

## Theo Ehrlicher

A brief biography by Gerrit Venema

Albert Theodoor Ehrlicher, born on April 4, 1916 in Menado (on the island Celebes in the Dutch Indies), was living with his parents in The Hague. When he was 8 years old, his father put him on violin lessons at Mr. Madlener, also in The Hague. But Theo could not find his feelings in that instrument.

Later on the high school was a band called "The Three" Indiana's from Honolulu", that was in 1933, 1934 and 1935 and Theo was a leading member. The band played on school parties and in dancehalls like "Hollandais" and Weeva". Other members were: Dick ter Beek, René Elias and Ruud Dracht. One of them was the Hawaiian guitar player but Theo found his playing not the way it had to be done, better sound, chords and jazzier. They discussed about the Hawaiian guitar and the Theo said: "I can do that better" and they made a gamble that Theo could play better and within a week he won the gamble and took over the Hawaiian guitar.

After the High school band came a famous dance band "the Moochers" from 1937 till 1941. In the band, he was not the leader but the Hawaiian guitar player.

In the meantime he also had his own band called: "The Kilauea's Hawaiian Orchestra" (also the Kilauea's), The Hague 1936 - 1944. A big orchestra with over 12 members and a lady-vocal group called "The Mata-Pua's". This lady's were also a band on its own from only lady musicians and very good singers, in total 9 beautiful ladies with only Theo on Hawaiian guitar.

With The Kilauea's he recorded for Polyodor and made over 13 recordings for this label and quite a lot recordings for GTB on acetate (glass recording). Unknown how much. His band is always easy to recognize because the bands sound and playing is typical Theo.

On the Concours de musique, the Kilauea's were winner from two (from the three) HOKY-Hawaiian-Concours in the Hague in de years 1938 / 1939; "hors concours"-participatie in the Nationaal Hawaiian Concours-1942 in "Gebouw O.K.& W" te Den Haag", organized by the 'ladies Hawaiian Ensemble' "The Samoa Girls" onder leiding van Hertha Gorsira and Pia Back, later the famous jazz and boogie player, op May 9, 1942.

Than, in 1944 the band was disbanded, in the end and the winter from 1944 it was to dangerous and travelling was almost impossible cause the

second world war. Most of the band members had to hide themselves for the Germans. At last, just short after the war for about year, Theo was playing in a dansband for the American soldiers for the Militaire authority.

Then now his life story with "**The KILIMA HAWAIIANS.**" (the Kilima's), from 1946 till 1959. Theo's time with the Kilima's exist in two periods: The Dutch time from 1946 till 1950. And the German periode from 1950 till 1959.

At the end from 1944 Vic Spangenberg, than the Hawaiianguitar player at the Kilima's, had to run and found a safer place. The German's were looking for him, and the Kilima's came to an end for that moment. Vic escaped to that part from Europa that already was liberated.

But in 1946 Holland was free from German nazi's and Bill Buysman wanted to start again with his Kilima Hawaiians. The call for Hawaiianmusic and enjoying the people was very big. Only Bill had to find a Hawaiianguitar player and someone who could go on tour with them. There are some stories about the way Bill persuaded Theo and finally he was agree and joined into the Kilima's and on Januari 12, 1946 in Utrecht, was his first job. From that moment on the sound from the Kilima's became more professional and a much better repertoire was studied. Wim van Herpen (stringbas) came into the band and the Kilima's became on top.

During that Dutch periode there was no concerthall or stage where the Kiliama's not have had a performance. Innumerable the towns they visited and the Radiobroadcasts at the VARA, AVRO, NCRV, Worldbroadcast, they did the first Dutch Experimental TV broadcast at Philips in 1947. On tour with Herman Rinket in any townshall, often number one in Tuney Tunes Poll, in foreign countries like Belgium, Scandinavia, Germany, Swintzerland, Austria and France and the Dutch Indies 1947 and 1948.

Lots of recordings were made on Decca, Philips, Imperial, Fontana, Odeon and Parlophone. On all the labels are more than 200 records with fine recordings with Theo on Hawaiianguitar and modern Hawaiian numbers, Krontjong, South African numbers, and ofcourse some old style successes.

After the fifties, in Holland the interest for Hawaiianmusic is slowing down a bit and the Kilima Hawaiians moved their performances to Germany. This land was slowly building up and music and amusement could be brought to the townhalls everywhere in West Germany. The Kilima's changed their repertoire into German numbers and translated a lot of English and Dutch numbers into the German language. With "het

Paardenhoofdstel" (there is a brighdal(?) hanging on the wall), they had a golden record . Also a lot of Radiobroadcasts, prerecorded on tape, did the Kilima's brought a very bright fame. Mostly by Theo Ehrlicher who's playing in Germany was giving him world fame. Without Theo ("Ehrlicher", a German name) and playing very good in the hearing from the German audience. When you talk about Hawaiianmusic in Germany (and I have been there often) people only talks about the Kilima Hawaiians and Theo Ehrlicher like he is the only one in the world.

Putting all the information about studio's for recording, Radio broadcasts, on TV in Berlin and Hamburg is unpossible in this biography. Allthought they had a lot of work in Germany, they did not forget the motherland Holland. On radio, in hall, theaterperformances, jubilee (20 years) in 1954 and more.

Than on December 30, 1958 is in Dordmund the last performance from the Kilima's with Theo Ehrlicher in Germany. Coming home after a tour he decided to stop and he ended his periode with the Kilima's. He was the base from the sound and stagepersonality. One of the best hawaiianguitar players in Holland had left the Kilima's, unique were his flageolet's to support the singers from the band.

After this worldfamous priode from his life, we find him at home with his wife and daughter. He started practising as a chiropodist and sport-massage in The Hague and he starts his school for Hawaiianguitar players and ofcourse guitar and jazzguitar lessons. He has had hundreds of students and I think that almost every hawaiianguitar player in Holland, has had his base at Theo's school. He was a strong and sharp teacher, not much side steps and a strong base in cords. For as far as I know, he never played anymore in a band anyhow with his hawaiianguitar.

The last 10 years from his bizzy life, he slowed down a bit but was still a sharp teacher with a clear mind and very good memory. He wrote about 30 Hawaiian- and other songs but not all are recorded.

I visites him several times and he was very proud when he received the Dutch Award, which was given him by the Dutch Foundation for Hawaiian Music on April 12, 2004; on the Hawaiian Promotion Day in Heerhugowaard.

He died rather suddenly, was not realy ill although his health slowly get worsen. Walking went worsen. He had a pupil (Hans van der Velde) in the morning and did not feel well, he was brought to the hospital and died soon after he was in hospital. He died on Wednesday, July 11, 2007.