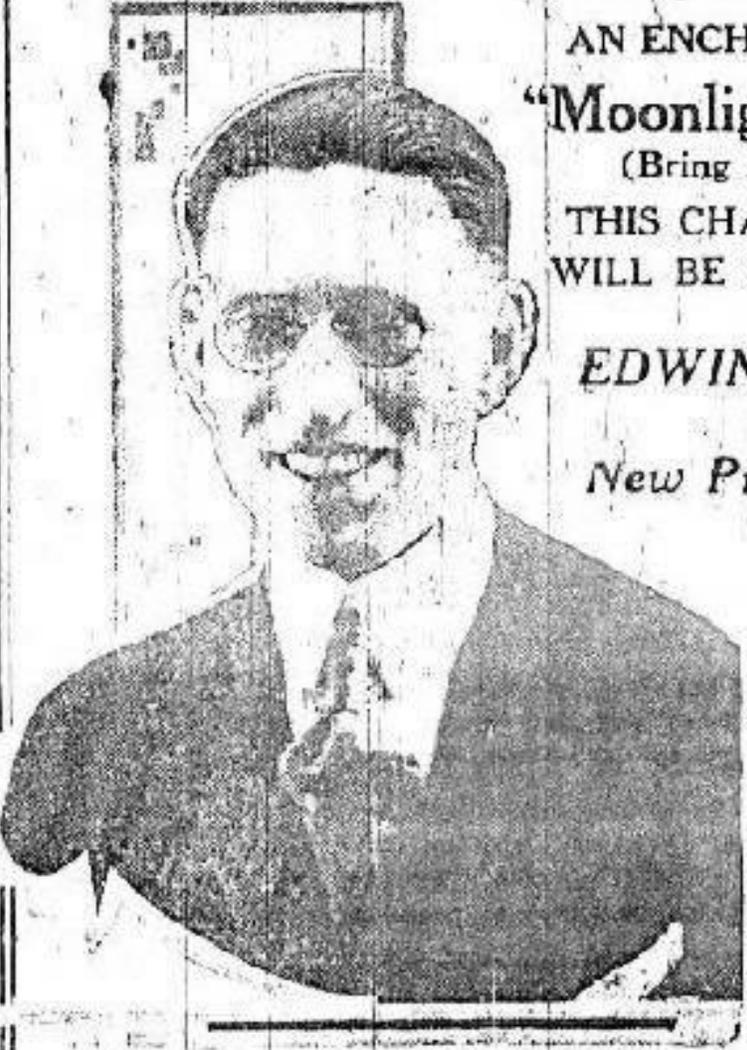


EDWIN SAWTELLE



AN ENCHANTING MELODY
"Moonlight and Roses"
(Bring Mem'ries of You)
THIS CHARMING NUMBER
WILL BE PLAYED TONIGHT
— BY —
EDWIN SAWTELLE
— at the —
New Princess Theatre

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SONG
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**Hawaii
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EDWIN SAWTELLE

Princess Theatre ad
Circa 1923

EDWIN SAWTELLE

MUSIC DIRECTOR AT THE WAIKIKI

From the Honolulu Advertiser, August 20, 1936

Rated as one of the foremost organists in the country, Edwin Sawtelle returns to Honolulu to be organist and musical director at the new Waikiki Theater. Sawtelle is one of the few who have mastered the new Hammond organ, which has been installed in the beautiful new playhouse.

Several weeks ago, Sawtelle went to the Hammond factory in Chicago and supervised the building of the organ for the Waikiki. It is the only one of its kind, and in it is incorporated many of Sawtelle's own ideas, drawn from years of experience. Unlike the old pipe organs so common in theaters, the new Hammond installed at the Waikiki develops its tones through electrical impulses.

Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Sawtelle is a graduate of Harvard, where he majored in music, and a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music where he studied under two of the nation's outstanding authorities, Professor Henry Dunham and Professor Wallace Goodrich.

For some time Sawtelle was with the Boston Symphony, and for three years was accompanist with the Boston Opera House. He entered the theatrical field in New York, and has been organist and musical director in theaters in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver, Atlanta, and Boston.

For many years Sawtelle was associated with the Robert Morton Organ Company demonstrating and installing theatrical organs. In this particular field he is considered one of the greatest authorities in the country.

In 1922 Sawtelle first came to Hawaii as organist at the opening of the Princess Theater. While here he was organist at the Hawaii Theater, and went to Hilo to open the Palace theater as organist and musical director. He now returns to Honolulu to open the new Waikiki Theater.

Leaving Hawaii in 1929, Sawtelle was featured on the radio in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. A concert tour took him through the major centers of the nation.

Mrs. Sawtelle returned to Honolulu with her husband. She, too, is noted in the field of music, having appeared throughout the country on concert tour as Carmen Prentice, mezzo-soprano.

Not only did Sawtelle supervise the building of the Hammond organ for the new Waikiki, but he brought it to Honolulu with him, and has supervised the installation at the new playhouse.

Sawtelle asserts it is far superior to any instrument of its kind. It is possible to create musical combinations on the electrical organ that could not be obtained on the pipe organ, these combinations number into the millions, surprising as it seems.

Sawtelle will present musical interludes at all performances at the Waikiki, and will also be heard in radio concert.

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EXCUSE MY BACK

By **DON BLANDING**

Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 27 March 1954

Conversation at Waikiki: "I see Ed Sawtelle's back" "I didn't know he had been away" "I said that I see Ed Sawtelle's back's the best known back in Honolulu. I want to see the face in front of the back for once."

Ed Sawtelle doesn't need to say "Excuse my back" when he sits at the console of the great Robert Morton Organ in the Waikiki Theater: that tall swaying silhouette under the proscenium lights is his signature.

Sure, everybody laughs when Ed Sawtelle sits down to play "Happy Laughter". We lean back, close our eyes, open our ears and hearts to let grand music pour in as this popular organist weaves old and new music into magic melody for our delight.

What's it like, that face in front of the well-known back? It's long, lean and healthily florid with shining silver-ivory hair topping friendly amused brown eyes which are keenly alert as he meets your eyes in conversation or remote as he turns his gaze inward to the phantom pages of music which are printed on his memory so fadelessly that he can play request numbers by the hour from that limitless repertoire without referring to sheet music. With his eyes only, he can "run through" a new song a few times and it is his. From "Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage" to "Bomb Me, Baby, You're Atomic" he knows them all.

As organist for the Consolidated Amusement Company since 1922 with only a break of seven years from 1929 to 1936, Ed has meant "moods, memories and music" to Honolulu audiences first at the Princess Theater, later at the Hawaii, and now in these latter years at the Waikiki.

During the war years his audiences extended far beyond the limits of the movie palaces to little lonely atolls in the deep Pacific, to hospitals and observation posts in the islands, and to ships at sea as his Star Dust Serenade went out over the airwaves to reach and sooth the homesick hearts of men and women in the service.

SIX FEET AND 187 ½ POUNDS is rather an outsize Cupid, but Ed played Cupid to many wartime romances and marriages. Ed doesn't wear white nighties and such wings as he might have are pinfeathers, but he was an Angel of Mercy with his music as he has many letters to prove.

Letters would come saying something like this: "Dear Mr. Sawtelle, I had a fight with my wife. It was my fault. I love her, but I'm such a tongue-tied so-and-so that I can't tell her. If you'll play I love You Truly on such-and-such a night, I'll write to her to please listen in on your program. Maybe she'll understand that you're saying it for me.. Then maybe everything will be all right. I sure thank you." Ed did. And they did. And everything was often all right, and they did thank him.

THIS WRITER HAS reason to know how widely Ed Sawtelle is remembered and loved. From Alaska to Atlanta to Bangor to Seattle at autograph parties people will come leaning forward with what I hope is a laudable desire to buy a Blanding book.

"You're from Honolulu, aren't you?" they say. "Do you know Ed Sawtelle? Gosh, that guy's music sure helped us over the tough rough spots on Guam, Saipan, Kwajalein or Kapingamarangi. You tell him." And, I tell him gladly.

Ed, as he is known to newsboys and dowagers, poets and politicians and policemen, was reared in Cambridge, Massachusetts, right across the river from Boston. The Boston influence shows in his immaculate, conservative grooming, and in his appetite for beans. His taste for beans has undergone a sea-change. He likes them new with the Spanish accent that his wife, Carmen, gives them.

At Harvard University he majored in Music. Later he was a prize pupil at the New England Conservatory of Music where he prepared for a career as a concert pianist and organist.

His brilliant performances on the organ created a demand for him, to open several fine new movie houses which were springing up over the country. He moved from one to another in rapid change from Atlanta, Georgia, to Denver, Colorado, through New England States and to the West Coast, and finally to Hawaii which was a break for Hawaii.

IN THE DAYS when the Silent Movies depended upon the organ for emotional mood-obligatos for the pictures his extensive repertoire of classical and popular music enabled him to usher Little Eva into heaven with Hearts and Flowers or to lend velvety voluptuousness to the amorous writhings of Theda Bara with improvisations on the battered theme of the Hootchy Kootchy. The mystic rhythms of angels in flight or the savage throbbings of Apache tomtoms were segued into the welcome thunder of rescuing cavalry or the muted murmurs of lovers in the moonlight with deft continuity. For documentary films of Nature he could supply the morbid moans of a mangled mongoose mingled musically with the bilious burps of a bloated Bufo. What an artist!

Ed is completely adult except for one babyish trick. He plays with his feet. He doesn't wear pedal-pushers; he IS a pedal-pusher. His size 11-C shoes move over the bass pedals of the organ with the agility of Bill Robinson, tapping toes supplying the deep tones which shake our hearts like earthquake temblors.

As he says, "My legs move like a frog's on a fish-hook. It is this exercise daily and nightly, undoubtedly, which enables him to eat second and third helpings of his wife's velvety shrimp curries, rich enchiladas, chili con carnes and caloric-laden cakes with frostings like feather beds without gaining an ounce. The lucky stiff. (Author's comment)

Sculptors frequently ask to model Ed Sawtelle's hands. They are what called "eloquent hands". The fingers are long, straight, strong and flexible with extra elastic webs between which enable him to play chords from C-to-F without rolling and with mobile combinations of keys which give something special to his music. He has been enviously accused of using his nose and toes for some of them.

There are four manuals or levels of keyboards in addition to the tablet-stops on the organ. It is a show in itself to watch his hands as he plays one of Liszt's more enthusiastic and complicated Rhapsodies. They look like agile agitated acrobats dancing adagios or amorous octopusses (octopi) in a love chase.

Requests come in from far parts of the world for the albums of Ed's phonograph recordings of Hawaiian Music which are available. Also, for his own compositions of popular songs. Ed is a composer as well as performer.

In the voluminous Sawtelle scrapbook there are many amusing memories for Ed and this writer of the days when we collaborated on the words and music for Dream Girls, a show which we produced for the Shriner's Crippled Children's Hospital around 1925. It was an extravaganza with colorful and singable tunes composed by Ed. Rumors of our beautiful island showgirls and chorus girls had Flo Ziegfeld planning to send scouts to Honolulu.

A few nights before the dress rehearsal we were running through the various songs, with Ed at the grand piano in the Sawtelle home. The singers were assembled for the last minute coaching. Carmen Sawtelle, a splendid artist in her own right, was the dramatic soprano leading lady of the show. She was called frequently from the rehearsal by one of the little household emergencies which occur in most homes. Carmen had given haven to a stray expectant cat, Kitty, in the Sawtelle's bedroom was also producing her show; Without rehearsal! While we were rehearsing the song Arapahoe, Carmen came in to announce the birth of the first kitten. “Name it Arapahoe,” we all yelled. The second kitten arrived during Cairo Love, and became Cairo Kitty. The third kitten staged her debut during Rainbow Girl and became Rainbow. Appropriately it was a calico cat. The fourth was Old Fashioned Girl which was shortened to Fashy. And the fifth was called Dream Girl, although later the name was changed to Dreamer because of its more co-educational application through necessity. Kittens are unpredictable that way.

ANOTHER OF ED's contributions to the Aloha spirit of Hawaii is his Christmas chorus of usherettes.



These slim pleasant and very pretty girls who usher us to our seats are trained for weeks before the holidays in Silent Night, Winter Wonderland, Jingle Bells, Ave Maria, White Christmas and other holiday songs. Both Ed and the girls contribute their time for this delightful venture. With infinite patience and affectionate uncle-ly discipline Ed brings the voices into blends as harmonious and as smooth as the delectable sauces which Carmen prepares for the After-Holiday dinner which she annually gives to the Usherette Chorus. I was guest at this year's party. After the feed, the girls sang from full hearts and full stomachs right up to show-time. The comment of the girls was “Gee, the Sawtelles are swell folks.” The vote was unanimous.

NOW FOR SOME more personal slants on the man behind the face in front of the best-known back in Honolulu. Ed likes good friends, good cars, good music, good food and good cigars. He is a good friend himself, so he has good friends: he has a good car, he makes good music, and Carmen cooks the best food, so on holidays, Christmases or other giving occasions Ed's friends know what to give him. He gets good cigars. On him they're becoming.

For weeks he practically kippers himself with the fragrant aromas of Corona-Coronas, although he does not scorn the less plush brands. He remembers the Lean days when he had to make an El Ropo Pilau-ro last a couple of days. On his off-duty time as part-time organist and part-time manager of the theater you can identify him, in addition to his striking good looks, by his powerful hand accented by a long cigar as he gestures while telling some amusing story of which he has a large repertoire.

Having reared two husky boys of his own, Courtland and Prentice, the Sawtelle's had Hospitality Hearts for the service men during the war years. Twenty-five to 30 fellows was the weekly average for bath, bed and board for them. Ed's music and Carmen's ability to make even an old inner-sole tasty reached right to that spot where lonely men's hearts are located.

And the spirit hands of Ed's music were out on the air with therapy to the hospitals and rest camps. One doctor-officer wrote "The men up here who are being re-oriented for return to civilian life after shell-shock are pretty jittery for a while. Night is the worst for them. They can't sleep, and we don't want to get them into drug dependency. Your Star-Dust is better than bromides. We certainly thank you."

One chap wrote, "Would you play Home on the Range for me some night? Maybe it'll bust open this locked-up place inside me and let me bawl. I need it. I sure thank you."

One grateful letter came with over 100 signatures of officers and men from some outpost in the deep Pacific with thanks. and with each, a favorite longed-for selection. Ed kept the list on the organ until he had worked his way through every last request. He's that kind. Ed is.

ED ENDEARED himself to the Hawaiians because of his ability to play Hawaiian music in Hawaiian style with that hint of tears that underlies even the gayest melodies. He learned that from the Beach Boys of the 20s who always welcome guests at the great parties when the theater people of the "live actor shows" of those days congregated after the shows at the Sawtelles. The music went on until dawn.

Outraged neighbors during the first three parties called the police. The police came, they saw and were conquered. They joined in the close harmony. When the neighbors got wise to the great shows and the tall talent which was theirs for the listening, they invited friends to come and be "pleasantly annoyed by the nuisance."

Among the personalities who contributed their talents were George Dewey Washington, great baritone, Henry Santry and Band, Judnich, accordionist, Maurice Kussells show, Niccola, the magician. And among the Dixie Boys Band there was one big sleepy-eyed, slow-drawling, drag-footed lug who was called "Wonga"; because that was his name. He was unanimously voted as "the boy who was least likely to want to succeed." He's known to movie and radio audiences as Phil Harris. Among other successes, he married Alice Faye.

Ed is a normally brave man, but he admits that he's intimidated in one spot. A shop-worn stray cat of a breed that's known as the "product of a syndicate" adopted the theater as its home. Every evening Ed asks plaintively "Carmen, have you got something for that cat? It won't let me in if you don't, and I've got a living to earn."

SPEAKING FURTHER of livestock, the only thing that rivals Allen Sawtelle, the grandson, as Carmen's and Ed's pride and joy (and sometimes annoyance) are two splendid German Shepherd dogs, Baron of Diamond Head and Dixie, Countess of Diamond Head, the Baron's mother by Harold Castle's Valiant of San Miguel. I have written elsewhere of Baron. Too much publicity might spoil him, but I can say that both dogs are prize-winners with champion ancestry way back. Baron has finished his training in Companion Dog course, and has taken first in his class three times, already, and he's just 2 years old. If

you don't think that Ed is proud, you ought to see the noble frame that surrounds the line of ribbons for both dogs. A friend said "If there's anything in reincarnation, I want to come back as a Sawtelle dog."

Ed's coming to Honolulu in the first place had that element of chance and humor which is characteristic of artists' lives. He was in Denver when the President of the Robert Morton Organ Company wired him. "The place is offered as top organist at the National Theatre in Mexico City. Splendid Opportunity, high pay. Would you replace current organist? He Just died of fever."

Ed found it easy to resist the allurements of that enticing offer. Immediately after, the offer came from Honolulu to play at the Princess . . . with no fever strings attached. It was fulfillment of a long-held dream for Carmen and Ed. He took it. When anyone asks Ed where he's going to take his vacation, he says, "Right here. Why look for heaven when you live in it?"

BEFORE ED CAME here the first time in 1922, he was rated among the three top organists in all the Mainland.

Driving with Ed in his firecracker red convertible car, with the top down is somewhat like a Royal Progress. Hails and alohas come from all the way. A traffic officer, "Hi Ed. You playing the organ tonight? I'll be there" A lei seller; "ALOOOOOOOHA, Ed Sawtalle"; A wrestler, "Hey Ed. Comin' to the show tonight?"; A banker, "Hello. Ed. How's your dog?"; "Hi Ed"; "Hello, Ed"; "Aloha Ed."

Ed has the most durable even-temper I've ever seen. Only one thing will get him riled: that is when someone kicks an underdog, canine or human. Then his "healthily florid" complexion flames, and fire music flashes from his eyes. And he usually does something about it.

When anyone asks Ed what he's going to do if and when he retires, he says, "Who said anything about retiring? The only retiring I'll want to do is to go to bed at midnight after playing a Star-Dust Serenade on the air." You see, he likes to know that his music has helped and healed.

It has been a great privilege to this writer to know the guy behind the face in the front of the best known back in Honolulu for 30 years. Aloha, Ed. Long may you wave those eloquent hands above the keys of the organ to summon magic out of the night to lift our hearts into dreaming and hope.

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