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Hawaii Five-O then and now

As filming starts, commentators envision show in 21st century

By **Mike Gordon**
Advertiser Staff Writer

It was stiff, serious and anything but real, yet somehow, "Hawaii Five-0" became an indelible part of its tropical setting.

From 1968 to 1980, it ruled the genre of TV police dramas even as it created a vision of the Islands that was never close to the truth but was always fun to watch. Hawai'i residents reveled in the exposure the CBS drama gave their ethnic diversity. If the dialog was a bit stilted or the pidgin mangled, no one seemed to mind.

Tomorrow, CBS plans to challenge nostalgia and begin filming the pilot for a modern remake of "Five-0." It could be a daunting task — a lot has changed in the 30 years since the original series finale.

We took a look at the "Hawaii Five-0" of an era past and asked a filmmaker, commentators and a retired detective to envision an updated version of the city, cops, cars, clothes and culture of the successful series.

city lights

THEN: The original opening sequence of "Hawaii Five-0" offered a sense of place that went against stereotypes, but probably still felt exotic for TV viewers anywhere but here.

Not yet a decade into statehood when the series began, Hawai'i came across as modern tropical.

It had a skyline, a sense of innocence and an undercurrent of danger.

NOW: Brett Wagner, the Honolulu filmmaker who wrote and directed the acclaimed short feature "Chief," said an updated intro — one that is faster but simple — would work best for CBS.

"Hawaii Five-0" is more about urban Honolulu than lei-wearing tourists or coastal panoramas, he said. "A few beauty shots will set the stage, but I would mostly focus on people — on the spectrum of faces and styles that define street culture on this island.

"Keep it real, keep it gritty, keep it interesting. Nothing that looks like a travelogue. This show should be about the Hawai'i that Mainlanders haven't seen."

And Wagner wouldn't tinker much with the signature sound of "Hawaii Five-0," which he called one of the best in TV history.

"It doesn't need to sound techno or hip-hop or anything else," he said. "I would hire Jack White from the White Stripes to update the sound just a little, but keep it rootsy and raw."

'Book 'em, Danno'

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THEN: Detective Steve McGarrett was the stoic face of "Hawaii Five-0," a cop so square, he did everything by the book, right down to the knot in his tie.

But the real Honolulu cops snickered at his body language and the way he emphatically stated the obvious, said Gary Dias, a retired Honolulu Police Department detective and the co-author of three books on local crime.

"It seemed stiff and a little comical," he said. "It seemed like McGarrett was not in the Hawaiian islands. It was more like he was in a very formal place. It was more like the FBI in Washington, D. C., than a unit in Hawai'i."

NOW: The modern crime fighter needs a reality check every now and then, said Dias, whose 27-year tenure included homicide, scientific investigations, robbery and hostage negotiations. Give McGarrett a sophisticated crime lab — can you say C.S.I. Honolulu? — but have him worry about funding.

"That would be much more interesting and much more realistic," Dias said. "Forensics is a field that continues to grow. You don't make investigations like they were doing long ago, where all you did was take photographs and talk to witnesses."

brawny Mercury

THEN: McGarrett drove a black, boxy Mercury. It might not have been as sexy as Don Johnson's "Miami Vice" Ferrari, but it was brawny, and its 345-horsepower engine packed so much muscle that the car's tires squealed even in the sand.

NOW: The modern McGarrett needs a modern ride, but what to choose: form or function? These days, a lot of police officers drive SUVs. They may go fast enough, but they look slow getting there.

Instead, Danny Luis, a supervisor at Ron's Performance Center, suggests the 2010

Chevrolet Camaro. It's a sexy beast, with 426 horsepower and Bluetooth technology.

"It looks fast," Luis said. "And I think soon there are going to be cops in real life who are going to be driving them. They shouldn't use a Corvette. A Corvette would be a little too much."

Sharp-dressed man

THEN: If the "Five-0" unit seemed a bit formal, blame it on the suits. At a time when 1970s polyester fashions invited men to dress with leisure and comfort in mind, McGarrett and his crime-fighting crew often chased bad guys with their collars buttoned at the neck.

Of course, McGarrett sometimes indulged in long-sleeved aloha shirts, bright colors, wide collars and bell bottoms. He was dapper in his day, even when he wore a carnation lei.

NOW: Aloha attire long ago became the uniform of choice for just about every working professional in Hawai'i, says Andrew Reilly, an assistant professor at the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa Apparel Product Design and Merchandising program. Wear an aloha shirt in a classic design with jeans or khakis and McGarrett will be stylin'.

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"That's what a typical cop would wear," Reilly said. "Anywhere else I would put him in a coat or jacket, but I don't see many people wearing jackets here, and I don't think it would be comfortable or necessary. A court is the only place you see a suit."

Kono's a WOMAN

THEN: None of the major players in the original cast belonged to the fairer sex. Women in the 1970s were victims for McGarrett to save.

And despite his good looks (and perfect hair), McGarrett never seemed interested in romance.

NOW: TV police dramas have evolved immensely since "Hawaii Five-0" — and gender equity is the norm, says Robert Thompson, the founding director of the Bleier Center for Television and Popular Culture at Syracuse University.

Thompson expects that more women will be fighting crime alongside McGarrett, and indeed, two of the first actors cast for the pilot are women, including Grace Park as Kono. That role was originally played by former beachboy Zulu.

But viewers should expect something more than just a pretty face who's a crack shot, Thompson said.

"Whenever a show is set in a tropical environment, where the average temperature is 82 degrees in the winter and the average temperature in the summer is 83 degrees," he said, "it is going to be populated by women who are scantily dressed."

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WHAT WAS ... AND IS — OR COULD BE
TOP ROW: Jack Lord was straightfaced and buttoned-down as Steve McGarrett; Alex O'Loughlin, the new McGarrett, has three-day stubble.
MIDDLE: Steve McGarrett drove a boxy, imposing Ford Mercury; Honolulu's cruising cops of today might go for a Chevy Camaro.
BOTTOM: Comedian Gilbert Lani Kauhi, aka Zulu, was big and brood as Kono Kalakaua; Grace Park, the new Kalakaua, breaks the gender barrier as "Five-0's" first woman officer.

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