfather's and my father's. So we were going to support him as a friend, but I think I got that sound in my ear." While attending college in Boston, Wong and his longtime friend Lagrimas—who had already played with Colon in an exotica-inspired revivalist band called Don Tiki—began to investigate exotica more seriously, and to generate ideas on how it might be made relevant and exciting again. One by one the band that would become The WAITIKI 7 fell into place.

W7 made its international debut on July 24, 2008 at the WASSERMUSIK Festival held by the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (in Berlin, Germany), and its American debut on November 1, 2008 at Liberty Hall for the Retro Cocktail Hour's 500th Broadcast Anniversary. Its first album, *Adventures in Paradise* has a street date of August 18, 2009.