
Honoring Armando Mendoza



Armando Mendoza's remarkable musical journey began in his hometown of Ola'a with the Ola'a School (now Kea'au Middle School) band. From those humble origins, Armando developed his considerable talents at Hilo High School, where he studied under longtime band director Dr. George Durham. "Hilo High was my training ground for my musical endeavors," Armando says. "It provided me with good opportunities to perform and interact with audiences."

After graduating from Hilo High School in 1968, Armando earned his B.Ed. in Secondary Music Education at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in 1972. He continued his postgraduate studies with an M.A. in Trumpet Performance from Temple University and completed some doctoral studies at the University of Southern California.

Armando also studied conducting at the University of Michigan in 1974 and at the Peabody Conservatory of Music in 1975. He studied trumpet with Jerry Callet in New York City. Armando received a fellowship to attend an intensive Conductors Institute at the University of South Carolina that extended to People's Republic of China to conduct youth and professional orchestras in Xi'an and the National Opera Singers in Beijing.

Armando served as conductor of the Hawaii County Band from 1973 through 1984. His teaching experience included stints at Kaimuki High School, Kapa'a Intermediate & High School, acting assistant professor of music at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, Hilo Intermediate School, Pahala Elementary, Ka'u Intermediate & High School, and band teacher at Hilo High School, a post he held for 17 years.

Armando remembers being asked how it felt to return to his old alma mater his first year teaching at Hilo High. Smiling, he said his honest reply was, "It's a little weird!"

It was a big transition for Armando, who had led the Hawaii County band for nine years. "I was used to dealing with adults," he recalls. "(Hilo High was sort of the last place in the world I expected to be.... It was very satisfying, though. There were many good students that I got to work with. We traveled a lot and had lots of good times."

Armando remains very active in his "retirement," with the Kona Music Society, the Kamuela Philharmonic Orchestra, the UHH orchestra, the Kona Brass, and is involved as a conductor or trumpeter with the Kilauea Drama and Entertainment Network (KDEN) for their summer musical productions. He plays occasionally with the Palace Theater pit orchestra and with the Island Swing band in Hilo. Armando helps the Saint Joseph Church music department and plays monthly with The Island Serenaders at Hale Anuenue. He recently enjoyed working with another musically talented Hilo High School alumnus, Pauline (Abong) Wilson. "One day I'll just sit back, close the door, and ignore the ringing phone," Armando says with a chuckle. "But maybe just not yet."

Armando's wife, Lisa (Bright) and daughter Tiffany Mason are both Hilo High School band alums. Tiffany received her B.M. and M.M. in Piano Performance on the mainland and recently opened a piano studio.
