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Upcoming documentary revisits New York's Hawaiian Room

HONOLULU, HI – A documentary that will air on PBS Hawai'i this month will take viewers back to The Hawaiian Room, an oasis in New York's Lexington Hotel that showcased Hawaiian entertainment from 1937 through 1966. **PBS Hawai'i Presents: The Hawaiian Room** makes its broadcast premiere Thursday, January 19 at 9:00 pm on PBS Hawai'i.

The tropical and glamorous ambiance and décor of The Hawaiian Room was largely informed by Hollywood's fantasy of an island paradise.

Filmmaker Ann Marie Kirk says that despite the glossy surface, the performers offered an honest representation of Hawai'i.

"Many of them were trained by prominent kumu hula of the time," Kirk says. "[Authenticity] still ran through everything that was done at the Hawaiian Room."

The Hawaiian Room examines how, in the mid-20th century, the Hawaiian culture was represented to the world – a topic that remains a hot one. Kirk says Hawai'i has moved past exaggerated representations of its host culture, but says "there's still lots more work to do." **Next page >>**



In *The Hawaiian Room*, filmmaker Ann Marie Kirk interviews more than 20 performers who worked at the New York nightclub, which showcased Hawaiian entertainment for nearly 30 years.

Photo: Hula Preservation Society Photo Collection

“The authentic representation of Hawai‘i and Hawaiians can be tricky waters to navigate,” Kirk says. “It’s not a bad thing, just tricky.”

For this film, Kirk interviewed more than 20 former dancers, entertainers and patrons of The Hawaiian Room. She was surprised by the courage of the young performers – many of them females in their teens and early 20s – who relocated to New York from Hawai‘i. For many of them, it was their first time outside of the islands. “They had no ‘ohana in New York City,” Kirk said. “Yet, they created an ‘ohana in New York City with the Hawaiian Room.”

Kirk says that *The Hawaiian Room* is a story that “could have been easily lost.”

“Many people don’t know the significance of the Hawaiian Room and of the Hawaiians who performed there, and I think they should,” Kirk says. “It’s an amazing story.”

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